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University of Alberta

Site-based Management: Its Impact on School Decision-making

by

Norman William Yanitski 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

in

Educational Administration

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated, in loving memory, to my grandfather William H. Chorney. He was a devoted family man, leader, and educator who gave so much of himself to those whose lives he touched. With his high personal values and love of life, he enriched my being and I will always remember him.

Abstract

Under recent restructuring initiatives, policies on "site-based decision-making" (SBDM) and "school councils" were mandated for all publicly funded schools in Alberta. This study addressed the perceptions of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons regarding the roles they play in the decision-making process at their schools.

An elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school were purposefully selected from a large Alberta suburban and rural district as the "multiple-sites" for this qualitative study. A purposive sample of 12 participants included the principal, two teachers, and the school council chairperson from each identified school. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews which were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Three major findings emerged. First, SBDM was seen to be a collaborative process amongst multiple stakeholders. Eight themes emerged as factors which impacted the SBDM process, namely: (a) collaborative process and multiple stakeholders; (b) information sharing; (c) pluralism and power; (d) leadership style; (e) trust, morals, and ethics; (f) changes in workload, time constraints, and involvement; (g) political intervention; and (h) concerns over the

future role of school councils.

Second, the participants' primary focus was the education of students in their schools. Primary legitimate stakeholders were seen as having daily supportive interaction with the school to improve student learning. The primary legitimate stakeholders were identified as the: (a) students, (b) school staff, (c) parents, and (d) school councils. Six modes of information sharing were also identified: (a) "one-on-one" discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent, (b) committee work, (c) survey, (d) participation at department meetings, (e) participation at staff meetings, (f) and participation at school council meetings.

Third, four themes emerged as factors enhancing SBDM. These four themes encompassed the qualities of: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic.

Recommendations for theory, practice, and research addressing issues such as streamlining SBDM, initiating professional development, educating future administrators, and examining the impact of SBDM on classroom instruction are presented in this dissertation.

Acknowledgements

An undertaking such as the writing of this dissertation does not happen without the significant contribution of a number of individuals. As my doctoral advisor, Dr. Jose da Costa provided encouragement, advice, and scholarly assistance throughout the study. The professional talent and kindness of this humble gentleman was truly appreciated. The time Dr. da Costa so generously spent with me grew into a friendship that our families will cherish throughout our lives. Drs. Michael Andrews and Ken Ward were members of the supervisory committee who diligently read and reread draft copies of the dissertation and provided insightful and critical recommendations. These two professors were always willing to share their expertise in writing and in research methodology. Other members of the examining committee, Drs. Don Richards, Len Stewin, and the external examiner, Dr. Ruth Rees each made valuable contributions in the form of suggestions and encouragement.

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The collegial support and advice of several doctoral students was also appreciated. Colin Kelly provided ongoing encouragement, read drafts of this dissertation, and provided valuable feedback. His friendship combined with the interest and advice of David Pysyk,

David van Tamelen, Rob McPhee, Margaret McVea, and Calvin Fraser contributed greatly to the completion of this dissertation. Discussions with these students and others in the cohort group will always be remembered as highlights of my doctoral residency.

I am most thankful to the superintendent and school district which allowed me access to conduct this study. The 12 participants who accepted the invitation to be part of the study are to be commended. All participants provided thoughtful information and took time from their busy schedules to share their understandings of the site-based decision-making process used in their schools. This study would not have been possible without their commitment to participate.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Site-based management in education is referred to by many names: school-based management, school-based leadership, building-based management, site-based decision-making, and decentralized decision-making. As the *School Resource Manual* (Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, 1995) noted, in general, under school-based management, decisions are made at the level closest to the issue being addressed. School-based management is based on two fundamental tenets. First, those closely affected by decisions ought to play a significant role in making those decisions. Second, educational reform efforts are most effective when carried out by people who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.

Blanchard and Karr-Kidwell (1995) indicated that many kinds of educational reform, especially site-based management, have contributed to teacher empowerment. The success of these reforms, however, is contingent upon administrative leaders who are willing to share power. Conrad (1995) suggested that site-based management should be approached as an incremental process;

furthermore this author recognized that every school system engages in some level of site-based decision-making. Implementation of this management concept in a school should, therefore, be gradual and flexible. Furthermore, boundaries that exist between site (i.e., school) and central office decisions will be changed as needed. As principals' management skills improve, more areas of control, previously the domain of central office, will be decentralized to schools.

In a similar vein, Hoy and Tarter (1992) postulated that school administrators should take into account the expertise that teachers bring to decision-making, their personal stake in the outcomes, and their acceptance of school goals. These authors stated that collaborative decision-making amongst administrators, teachers, and parents should not diminish the authority of the principal. There will be times when principals are in the best position to make decisions and other times when they are not. When appropriate, utilizing a team approach to solving problems will likely be more successful. Hoy and Tarter's model for collaborative leadership, as a guide to participative decision-making, is discussed further in chapter two.

Other factors also influence how decision-making is accomplished in schools. Two of the most important influences, from an Alberta context, were: (a) Alberta Education policy 1.8.3 which mandated the implementation of "school councils" in 1996, and (b) Alberta Education policy 1.8.2 which mandated the adoption of "school-based decision-making" in all schools in 1996. These two policies are quasi-legal companion documents, which support each other, prescribe the guidelines by which publicly funded schools must incorporate multiple stakeholders' views into the decision-making process. Policy 1.8.2 is discussed later in this chapter. The following section discusses the importance of school councils and their emerging impact on how education will experience more multiple stakeholder input into the decision-making process.

School Councils

Rideout (1995) conducted a cross-country survey on school councils in Canada and reported that there was a growing trend towards granting school councils greater decision-making power in the policy areas of budget, personnel, and programming. Rideout also suggested that as part of a growing trend toward site-based management, which provides local communities with decision-

making powers, there should be considerable input from school principals, staff, and parents. To spur greater involvement of multiple stakeholders, Neal (1991) stated that "when practicing decentralized management, each school should be required to have in place a functioning collaboration process which involves faculty, parents, students, and the principal" (p. 28). Neal stated further that the principal should be given special attention in the collaboration process, since he or she is accountable for the overall running of the school. Neal noted that if a good system of collaboration is followed, the principal will get sound advice. Neal contended that the issue of who is in charge is a "non-issue," because "the principal runs the school under the close scrutiny and advice of the faculty, parents, and students, but under the supervision of the superintendent" (p. 29).

In order to obtain this input and collaboration from multiple stakeholders, Alberta Education (1996) brought forth policy 1.8.3 which stipulated that parents should have a meaningful role in the education of their children. The rationale was that few decisions in a school system could be made in isolation by one individual or one group. The policy stated that "parents, students, teachers,

principals, superintendents, trustees, government, business and other community members are all participants in the educational endeavour and have a responsibility to work together, cooperate and communicate with one another" (p. 1). Policy 1.8.3 is supported in Section 17 of the *Alberta School Act* and legally reaffirms the rights of parents and the school community to have a purposeful role in the education of their children through the establishment of "school councils" (p. 1).

Although "parent advisory councils" (groups of parents who provide advice to the principals of their schools) were established and in place in the majority of schools in Alberta prior to policy 1.8.3 coming into force, the new regulations were in keeping with the move by Alberta Education to involve more stakeholder groups in the decision-making process at schools. The policy 1.8.3 stated that "school councils will have a role in advising and consulting with the principal on any matter relating to the school" (1996, p. 1). This consultative role, and the second key factor in how decision-making has been influenced in schools, is supported in Alberta Education's policy 1.8.2 on school-based decision-making. A closer look at this policy on school-based decision-making follows the description of

the problem and subproblems. The next section describes the purpose of the study, and the statement of the problem and subproblems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to obtain the perceptions of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons regarding the roles they play in the decision-making process at their schools. These perceptions provided important insights about how decisions were made and helped to identify characteristics of effective decision-making processes used in their schools.

Statement of the Problem

Given the purpose of this study, the following general problem statement presented itself. Namely: Under site-based decision-making, how are decisions made in schools?

Subproblems

Emerging from the problem statement were three subproblems:

1. Which factors impact on the practices used in the decision-making process?
2. Who provides input into decisions and within what parameters?
3. How can the decision-making process be enhanced from the

perspectives of the respondents?

Limitations

Rudestam and Newton (1992) stated that limitations "refer to restrictions in the study over which you have no control" (p. 74). Two limitations were identified in this study. The first of these was that the respondent group was not representative of the total population of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons, thus any comparisons are limited by this factor. Secondly, the data may not be valid over time because of the evolving nature of the decision-making process and changes in policy which occur yearly.

Delimitations

According to Rudestam and Newton (1992) "delimitations imply limitations on the research design that you have deliberately imposed" (p. 73). It was not intended that the choice of institutions be representative of the total population of schools in Alberta. This study was delimited to the principal, two teachers, and the school council chair of an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school in a suburban and rural district of Alberta. This study was further delimited to not address gender differences as they might relate to site-based decision-making since this would be

several studies in itself.

The conceptual framework was delimited to not include interaction between stakeholder groups, but to focus on how stakeholders interact with the principal vis-a-vis the decision-making process. In order to focus on school level issues, questions were avoided regarding the decision-making process between central office and the participating schools. Also, data were not collected through direct observation of decision-making or from other informants. The study was designed to collect data via audio-recorded interviews with the participants.

Assumptions

I believe that principals work in a politically challenging situation and must apply varied leadership styles, depending on the specific site-based management issues that arise. Further, I believe that site-based management requires substantial time commitments from educational staff, which may detract from their primary job of teaching students. As a parent of two school aged children, I think that parents should have input into decisions that impact their children's education. With the move to site-based management and school decision-making presently being implemented in education in

the province of Alberta, I concur with Sidener (1995), who stated that school systems must clearly define the new roles of all participants and recognize the fine line between providing structure and encouraging participant ownership. Thus, research into how decisions are made in schools will: (a) add to the knowledge base, (b) provide insights into what practices are now being utilized, and (c) address how these practices can be enhanced.

Definitions

The language used in this study is primarily based on definitions obtained from review of the literature and on key terms from the Alberta Education (1996) *Policy, Regulations and Forms Manual.* In this section the terms related to school-based decision-making in Alberta are reviewed, including: (a) policy 1.8.2, (b) school-based decision-making, (c) community, and (d) stakeholder. Carver (1990) stated that understanding policies is important "because policies permeate and dominate all aspects of organizational life, they present the most powerful lever for the exercise of leadership" (p. 28).

Policy 1.8.2

> School-Based Decision-Making.
> A school and its community shall have the authority and the support to make decisions which directly impact on the education of students and shall be accountable for the results. (Alberta Education, 1996, p. 2.)

Alberta Education implemented this policy with the belief that "major decisions about policies, instructional programs and services, and the allocation of funds to support them must be made collaboratively" (1996, p. 1). Alberta Education's intention was that school-based decision-making should involve a diverse group of individuals in a collaborative process. This group would consist of the superintendent, the principal, the teachers, the instructional support staff, the parents, and the community. The decisions made at the local school, are to be consistent with policies of the elected board of trustees. This collaborative endeavour was meant to enable schools "to be responsive to local needs" (p. 1).

Alberta Education (1996, p. 1) stated that "under section 15 of the *School Act*, and the direction set by the *Three-Year Business Plan,* the principal is the key educational leader at the school level, who will provide leadership in successful school-based decision-

making." This policy statement, 1.8.2, provided the legal framework for allowing multiple-stakeholder input into the decisions that occur at the school level. The policy also stated that "principals must work with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a school-based decision-making process to develop school policies and budgets as well as establish the scope of the school program and extra-curricular activities" (p. 1). With this policy, Alberta Education legitimized the involvement of parents and the community in the decisions that affect their children's education.

School-based Decision-Making

Alberta Education (1996) stated that school-based decision-making "involves the whole school community in teaching and learning in order to ensure high levels of student achievement" (p. 2). The document also indicated that "school-based decision-making is a process through which major decisions are made at the school level about policies, instructional programs and services, and how funds are allocated to support them" (p. 2).

Community

Alberta Education (1996) stated that community refers to "a school's students, their parents and other community-based support

elements available to the school" (p. 2). An example of community-based support elements are the local business people willing to participate on the school council or to provide work experience placements for students.

Stakeholder

Although the term "stakeholder" is not specifically defined by Alberta Education (1996), it is referred to in the literature and its meaning in the Alberta context is important. A stakeholder can refer to any or all of the following participants in the educational endeavour who have a responsibility or stake in the education of students, namely: parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees, government, business, and other community members. This definition of stakeholder was crafted from the background information provided in the Alberta Education policy 1.8.3 (p. 1).

Policy and Political Ideology

The political climate, in Alberta during 1993 and 1994, provided the impetus for discussion regarding reform in the provincial publicly funded education system. The provincial government of the day initiated "round-table" meetings between

itself and the public at large. The provincial government solicited public input regarding the nature of the changes that were needed to improve public education. From these round-table meetings, position papers were presented by the government; from these emerged new policy. Manzer (1994) believed that the political climate was ready for the public to accept changes because the collective perceptions of the public were such that "institutions of educational governance and designs of educational policies are subject to political contestation and require political determination" (p. 12).

Manzer (1994) also stated that "from its foundation in the middle of the nineteenth century, public education in Canada has been shaped by liberal political ideology" (p. 255). Manzer indicated that for ethical liberals the most important decisions about education are made by young people with the advice and guidance of adults; particularly principals, teachers, and parents. Hence, Manzer believed that the ethical liberal project required a massive decentralization of educational decision-making (p. 264).

Consequently, educational governance must be able to combine politics, policy, and administration in public schools, school boards,

and provincial departments in a relationship of policy interdependence. Manzer (1994) also stated "the legitimacy of public education must be defined in terms of its capacity to provide for the universal development of individuals who live in a multidenominational, multilingual, and multicultural society; that entails educational pluralism" (p. 265). McGrath (1992) defined pluralism in public education as "collective participation in the decision-making process through some form of representation, either by a group acting on behalf of a constituency or by the educational institution reflecting the wishes of it's clientele" (p. 7). The importance of pluralism is highlighted by the introduction of school councils and site-based decision-making in Alberta schools. Manzer concurred with McGrath, that multi-stakeholder points of view are important factors for educators to understand in today's educational reform movement.

Manzer (1994) indicated that the public has accepted the current educational reforms of provincial financing, district reorganization and amalgamation, "back to the basics" curricular reorganization, and decentralized decision-making. The government's new site-based decision-making policy (Alberta

Education, 1996) allowed more diverse input into the process by stakeholders. Manzer (1994) stated that "in spite of the depressing drag caused by declining enrolments and fiscal crisis, provincial politicians and ministry officials, educational and community interest associations, and local school boards have worked steadily towards pluralizing public education in Canada" (p. 266). These reforms in education speak directly to the significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

Studies conducted over the past 30 years have clearly depicted the pivotal role of the principal in improving school effectiveness (e.g., Blanchard & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Boyan, 1988; Dubin, 1991; Estler, 1988; Holdaway & Ratsoy, 1991; Quinn, 1996; Rideout, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1991; and Williams, Harold, & Southworth, 1997). The principal is the staff member who should oversee the entire operation of the school. Given this mandate, the principal has a very important role to play in site-based management and school decision-making.

This study is significant because it illuminates specific areas of practice which ought to be enhanced. The conceptual framework, emerging from the literature review in chapter 2, demonstrates how

the principal and the decision-making process interact with: (a) legitimate groups, and (b) nonlegitimate groups. Principals interact with stakeholders and must be "aware" of these different groups when considering the impact of decisions that are being deliberated. Depending on the situation, stakeholders will need to be involved in various elements of the decision-making process. An understanding of the characteristics of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons which enhance or inhibit the decision-making process will also add to the knowledge base.

Similarly, the stakeholders will also need to think differently about the decision-making process as they consider the difficult task of getting diverse groups to agree. With the government encouraging pluralism in the education of today's youth, multiple points of view will be the norm, not the exception. Improved ways to allow for input from diverse groups, at various stages of the site-based decision-making process, should be employed. Also, stakeholders should realize that there are legal parameters that educators must follow and that all decisions are bounded by these parameters.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature on decision-making in relation to site-based decision-making in public education. This chapter examines: (a) the nature of decision-making and effective decisions; (b) a conceptual model of shared decision-making and elements of the decision-making process; (c) the kinds of decisions that are made in schools; and (d) special problems facing decision-makers, specifically, transformational leadership. Chapter 3 provides a description of, and rationale for, the specific method that was used in this qualitative study. The appropriate methodological principles and their resulting procedures are described. The third chapter includes discussions of the (a) research design, (b) data collection procedures, (c) data analysis procedures, and (d) the procedures used to ensure methodological rigor. Descriptions of the participants, the system, and their schools are also presented. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 address the findings and provide discussions of the findings in relation to the literature. These chapters draw heavily on verbatim quotations from the participants to support the findings as they relate to the three subproblems. As the reader

encounters information from the participants, details regarding the participants can be found in the tables in chapter 3. Chapter 7 provides an overview of the study, followed by conclusions, and recommendations emerging from the study. Chapter 8 centers on my personal thoughts and reflections gleaned from undertaking this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of the literature regarding decision-making in relation to site-based management in public education. This literature review examines: (a) the nature of decision-making and effective decisions, (b) a conceptual model of shared decision-making and elements of the decision-making process, (c) the kinds of decisions that are made in schools, and (d) special problems facing decision-makers when viewed from the perspective of transformational leadership.

Four of the landmark works deserving attention include: *The Effective Executive* (Drucker, 1967), *Administrative Behavior* (Simon, 1976), *Organizational Effectiveness* (Steers, 1977), and *The Functions of the Executive* (Barnard, 1938). These works speak directly to fundamental premises of this research. The specific premise is that decision-making is the basic and central activity in administration and that understanding the complex process is paramount to having an effective organization.

Keast (1995) claimed that Barnard placed emphasis on the identification and analysis of the "strategic factor." Barnard

(1938) described this factor as "whose control, in the right form, at the right place and time, will establish a new system or set of conditions which meet the purpose" of the organization (p. 203). Meeting this purpose is the meaning Barnard assigned to effective decision-making. Because school organizations strive to optimize their goals, school effectiveness can be ascertained by how well resources are used to attain these goals. Principals of schools are responsible for implementing procedures, decisions, and actions that lead the school over time. Principals should use their knowledge base to keep their schools focused on appropriate school goals. Teachers, parents, students, and the community do contribute to the knowledge base and can provide input into decisions. However, principals have the formal authority to make many decisions and they incur the consequences of those decisions, both positive and negative. Drucker (1967) similarly stated that although decision-making is only one of the tasks of an executive, the principal in the educational context, it is a specific executive task and deserves further discussion. Recent studies (e.g., Blanchard & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Dubin, 1991; Estler, 1988; Quinn,1996; Sergiovanni, 1991; and Sidener, 1995) concur with these earlier authors.

The Nature of Decision-making

What administrators do and why they do it has been addressed in the literature for over 40 years. Almost a decade ago, Boyan (1988) stated that approximately 50 facets of administrator behavior have attracted the attention of investigators. Decision-making has always been one of these facets and in a modern society where institutions are becoming larger and more complicated, knowledge is an essential commodity and knowledge improves the quality of the decision. Administrators who have been schooled to use knowledge, theory, and concepts are effective in so far as they can make a contribution to the organization (Drucker, 1967). Now that many organizations are large and very complex, they require administrators who fully understand the decision-making process. The nature of the decision-making process includes the choice of one from among several alternative ways to achieve an objective (Hoy & Miskel, 1996).

Effective Decisions and Definition of Terms

Steers (1977), concurring with Drucker (1967), stated that a "true test of good management is its ability to organize and utilize available resources to achieve and maintain an effective level of

operation" (p. 1). Steers also commented that the key word is "effective," because administrators will ultimately be evaluated against the concept of effectiveness. Drucker defined effectiveness as the ability to "get the right things done" (p. 1). This definition is so simple, yet so brilliant. Society judges effectiveness by results, not by how decisions might be planned or discussed.

To better understand how effective decision-making is linked to administrators and organizations, these terms require defining. Steers (1977) defined organizations as "complex entities that strive for the rational allocation of their resources for purposes of goal attainment" (p. 2). Drucker (1967) defined an executive, as "those individual professionals who are expected by virtue of their position or knowledge to make decisions . . . that have significant impact on . . . the whole" (p. 8). In the educational context, this definition can be adopted for the principal. The decision-making process defined by Hoy and Miskel (1996) is "a cycle of activity that includes recognition of the problem, analysis of difficulties, establishment of criteria for satisfactory resolution, development of a plan of action, and initiation of the plan" (p. 303).

The principal of a school does not possess all of the

information to adequately make all of the decisions, therefore decision-making often becomes a group activity. It becomes necessary to develop processes within the school for the organized effort to accomplish the tasks. Simon (1976) noted that these administrative processes are decisional in nature and consist of: (a) segregating certain elements in the decisions of members of the organization, (b) establishing regular procedures to select and determine these elements, and (c) communicating them to the members. Simon used the following example: if a group was to build a ship, a design for the ship would be drawn and adopted by the organization, this design would then limit and guide the activities of those who actually constructed the ship.

Simon (1976) further stated that "the organization, then, takes from the individual some of his decisional autonomy and substitutes for it an organization decision-making process" (p. 8). The organization ordinarily (a) specifies the individual's function, (b) identifies the scope, (c) describes the nature of duties, (d) allocates authority, and (e) sets other limits regarding choice as are needed to coordinate the activities of individuals in an organization. This would mean that school staffs make decisions by

specialization: "particular tasks are delegated to particular parts of the organization" (p. 9). A pyramid or hierarchy of authority may be established from the principal downward. Decision-making functions may be specialized among department heads, librarians, and other members of this hierarchy. Vertical specialization permits greater skill and expertise to be developed by those closest to the decision.

In a similar vein, Hoy and Tarter (1992) postulated that school administrators should take into account the expertise that teachers bring to the decision-making question, their personal stake in the outcome, and their acceptance of school goals. These authors stated that collaborative decision-making should not diminish the authority of the principal. It creates the "paradox of authority: to increase authority, leaders must be willing to relinquish it" (p. 5). There will be times when principals are in the best position to make decisions and other times when they are not. When appropriate, utilizing a team approach to solving problems will likely be more successful. Hoy and Tarter provided a model for collaborative leadership as a guide to participative decision-making. The critical issues this framework takes into consideration are: (a) under what conditions

should teachers collaborate in decision-making, (b) how should the process of decision-making be structured, and (c) what are the roles of administrators and teachers in the process?

Model for Shared Decision-making

Hoy and Miskel (1996) illustrate a model developed by Hoy and Tarter for determining when principals should use shared decision-making. This model was based on Bridges' (1967) theories which indicated that: (a) as principals involve teachers in making decisions located in the teachers' "zone of acceptance," participation will be less effective; and (b) as principals involve teachers in making decisions clearly outside of their "zone of acceptance," participation will be more effective.

An operational definition of "zone of acceptance" is important to understand this model. If teachers have a personal stake in and knowledge to contribute to the decision-making process, then the decision falls outside the zone of acceptance and teachers should be involved in the decision-making process. If teachers have no interest or a lack of expertise regarding the issue, then the decision falls within the zone of acceptance and involvement should be avoided. Two tests are used to identify issues that clearly fall

within the teachers' zone of acceptance: the test of relevance and the test of expertise. The test of relevance can be addressed with the question: "Do the subordinates have a personal stake in the decision outcomes" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 291)? If teachers have a personal stake in the decision, then interest in participation usually will be high. Conversely, if there is no personal stake, teachers will typically be receptive to principals' decisions. The test of expertise is the extent to which teachers "have the expertise to make useful contributions to the decision" (p. 291). To involve teachers in decisions that are outside of their realm of competence is not likely to improve the decision-making process. In fact, teachers may perceive the unwarranted involvement as tokenism in which the decisions have already been crafted.

An additional consideration and test is important to note if the model is to be applied successfully. The "commitment of subordinates should sometimes moderate their degree of involvement" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 292). To gauge commitment the following questions should be employed. "The test of commitment: Are subordinates committed to the mission of the organization? And can they be trusted to make decisions in the best

interests of the organization" (p. 292)? The model that follows (Figure 1) indicates when teachers should be involved in decision-making and the extent of that involvement.

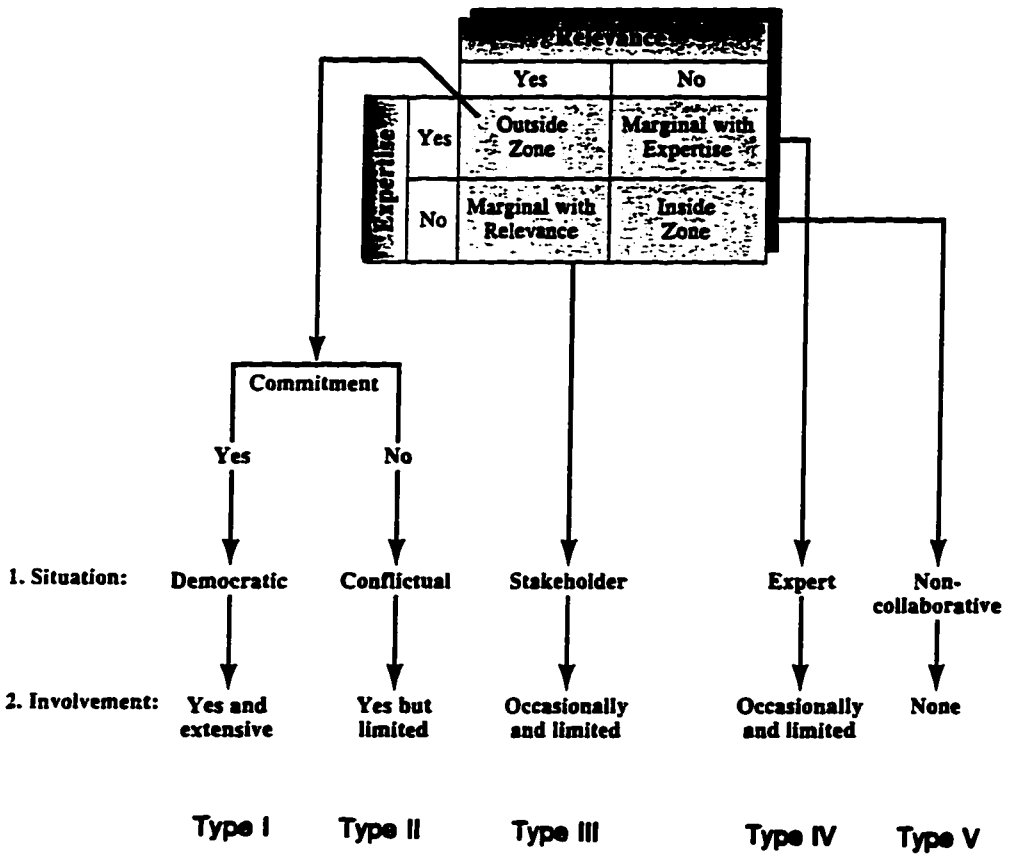

Figure 1. Decision Situation and Subordinate Involvement (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 293). Permission granted for use by the publisher.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) have identified five types of situations

dealing with supervisees' zone of acceptance and supervisees' role in the decision-making model. In Type I "democratic situations," where teachers have a personal stake, the expertise to contribute to the process, and a commitment to the organization, they should be involved as early as possible in defining the problem and in specifying the alternatives.

In Type II "conflictual situations," where teachers have a personal stake, the expertise to contribute to the process, but have little subordinate commitment to the organization, "their participation should be restricted" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 292). In these circumstances, participation from uncommitted subordinates could be detrimental and "invites moving in directions inconsistent with the overall welfare of the organization" (p. 292).

Type III "stakeholder" situations are considered marginal and are neither distinctly inside or outside the zone of acceptance. Teachers should occasionally be involved on a limited basis. The principal who is sensitive to the situation may involve teachers to communicate the rationale for and lower resistance to the decision (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 292). It should also be made evident that those with the expertise, not the subordinates, will make the final

decision (p. 292).

Type IV "expert" situations are similarly marginal. Hoy and Miskel (1996) stated that the importance for involving supervisees is primarily to improve the decision. Groups are often more likely to generate a wide variety of alternatives, more accurately predict consequences than individuals, and increase the chances of reaching a higher quality decision (p. 293). The astute principal should clearly indicate to the group the boundaries within which it is expected to operate. The principal must not grant unlimited freedom for action when in reality the decision-making group is bound by organizational policy or authority. For example, if the board chairperson has already defined a problem and specified viable alternatives, it is unwise for the principal to encourage the group, as if its members had complete freedom to define and solve that problem.

Type V "noncollaborative" situations distinctly fall inside the zone of acceptance. These are decisions that must be made by the principal and should not involve the staff. Teachers realize that they are not able to contribute to all decisions and that they do not have the time to become involved. In these circumstances, teachers

expect their principal to make decisions. Hoy and Miskel (1996) indicated that in noncollaborative circumstances

> teachers have neither the interest nor the expertise to contribute to the decision. Yet there is a strong norm about involving teachers in all sorts of decisions that school administrators often feel constrained to involve teachers regardless of their knowledge or interest. Such ritual is dysfunctional and illogical. (p. 295)

Elements of the Decision-making Process

The model shown in Figure 2 on the decision-making process is adapted from Nelson and Quick (1994). The model was adapted by grouping the elements into five steps making the transition points clearer to the reader. Decision-making is a process that involves a series of steps. The first step is recognition of the problem and realizing that a decision must be made. This is a difficult step as the principal must determine if the problem is real and important. If all situations are identified as problems needing a decision, then school principals and staff would be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. It is also prudent at this stage to identify the objective of the decision, in other words the principal "must determine what is to be accomplished by the decision" (Nelson & Quick, 1994, p. 296).

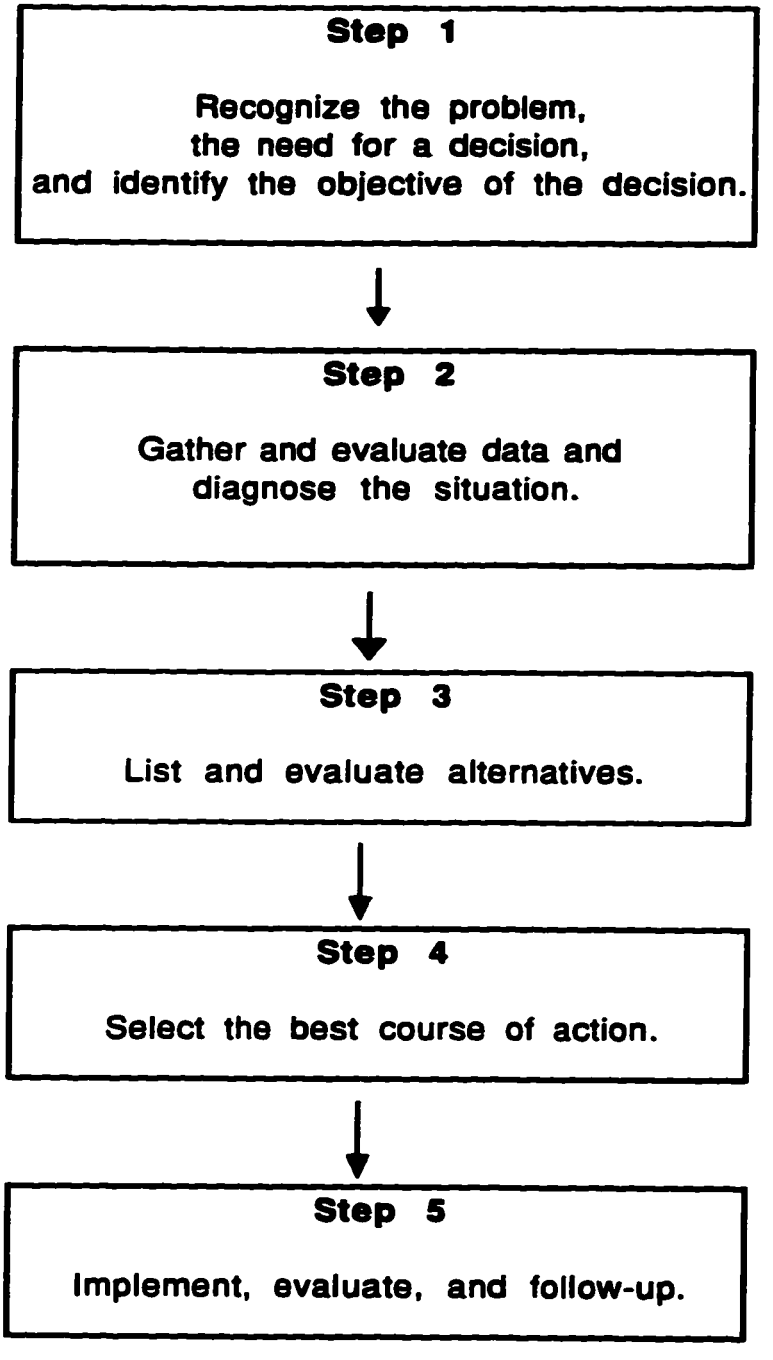

Figure 2. Elements of the Decision-making Process (adapted from Nelson & Quick, 1994)

The second step in the decision making process involves having the principal gathering information relevant to the issue. The principal must collect sufficient information regarding why the problem arose. "This involves conducting a thorough diagnosis of the situation and going on a fact-finding mission" (Nelson & Quick, 1994, p. 296). This is when the "sensitive" principal should involve other members of the staff if they are capable of helping. For example if the problem is in the area of "after school bus supervision," then staff involved in supervising should contribute to the collecting of data and diagnosing of the situation.

In a similar manner, using the above example, in step three those same staff should be listing and evaluating alternative courses of action. The principal should act as facilitator, keeping the group focused on the task. Nelson and Quick (1994) stated that a thorough "analysis should also be conducted to determine various factors that could influence the outcome. It is important to generate a wide range of options and creative solutions in order to move on to the fourth step" (p. 296). The richness of the group process, when used appropriately, should generate greater numbers

of alternatives than an individual principal would generate.

In the fourth step, the principal selects the alternative that appears to best meet the decision objective set earlier. If the principal, either individually or with the help of the appropriate staff, has diagnosed the problem correctly and identified sufficient alternatives, then this step is much easier. The process builds on the strength of the work that is performed at each previous level.

Finally, in the fifth step, the solution is implemented and monitored to determine if the decision has met its objective. The monitoring and feedback are essential components of the decision-making process. The course of action principals and their staffs take will be scrutinized by parents and students; adjustments may be required over time.

Types of Decisions

Campbell, Corbally, and Nystrand (1983) examined four alternative courses of action designed to solve or remove barriers in the decision-making process. These four types of decisions were: (a) maintain the status quo, (b) defer, (c) new course, and (d) response. One option open to the principal is to decide to do nothing. To decide to keep the status quo and not to initiate action of any

type is as sound a decision as to take assertive action. The status quo decision is a final decision, but could be amended with the words "at this time" (p. 117). This leads into the second choice which is to defer the decision until some action must be taken. To defer is to make no decision at the moment, waiting to see if the situation clears itself up or represents an ongoing problem which will require eventual action. The decision to keep the status quo or to defer until later is often a judgment call by principals to manage the numerous problems that cross their desks.

In other cases principals may need to introduce new courses of action. Educational institutions are under constant pressure to change. New curriculum is being introduced, rapidly transforming school populations require innovative class scheduling, and government policy demands that school staff become accountable to the community. "Thus a decision to introduce a new course of action is one that requires a whole subset of decisions. How rapidly are the new programs to be introduced? What kinds of phasing-in steps are possible" (Campbell, Corbally, & Nystrand, 1983, p. 117)? An alternative which calls for a new course of action is one which requires a number of decisions about process and timing. These new

course alternatives represent facts which should be examined as part of the basic decision-making process. Campbell, Corbally, and Nystrand (1983) used the example of a school staff wanting to improve student reading scores. If the problem appears to have some urgency about it, introducing a whole new course of action might take too long to address the situation due to time constraints. If reading scores need to be improved immediately, a better solution may be to improve present methods, rather than introduce completely new approaches (p. 118).

The most common type of decision made in school settings is the response to a situation or a problem. Examples of these situations include: (a) dress code infractions -- a student wears a shirt with profane language, (b) trespassing -- a student from a neighbouring school trespasses to instigate a fight, (c) or curriculum issues -- the local newspaper wants a comment on how the school addresses sex education. Campbell, Corbally, and Nystrand (1983) stated "these problems or situations require a response and each offers a variety of possible responses from which a choice needs to be made" (p. 118). Responding to problems as they arise is an essential part of principals' ongoing daily decision-

making processes. Given their complex work environment principals should understand that none of the possible responses will satisfy all stakeholders. Expedience dictates that some sort of response is the critical task for principals, and not all alternatives will be explored. Principals hope that their responses will "de-stress" the situation, allowing teachers a positive environment in which to teach and providing students with an opportunity to learn.

School administrators would rarely use a purely theoretical conceptualization to determine which of the previous four courses of action a specific problem requires. As Campbell, Corbally, and Nystrand (1983) indicated most "administrative problems are complex and consist of a number of interrelated parts. Solving one part can aggravate another, and the approach to one part may need to be radically different than the approach to another" (p. 119).

Pluralism of Educational Decision-making

Other factors also influence how school principals and their staffs make decisions. Two of the most important, in the Alberta context, were the mandatory implementation of school councils in 1996 and Alberta Education policy 1.8.2 which made "school-based decision-making" a mandatory process for all schools to adopt.

Crump and Eltis (1995) noted that shared governance, through devolution, placed greater responsibility on schools and their leaders to gain the active participation of parents and community members, and to be more publicly accountable to them.

This is directly in line with Alberta Education requirements defined in *School Councils Handbook: Meaningful Involvement for the School Community* (1995). This handbook contains legislation (section 17 of the School Act), regulations (School Council Regulation 124/95 as mandated in the School Act), and general information to assist Alberta schools in establishing school councils. Rideout (1995) conducted a cross-country survey on school councils in Canada and reported that there was a growing trend that school councils be allowed greater decision-making power in the policy areas of budget, personnel, and programming. Rideout also suggested that as part of a growing trend toward site-based management, which empowers local communities with decision-making powers, there will be considerable input from school principals, staff, and parents.

McGrath (1992) defined the representation of groups, such as school councils, in decision-making in public education as a

"pluralistic process that contributes to the politicization of educational administration" (p. 1). These groups fall into one of two categories: (a) cooperative groups that usually support the school or (b) counteractive groups that usually lobby for their own self-interests.

Examples of groups, agencies, and associations that have a legitimate affiliation with part of the education system are: (a) teachers associations, (b) trustees, (c) school associations, (d) home and school associations, and (e) curriculum committees. Likewise, McGrath (1992) indicated that other groups have legitimacy by their very nature--their primary function is to support schools. These include, parents for French, junior achievement, school councils, and program advisory committees.

Conversely, other groups or associations are often suspect regarding their legitimate involvement with schools. These are "often highly organized and well-funded special interest or pressure groups whose aim is to promote social change over a broad spectrum by exerting their influence on public education. Pro-life groups, . . . and human rights groups fit into this category" (McGrath, 1992, p. 1). Part of a complex organization accountable to the public, schools are

having pressure exerted upon them by legitimate and nonlegitimate groups seeking to influence, in some way, the decisions that are made. McGrath stated that these groups need to be recognized as important forces by educational administrators "who must interact with them and who often suffer a loss of their own professional autonomy in the process" (p. 1). Fullan (1993) indicated that multiple stakeholders shape and own education, and that the concepts regarding students, staffrooms, and schools as isolated units are no longer viable (p. 95). Fullan explicated that principals and their staffs must work with the parents and the community, because no reasonable case can be made for continued isolation (p. 95).

Leadership Styles

Sergiovanni (1991) stated that "principals are the main characters in bringing about adoption and implementation goals. They play key roles in the planning and providing leadership for changes addressed to individuals, the school, and the workflow as units of change" (p. 263). Sergiovanni believed that principals cannot encourage change by themselves. Principals require the support and help of the superintendent and of central office staff,

and the acquiescence of the school trustees and the teachers' union (p. 263). Sergiovanni also indicated that "adoption of change does not occur without an advocate, and one of the most powerful advocates is the superintendent of schools with her or his staff and in combination with the school board" (p. 264).

In a similar manner, Fullan (1993) stated that the change process is extremely complicated and no one person could possibly deal with all its ramifications. Take, for example, any educational policy or problem and begin to think about all the factors that could influence towards the solution for effective change, then add unplanned catalysts, "government policy changes . . . , key leaders leave, important contact people are shifted to another role, new technology is invented, immigration increases, recession reduces available resources, a bitter conflict erupts, and so on" (p. 19). Fullan stated that, one must realize that multiple variables and unpredictable forces produce new ramifications, which "produce tens of other reactions and on and on" (p. 19).

This dynamic and complex change process is now part of everyday life for principals' and their staffs. Fullan (1993) indicated, by using Stacey's (1992) research, that change is non-

linear and one "cannot predict or guide the process with any precision . . . instead, success has to be the discovery of patterns that emerge through actions we take in response to the changing agendas of issues we identify" (p. 20).

What does this mean for today's principals? Hoy and Miskel (1996) explicated that new styles of "transformational leadership" have emerged in the last two decades and supplicate "inspirational, visionary, and symbolic leader behavior" (p. 392). Hoy and Miskel contended that transformational leadership theory is based on Burns' (1978) ideas of transactional and transformational political leaders. For Burns, transactional political leaders motivate others by trading compensation for a service rendered. Examples would be "jobs for votes and influence for campaign contributions" (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 393). A principal in a school could be a transactional leader by understanding what teachers want and "if their performance warrants it; exchange rewards and promises of reward for effort; and respond to employees' immediate self-interests if they can be done by getting the work done" (p. 393). Simply put, transactional leaders provide their staffs with things they want in exchange for work the leaders require.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) stated that transformational leadership stands out in sharp contrast to transactional leadership. They stated that transformational leaders are expected to:

- Define the need for change.
- Create new visions and muster commitment to the visions.
- Inspire followers to transcend their own interests for higher-order goals.
- Change the organization to accommodate their vision rather than work within the existing one.
- Mentor followers to take greater responsibility for their own development and those of others. Followers become change agents, and ultimately transform the organization (1996, p. 393).

The personal values and beliefs of leaders are the key concepts of what transformational leadership is based on. Principals could express their personal standards and vision to unite the staff, students and parents, and change their goals and beliefs to enhance performance beyond what was considered imaginable. Shamire, House, and Arthur (1993, cited in Hoy & Miskel, 1996) indicated that the concept of charismatic leadership is similar to ideas of transformational leadership. Charismatic leaders use their personal abilities to make a profound impact on those they lead. The following personality traits are attributed to charismatic leaders:

- Achievement orientation

- Strong tendencies to be creative, innovative, and inspirational
- High levels of energy and involvement
- Self-confidence
- High need for social influence coupled with a strong concern for the moral and nonexploitive use of power (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, pp. 393-394).

Hoy and Miskel (1996) reviewed the work of several authors who indicated that transformational leadership goes beyond transactional leadership and "simple exchanges of and agreements by employing one or more of the four I's - -*i*dealized influence, *i*nspirational motivation, *i*ntellectual stimulation, and *i*ndividualized consideration" (p. 394). These four leadership characteristics can be summarized as follows:

> **Idealized influence** represents the building of trust and respect in followers and provides the basis for accepting radical and fundamental changes in the ways individuals and organizations do their work. The leaders are admired, respected, and trusted . . . Without such trust and commitment to the leaders, attempts to change and redirect the organization's mission are likely to be met with extreme resistance . . . Among the behaviors that transformational leaders exhibit . . . include . . .
> - Demonstrating high standards of ethical and moral conduct
> - Sharing risks with followers in setting and attaining goals
> - Considering the needs of others over their own
> - Using power only when necessary and never for personal gain. (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 394)

> **Inspirational motivation** changes the expectations of the group members to believe the organizations's problems can be solved . . . Inspirational motivation comes primarily from leader behaviors that provide meaning and challenge to work . . . Hence, team spirit, enthusiasm, optimism, goal commitment, and a shared vision arise and coalesce within the work group or organization. (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 394)
>
> **Intellectual stimulation.** Transformational leaders encourage creativity in new procedures, programs, and problem solving; foster unlearning and eliminate the fixation on old ways of doing things; and do not publicly criticize individual members for mistakes. (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 395)
>
> **Individualized consideration** means that transformational leaders pay particular attention to each individual's needs for achievement and growth . . . . This is accomplished by creating new learning opportunities in a supportive climate, recognizing and accepting individual differences in needs and values, using two-way communication, and interacting with others in a personalized fashion. The individually considerate leader listens actively and effectively. (Hoy & Miskel, 1996, p. 395)

The four "I's" indicate that principals must work in complex roles, characterized by multiple realities. Fullan (1993) indicated that "as the scale of complexity accelerates in post-modern society our ability to synthesize polar opposites where possible, and work with their co-existence where necessary, is absolutely critical to success" (p. 41). There are no comfortable positions for today's leaders in education. In a similar manner, Sergiovanni (1991) noted

that school principals are emerging as important leaders with "their visions key in focusing attention on change and in successfully implementing the process of change, what counts in the end is bringing together the ideas and commitments of a variety of people who have a stake in the success of the school" (p. 269).

Conceptual Framework

From this review of the literature a conceptual framework (Figure 3) was developed which illustrates how the principal and the decision-making process interact with legitimate groups, namely: (a) students, (b) school staff, (c) parents, (d) school councils, (e) volunteers, (f) business partnerships, (g) teacher associations, and nonlegitimate groups, namely: (a) pro-life, (b) human rights, and (c) taxpayers without children. McGrath (1992) indicated that groups are legitimate if their primary function is to provide support to schools to improve learning for students. Conversely, nonlegitimate groups are often suspect regarding their legitimate involvement with schools and nonlegitimate groups are often special interest or pressure groups. Principals interact with stakeholders and should be "aware" of these different groups when considering the impact of decisions that are being deliberated. This

Conceptual Framework

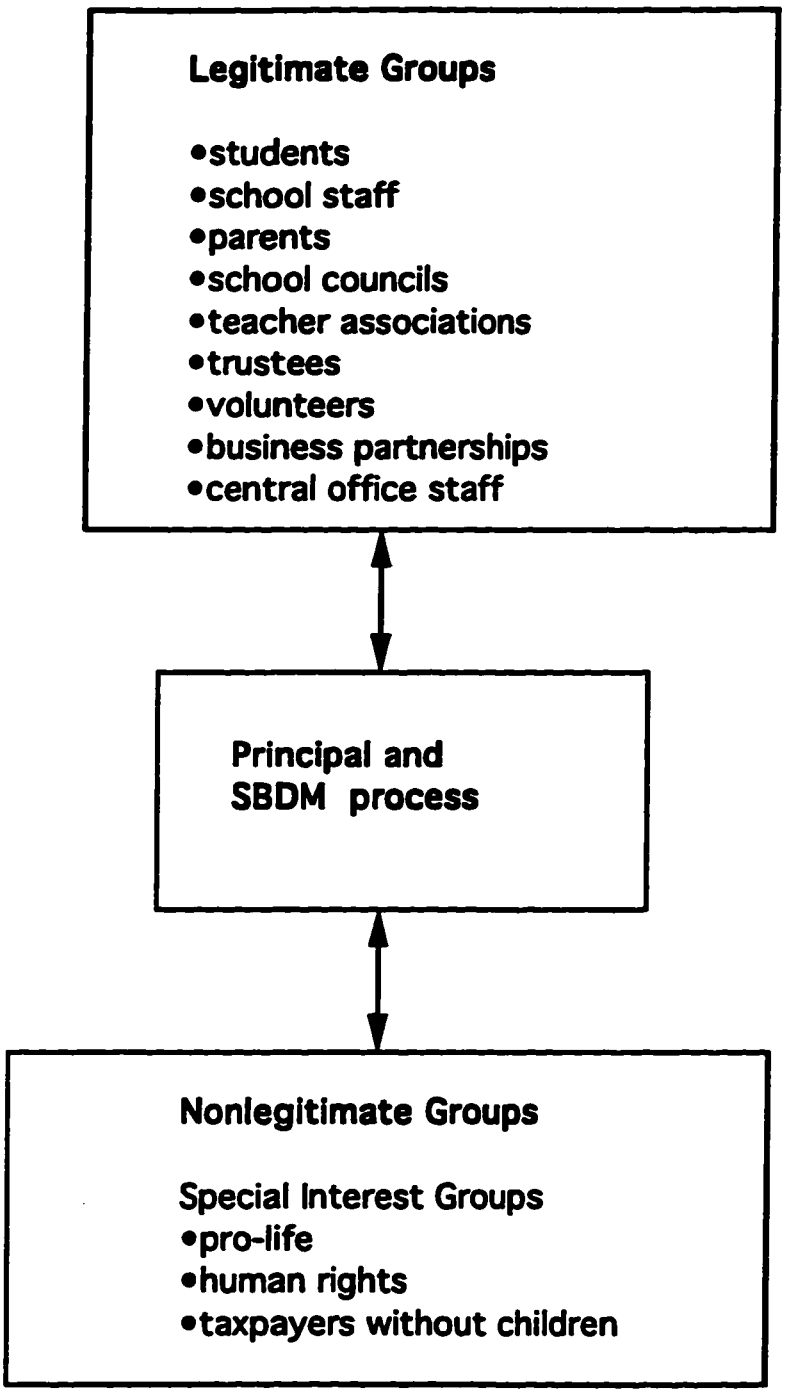

Figure 3. Stakeholders interaction with the principal and the decision-making process. The principal should consider the interests represented by each group, when resolving the decision-making process.

conceptual framework is delimited to interactions between the principal and the stakeholders, it does not consider interaction between groups of participants. The essence of multiple stakeholder points of view are illustrated by the arrows showing interaction between the principal, the decision-making process, and each participating group. The principal should consider the interests represented by each group, during the decision-making process. These groups are involved in providing input for decisions, or are attempting to influence the decision. The principal is in a precarious position. He or she should acknowledge a variety of opinions and reflect the wishes and opinions of diverse stakeholders when resolving the decision-making process.

Summary

Studies conducted over the past 30 years have clearly identified the pivotal role of the principal in improving school effectiveness (e.g., Blanchard & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Boyan, 1988; Dubin, 1991; Estler, 1988; Holdaway & Ratsoy, 1991; Quinn, 1996; Rideout, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1991; and Williams, Harold, & Southworth, 1997). The principal is the staff member who should oversee the entire operation of the school. With the move to site-

based management and school decision-making presently being implemented in education in Alberta, this provides the principal with an even more important role to play. Sidener (1995) concurred and stated that school systems must clearly define the new roles of all participants and recognize the fine line between providing structure and encouraging participant ownership. Similarly, Estler (1988) indicated that in training administrators, skills in analysis of organizational dynamics and contexts should replace recipes or cookbook approaches to decision-making. Recipes do not "deal effectively with multiple and ambiguous goals, multiple interests and participants, scarce or inaccessible information, and quirks of human nature, all often observed in reality" (p. 308). Sergiovanni (1991) indicated that "it is natural to emphasize the principal's role and its significance in school improvement efforts. But the principal can't do it alone" (p. 268).

Alberta Education (1996) brought in two policies to encourage input to the decision-making process. Policy 1.8.2 addressed the implementation of "school-based decision-making," and stated that "principals must work with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a school-based decision-making process to

develop school policies and budgets as well as establish the scope of the school program and extra-curricular activities" (p. 1). Similarly, policy 1.8.3 explicated that, via "school councils," parents and the school community have a legal right to a purposeful role in the education of their children. Depending on the situation, stakeholders will need to be involved in various elements of the decision-making process.

The conceptual framework places the principal at the centre of the decision-making process. The legitimate groups and the nonlegitimate groups are stakeholders which interact with or attempt to influence the principal and the decision-making process.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter contains a description of the specific procedures that were followed in this study. The appropriate methodological principles and their resulting procedures are described using references from the literature. The following sections of this chapter include discussions of the (a) research design, (b) data collection procedures, (c) data analysis procedures, and (d) the procedures used to ensure methodological rigor. A description of the participants, their system, and their schools, is also provided.

Research Design

One elementary school, one junior high school, and one senior high school were selected in a large Alberta suburban and rural district to be the "multiple-sites" for this study. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined a "multi-site study" as investigating a number of individual respondents in different locations at different times. These three levels were chosen to provide a "snap shot" of how schools of different grade levels address site-based management.

Population and Sample

Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) stated that "purposeful sampling is not designed to achieve population validity. The intent is to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals, not to select a sample that will represent accurately a defined population" (p. 218). The reason for selecting a purposeful sample was to develop a deeper understanding of the decision-making process being studied. The population of interest included principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons from selected schools in Alberta. The sample from each school consisted of the principal, two teachers, and the school council chairperson from each of the selected elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. The three schools were selected by asking the superintendent of the large Alberta suburban and rural district, in which the study was conducted, to nominate schools that were perceived to have an involved staff in the decision-making process and who have active school councils. The district was selected because it was in relatively close proximity to the university making it readily available to the researcher. This purposive sample provided a total of 12 participants who were interviewed across three levels of schooling.

This method of selecting the sample was intended to maximize the thickness and range of information collected. For political reasons, explained in the final chapter, the study was not conducted in the district where I was employed.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

In accordance with the philosophy of interpretivistic inquiry and the design of this study, the instrument employed for data collection was the semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A). Questions were open-ended, derived from the literature, and refined in advance of the main study in a graduate research methodology course. During the four month graduate course I pilot tested the questions in two schools. Responses to the preconceived questions were probed further, during the main study, to gain a deeper understanding of the issues. The richness of responses to the open-ended questions provided data on a number of themes related to the three subproblems. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) indicated that the major advantage of the interview process is that the interviewer "can build trust and rapport with respondents, thus making it possible to obtain information that the individual probably would not reveal by any other data-collection method" (p. 289).

Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1982) and Measor (1985) suggested that interviewing involved the collection of data through direct communication between individuals. Direct interaction is the main advantage of the interview situation. The interview method was chosen to enable a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the research question. I kept a journal to record thoughts and insights regarding the interviews immediately after each interview was conducted. This journal became an invaluable tool for me to help organize my thoughts and to summarize what was considered to be relevant information as the data were reduced.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded on standard cassette tapes. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) and Best (1970) advocated that recording interviews on tape is convenient, inexpensive, and the actual wording of the responses is retained. The recorded interview tapes were transcribed by a typist, who maintained the confidentiality of the respondents and provided the researcher with a hard copy and an electronic copy on a computer disc.

Ethical Considerations

Guba and Lincoln (1982) stated that "individuals have a right

to privacy and to opt in or out of a study depending on how they view the risks to which they are exposed" (p. 234). The key issues regarding these rights are clearly stated by Fontana and Frey (1994) as informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm (p. 372). These three ethical concerns can be defined as: "*informed consent* (consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the subject), and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other kind)" (p. 372).

I ensured that the highest standards of ethical research practice were followed. The Department of Educational Policy Studies' ethics review was conducted to ascertain that the ethical requirements of the University of Alberta were met when research on humans is involved. Each participant was guaranteed anonymity by using pseudonyms in the dissertation. The purpose of the dissertation, and the roles of the participants in the study were explained as a prelude to obtaining voluntary commitment of cooperation from each participant before commencing the interviews. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw without penalty from the study at any time. Each

interview was conducted in a private setting. Participants were also informed that they had the right to opt out of the study at any time during the interview, and that they did not have to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable. The participants were asked if a tape-recorder could be used to record the interview, none objected. All participants were informed verbally and in writing (see Appendix B) regarding the nature of the study, furthermore, they signed consent forms outlining the purpose and procedures of the study and permitting the interview to be conducted and tape recorded. The participants were informed that only the researcher and transcriber would have access to the interview tapes and that these tapes will be magnetically erased at the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis

Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggested that data analysis is a systematic process of arranging the interview transcripts to understand the data, and to inform others of these discoveries. The analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is

important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 146).

As was stated earlier, the use of the journal after each interview provided an excellent starting point for analysis. The journal was used to make summaries of each interview, and to begin to identify emergent themes. I then went to the audio tapes and reviewed them to further my understanding of what was said by the participants. Next, the transcripts were read thoroughly, then reread while using coloured highlighter pens to highlight the important words or sections that were addressing the research questions. Finally themes were identified and supported with appropriate quotations. With the exception of omitting specific names and locations, correcting grammar, and using pseudonyms, the selections from the interviews were generally printed verbatim. Any changes that were made, were designed to keep the integrity of the quotation and to make the statement easier to read.

Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1988) delineated the trustworthiness of qualitative data into the following four areas: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was

defined as the "degree to which data and interpretations of the investigator are similar to the multiple realities in the minds of the informants" (p. 84). Rudestam and Newton (1992) suggested that credibility could be safeguarded by "multiple interviews" over time and a return to the field for "member checks" with respondents to confirm the interpretations of the data made by the researcher (p. 76). Twelve separate interviews were conducted over time and then returned to each participant with a copy of the transcript for them to read. Each participant confirmed that the data transcribed were correct. As part of the member check, a group meeting was held in a private room, with the four participating members of each school. This request was made by the participants from each school to "hear what I had to say" about what was happening at their school. At first, I planned to review interpretations individually with each participant in order to honour their privacy, but they were all interested in discussing the findings together, consequently this approach was abandoned in favour of group debriefing. After obtaining the participants' permission, we met as a group at each respective school to discuss what I had found and interpreted. Each of these group member checks were recorded, with the participants'

permission, and treated as further data to support, through triangulation, the emerging themes.

The participants were very open about discussing the interpretations and provided me with further clarification. The participants also asked questions about the decision-making process from each other. Only one participant was unable to attend the group debriefing meeting. I met with this person at another time and reviewed my interpretations with him.

Guba and Lincoln (1988) defined transferability as the "extent to which the case study facilitates the drawing of inferences by the reader and may have applicability in his or her own context or situation" (pp. 20-21). By using a method suggested as a "thick description" of each respondent's context, a reader of this dissertation may transfer concepts to a situation similar in context.

Guba and Lincoln (1988) indicated that dependability allowed the research design to "emerge and evolve, theory to develop," and that changes which occur "cannot be referred to as error in procedure" (p. 84). They suggested that "good practice" throughout the research process would provide a greater sense of reliance on the procedures. In a similar manner, Measor (1985), and Glesne and

Peshkin (1992) concurred that "triangulation" of interview findings with and among the participants constitute a good "tactic" to improve the dependability of the study. I believe that the group member checks provided an excellent check of my understandings of the interviews and the emergent findings. It appears that this tactic improved the dependability of this study.

Guba and Lincoln (1988) indicated that confirmability "shifts the emphasis from the certifiability of the inquirer to the confirmability of the data" (p. 84). To enhance the confirmability of data, Rudestam and Newton (1992) suggested the "use of tape recorders to record interviews . . . , [and] the use of a diary or journal to record impressions, reactions, and other significant events that may occur during the data collection phase . . . " (p. 76). By using these strategies, which demonstrated a concerted effort to collect accurate data, I believe the confirmability of this study was enhanced.

Profile of the System, Participants and their Schools

This section presents information regarding the participants and their schools, as well as a brief description of the school system in which they were employed. These data are presented to

allow the reader to contexualize the comments, quotes, and discussion that follow in subsequent chapters. The extent to which the experiences of the participants, and the findings of this study are transferable to other schools and systems is left to the reader to decide. They must assess the applicability of the findings and conclusions to their particular setting by determining the extent to which the settings described in this study are similar or different.

First, a description of the system is presented. This is followed by a profile of each of the three schools selected for the study. Next, the pseudonym of the participant, gender, current school, position, grade level, enrolment, years at current school, and total years in education are presented in tabular format. The chapter concludes with a summary of the method employed in the study.

As stated earlier in this chapter, pseudonyms have been employed to conceal the identity of the school system, the schools, and the participants. The pseudonyms for the schools and the participants have been chosen so that the names of the schools and the surnames of each participant from the respective schools start with the same letter. The elementary school and its participants

start with "a," the junior high school and its participants start with "b," and the senior high school and its participants start with "c."

School System

Delta Regional Schools is a newly regionalized public school system, combining three previous systems into one larger unit. Each of the previous systems had its own superintendent, board of trustees, and policies which guided the way decisions were made prior to regionalization in 1995. The regionalization of the three school systems resulted in a new governance structure, whereby, one of the three superintendents was retained to be the new superintendent of Delta Regional Schools. One of the former superintendents became the deputy superintendent of Delta Regional Schools, and the third choose to leave the district.

This new school system had to blend the practices and policies from the former systems into a system having its own procedures, identity, and vision. The site-based decision-making initiative was introduced for the entire district during the 1996-97 school year. The initiative was a new concept for the stakeholders of all three former systems. This provided the new district with opportunities to involve all school staff, central office staff, the board of

trustees, and the parents in developing a vision for a decentralized decision-making process. I believe the superintendent tried to unite the new district and demonstrate that all stakeholders would have an opportunity to shape the vision and the policies of Delta School District.

This suburban and rural district is within a two hour commute of a major metropolitan urban city in Alberta. The district consists of approximately 8000 students, 25 schools, just under 500 full time equivalent certificated staff, just under 250 support staff, and 7 school board trustees.

Able Elementary School

Able elementary school provided a full complement of programs from Early Entry Special Needs to grade 6, including: French as a second language, Resource, Special Education, Challenge, and Computer Education. Able elementary was a meticulously clean and brightly decorated, small suburban elementary school with approximately 150 to 200 students in attendance.

The principal administered the school without the aid of an assistant principal, and thus had a close working relationship with all the staff. The principal had an "open door" style of

communicating with students, parents, and staff; he was extremely accessible. During my visits to the school, parents could be seen volunteering in the classrooms, and helping with noon hour activities for the students. There was an active school council working with the principal and staff on issues such as school policies, district policies, field trips for students, and general fund raising. The staff room was an active location, where school staff and parents met to talk, rest, eat lunch, drink coffee, and celebrate special events such as staff birthdays.

Beacon Junior High School

Beacon junior high school offered an excellent academic program and special programs for students requiring an alternative junior high school education in grades seven to nine. High quality daily physical education classes, diversified extra-curricular activities, and a wide range of complementary courses were offered to all students at this older, well-maintained school. The students and staff were always busy, during my visits, either heading through the crowded hallways to the next class, or going to a team or club meeting. The staff provided supervised activities for students to participate in from intramural programs to organized sport teams.

The staff also provided incentives for students to behave well, and offered school sponsored field trips to the local ski hill and swimming pool. These incentives were well received by students, staff, and parents. The principal was well respected by staff, and considered himself to have had a collaborative decision-making process in place long before the district mandated site-based decision-making. Staff were active on numerous school committees. The school council was also very active at Beacon Junior High School. The chairperson believed that the school council was very organised, and could provide a broader perspective of views for the school staff to consider when decisions needed to be made. Issues such as the school discipline policy and "zero tolerance" were important discussion items this past year for the school council. Beacon Junior High School is located in a suburban centre. There were approximately 750 to 800 students in attendance.

Celestial Senior High School

Celestial senior high school was a "dual track" school offering instruction in French and English to students in grades 9 to 12. It was the Delta Regional School District site for French immersion in grades 9 to 12. The high school offers a full academic program, an

Integrated Opportunities Program, Vocational Program, and Skills Program. Celestial senior high school provides Advanced Placement courses in Math and Science. A partnership with Athabasca University has also been developed to provide instruction in university courses such as English. There was a high school Band Program, a variety of extra-curricular activities, and numerous sport teams for the 650 to 750 students to participate in.

The principal was in his 30th year as an educator, his ninth year as principal of Celestial Senior High School, and he was planning on retiring at the end of this school term. He told me he enjoyed being principal of this school, and liked working with the diverse personalities of students, staff, and parents. He was very proud of his school, and liked to talk about the success stories his staff were having with students. When I visited the school, it was clear that the students enjoyed sitting in a common area talking to one another in friendly, quiet conversation. The staff supervised the hallways and spoke to the students they encountered. The school council was actively working with the school principal. The school council met regularly each month as a large group, and also had smaller additional committee meetings. Two of the issues the school

council were concerned about this past year centred on the withdrawal of funding by the school board graduation pictures and the school athletic programs. The school council initiated an extensive survey to gather data to help them make an informed decision about the future direction of the high school athletic program.

Participants

The participants consisted of the principal, two teachers, and the school council chairperson from each of the selected elementary, junior, and senior high schools. The superintendent commented that the principals of these three schools were all very experienced, positive people who would not be afraid of having a university researcher in their buildings. I observed that the principals were confident of their relationships with the students, staff, and parents in their school. The principals were very professional in their attention to detail and openness as they allowed me the privilege of being in their schools. They were quick to comment on school successes, but equally apt to point out areas in need of improvement.

The school council chairpersons were all in their first year as

chairperson. They too, were very open about discussing their efforts to work with the school staff. They recognized the difficult task of getting a diverse group of parents to agree on decision-making issues. All three school council chairpersons saw their roles as being advisory to the principal, and in encouraging discussion and participation between parents and the school staff.

The teacher participants spoke at length about the changes that had occurred in education over the past five years. The primary issues for them were cuts in funding to education and keeping the focus on teaching students.

All of the participants appeared to have common traits. They were all extremely busy. They all spoke about students and about focusing their energies on doing the best they could for students: they were "student focused." They were happy, positive people who wanted to tell me about what they perceived to be issues surrounding site-based decision-making.

Table 1 provides a profile of the participants, namely: a list of the participants' pseudonyms, gender, current school, position, years at the current school, and total years in education. Table 2 then provides a profile of the schools, namely: the grade level of

school, the enrolment, and where each school is located. The profiles were placed at the end of this chapter, and on the same page, to allow the reader to more easily reference this information when reading the remainder of the dissertation.

Summary

In this chapter the method employed in addressing the research questions have been presented. Literature recommending specific procedures in the conduct of qualitative research were provided regarding the following aspects: (a) research design, (b) data collection, instrumentation, and analysis, (c) ethical considerations, and (d) enhancement of trustworthiness. Profiles of the 12 participants, their system, and their three schools, were presented. The participants were interviewed and all of the interviews were audio-recorded. These interview tapes were transcribed and checked for accuracy by the participants. These transcriptions provided the data for the findings.

Participant	Gender	School	Position	Years at current school	Total years in education
Alan	Male	Able Elementary	Principal	3	20
Angie	Female	Able Elementary	Council Chair	1st year as chair	n/a
Amanda	Female	Able Elementary	Teacher	29	29
Alison	Female	Able Elementary	Teacher	15	20
Bob	Male	Beacon Jr High	Principal	18	24
Betty	Female	Beacon Jr High	Council Chair	1st year as chair	n/a
Brian	Male	Beacon Jr High	Teacher	18	18
Belinda	Female	Beacon Jr High	Teacher	12	17
Carl	Male	Celestial Senior	Principal	9	30
Cam	Male	Celestial Senior	Council Chair	1st year as chair	n/a
Connie	Female	Celestial Senior	Teacher	6	7
Casey	Male	Celestial Senior	Teacher	9	14

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

School	Grade Levels	Student Enrollment	Location
Able Elementary	K-6	150-200	Suburban
Beacon Jr. High	7-9	750-800	Suburban
Celestial Senior High	9-12	700-750	Rural

Table 2. Profile of the Schools

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of chapter 4 is to present, from the perspective of the participants, the research findings in relation to the first subproblem specifically: which factors impact on the practices used in the decision-making process? Three questions related to the subproblem were addressed: (a) What does school-based decision-making mean at the school level? (b) How has the workload of principals, teachers, or school council chairpersons changed since the implementation of school-based decision-making? (c) To what extent do individuals want to be involved in decision-making?

This chapter includes a discussion of the findings and emergent themes, either supportive of or contrary to, as they relate to the literature. The chapter concludes with a response to subproblem one and answers the question regarding which factors impact on the practices that are used in the decision-making process.

The responses to the questions provided the perceptions of the principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons regarding the roles they play in the decision-making processes at their schools.

These perceptions provide important insights in addressing the general problem statement, namely: Under site-based management, how are decisions made in schools? Eight themes emerged as factors which impacted on the effectiveness of the practices used at all three schools in the study. These themes fall under the headings of: (a) collaborative process and multiple stakeholders; (b) information sharing; (c) pluralism and power; (d) leadership style; (e) trust, morals, and ethics; (f) change in workload, time constraints, and involvement; (g) political intervention; and (h) concerns over the future role of school councils. These themes are discussed in relation to the literature at the end of the chapter.

Subproblem One:

What Practices are used in the Decision-making Process?

Participant Definitions

To begin to address this subproblem participants were asked to provide their definitions for site-based decision-making. The participants used the terms "site-based management" (SBM) and "site-based decision-making" (SBDM) interchangeably in their interviews. A general definition for SBDM emerged from the findings. It was viewed as a collaborative process to share

information and gather input for decisions at the school level amongst the principal, teachers, and parents. The nature of interaction and discussion amongst the stakeholders indicated the participants viewed the collaborative process as a "team or group" activity. This meant individuals could interact; in fact, the respondents encouraged both individual and group interaction to facilitate the sharing of information.

The SBDM process at Delta Regional Schools had been decentralized from central office staff. Decision-making became the responsibility of the school staff, with the principal being ultimately accountable. The principal, staff, and school council chairpersons all felt that they were now "accountable" for decisions at the school level.

The leadership style of the principal was identified as an important factor in the effectiveness of SBDM. Also, the beliefs held by the respondents indicated that ethical practices of the principal and all stakeholders improved trust amongst the entire organization. The ability for the individuals within the group to trust each other was seen as an essential element for successful implementation of SBDM. One principal discussed SBDM in terms of

who had the "power" to make decisions.

Alan, the principal of the elementary school, discussed the difficulty of involving stakeholders in a variety of decisions which occur on a daily basis in schools. He also addressed who should have the power to have the "final say." He felt that there may be times when he could delegate the authority to an individual staff member, a committee, or to the school council. He also said that he understood the value of sharing the decision making duties and, whenever feasible, he encouraged others to take responsibility and exercise their decision-making skills. But, Alan wanted to reserve the right to have the "final say" when he deemed appropriate, since he was the principal and "accountable for his school." Alan explained site-based decision-making in this way:

> It is using power, and giving away power, empowering people. Knowing which decisions you need to make and then making them. And knowing which ones should be joint and which ones should be deferred. Decision-making becomes difficult because you can't be a dictator, at the same time, you can't work in a democracy, especially when the principal is ultimately accountable.

Alan continued with his description of SBDM to state that principles are important to consider when making decisions. Principals should remember that they are professionals responsible

for the well-being and education of all the children in their schools. Decisions should be ethical and made in the best interests of students. Alan presented a hypothetical situation explaining what he would call a principal's actions if that principal was making unethical decisions. Alan developed the term "satisficing" as a word which implied that one makes a decision only to satisfy the stakeholders and that the decision is not in the best interests of educating students. Alan believed that principals should not compromise their ethical practices and should avoid "satisficing" others. Alan expressed his views accordingly:

> Decisions and actions always need to be both moral and ethical. You have to wrap it all in the professionalism of our profession. Sometimes I think people slip into convenient ethics or flexible morals of a "satisficing" concept; and they lose sight of what we're really about and that we're here for the students. I think that's part of the problem.

Bob, the junior high school principal, discussed his collaborative view of decision-making as staff working together towards a common goal. Bob saw the group's duty as deciding how to spend the budget dollars and how to deal with policy issues. Bob also discussed how uncomfortable dealing with the human resources component of this new process had been for staff. Staff experienced

difficulty in discussing which programs should stay and which should be removed. This was due to the fact that, ultimately, colleagues might have to be relocated within the district or face termination. This was one area where staff felt tension and incongruence with their collegial roles. In SBDM many of the decisions into which individuals provide input, do affect the educational programming and staffing. Bob stated his view thusly:

> In our school we've long been staff driven. Staff make most of the decisions. This is the first year we've really dealt with major dollars, hiring, and looking at numbers. With site-based management we're new to the business of having to decide the budget and make decisions about people's jobs, and that's very uncomfortable for staff. We've been pretty much a collaborative group since I've been principal. If the students, staff, and school council don't have any say in policy and decisions then they're not likely to go out there and support those decisions at all.

Belinda concurred with Bob, and added that her view of SBDM now included responsibilities for allocating funds. It is interesting to note that, generally, the collaborative process utilized in her school had not changed for her with the introduction of SBDM. She felt that she and her colleagues had always been able to provide input into issues they believed to be important to them. Belinda stated:

> It's always been a school where the staff has made most of the major decisions as a group, and so, when this new term came along, "school-based decisions," the only thing it meant new to me was that now we had the actual money to make decisions where that money was going to go. So, as far as making decisions in other areas, we've always had lots of input in almost every area other than just making decisions about the financial aspects.

Casey, a teacher at the senior high, also discussed the group or team aspect of decision-making in his school. However, he went further in pointing out the importance of leadership style. Casey believed that principals who were sensitive to the views of multiple stakeholders, who listened to their ideas and allowed for meaningful input into SBDM, and who allowed for a "team" approach to solving problems had a leadership style which was conducive to collaborative decision-making. It was also important to Casey that school administrators understand the concept of decision-making as a "process." Casey presented his views accordingly:

> School based decision making is largely dependent upon the leadership that is exhibited by the administrator or administrators, largely their style. I also believe that a large part of the idea of SBDM in this school is a team approach. I believe that, in our school, we have administrators who are interested in our points of view and accept our input, and do allow us to be part of the decision making process.

Angie talked about the vast numbers of decisions that have to be

made each day to run a school; she pointed out that trust and consistency must be present to allow parents and educators to coexist. Angie also discussed the level of involvement that she was prepared to be responsible for. She defined her thoughts on SBDM in this way:

> There are thousands and thousands of decisions that have to be made. As a parent, I don't want to be involved in every decision that's made, but there are certain decisions that I do want to be involved in, ones that I feel directly affect the school that my children go to. There has to be consistency among schools, and that someone else has to make decisions. I trust the principal to make those decisions, just like he or she trusts the school council to make decisions. There are many parents who don't attend our meetings, but they trust us to make the right decisions for the school, and we do. Everything is tailor made to what is happening at Able Elementary.

Change in Workload

When the participants were asked if their workload had changed as a principal, teacher, or school council chairperson with the implementation of school-based decision-making, a variety of responses ensued. Carl described his change in workload as a shift in: (a) power, (b) accountability, and (c) money from division (central) office to the school staff -- primarily to the principal. He described the changes in terms of "decentralizing" the authority for decisions from central office to the school level. He also

framed the changes in terms of political interventions such as: (a) new policy for site-based management, (b) consolidation of school divisions, and (c) accountability of the principal for decisions made at the school level. Carl explained his views accordingly:

> It's increased big time. I'm making decisions that would probably have been made at the division office. If you went to the division and asked a question before you would get an answer, now it's "well, you decide." You have the power, you have the money, you have what's required to make that decision whether it be hiring a teacher or supporting a program. The decision-making has fallen right back on my shoulders, staff shoulders, but mostly my shoulders.
>
> I've had to do a lot more reflecting on decisions that I do make whereas in the past, it was easier to just call someone at the next level up and look for input from them. With all the changes in Alberta, a lot of my time is trying to keep current with all of the information that's coming out. All the work involved in the accountability with your budget and this is part of the amalgamation of divisions as well. It's not just the site-based management initiative. It's other political factors that have happened in Alberta one of these is the consolidation of school divisions. They've had to develop with practices and accounting procedures and we're learning all of that as well.

Bob concurred with Carl that the work load had increased, and also discussed how keeping parents and staff informed is important. Bob stated that committee work has increased because of the collaborative nature expected of principals working with diverse specialty groups. Committee work became a key practice for the

Delta Regional School District because of the magnitude of change that occurred when three former school systems were regionalized into one large district. District level policies had to be blended to take into consideration the views of the previous systems. The principals felt that they were being utilized as key resource personnel to sit on committees to provide the input required to set new directions for the district. Bob expressed his views this way:

> We have lots more to do. Staff and parents have a lot of say into decisions, so, you always want to keep them informed. You're going to school council with policies, you're going to your staff with policies, you're responsible for the reaction of all of these people to the superintendent. In site-based management there's a lot of committee work that also needs to be done at the district level because with the collaborative nature of SBDM it's expected that principals will have responses to many of the issues. They're the ones that sit on committees and decide on special education funding, maintenance, and operations.

Amanda confirmed Bob's point about committees and brought up her concerns about added stress. The stress levels of staff in general were discussed by the majority of respondents. Over all, stress levels were considered to have increased. Amanda stated:

> I would say that the workload as a teacher has increased. I find it more stressful by having to be on committees and to spend extra time in that way.

Brian also addressed the issue of time constraints and the

resulting impact of staff reductions due to government funding cuts to education. Brian speculated that because there were fewer staff at his school, he believed that teachers were spending more time, on more committees in order to accomplish the required tasks. He voiced his concerns accordingly:

> I'd say the workload increased a little bit just because of the committees. As a staff, we could be there for hours and hours trying to agree. I'm on the library committee since we no longer have a librarian due to funding cuts that required staff reductions. We meet at lunch hour, when I have free lunch hours -- if there was no supervision or no team practices. We would meet after school mostly, so it would mean just juggling time and putting in more time after school hours.

Belinda brought up conflicting views regarding the increased workload for teachers. She felt that her school had always had considerable input into the decision-making process, but that the teachers who get involved in committees end up spending more time than those who leave immediately after a staff meeting. She suggested that school staff who did not take the time to discuss issues, had less work to do. Belinda expressed her opinions thusly:

> It's hard for me to say if the workload changed or not. Because as opposed to some other schools where you have no input to these decisions we've always had more work, we've always had committees. I would say it increased slightly, because now we're looking at the dollars. The work load here is much greater in that aspect than at other schools. For example, the

> first 3 staff meetings we had this year went to 6:00 o'clock. Other staffs, well, they were out at 3:30 because the decisions are made, and they come to the table and they ask, does everybody agree with this, and everybody says, "oh yeah, okay," and so they're gone. So the time aspect certainly is there, plus the committee aspect of presenting the information to staff takes time.

Casey commented upon how the leadership style of the administrators can impact on the workload of the teachers. Casey believed that the staff were much more inclined to be satisfied with their workload if the principal allowed the teachers to concentrate their energy in areas of instruction and curriculum. Staff wanted to be involved in issues which they felt they understood and which directly affected them. Staff did not want to be involved in all the possible decisions that might evolve in a school setting. If staff were "shielded" from issues that might detract from their teaching duties, teachers tended to view the principal as being supportive of student instruction. To be shielded meant to be not consulted regarding issues irrelevant to duties associated with teaching, such as building maintenance and janitorial contracts. The staff appreciated being left out of issues that did not directly affect them. Casey also discussed the political climate of the past three years. Casey stated his views as follows:

> I would say that there has been a lot of upheaval in the last two or three years. There have been statements come out of Alberta Education and we know that the system is going to change. I think that this has put a lot of pressure on us in a lot of ways. But I'd say for the most part that things probably haven't changed that much mainly because of the leadership style that we have. I think the principal shields us from unnecessary tasks.

Connie indicated that her workload has changed to accommodate being involved in the decision-making process. She discussed the mandate for school staff to become a part of the "everyday decisions" that affect them. Connie stated her opinions accordingly:

> I still put student time first. So, has SBDM taken away from student time? I think it's augmented the time that teachers have to spend at their job. I don't know if you could say it's taken away or not. Yes, it means my job takes longer to do. It means I invest more time to accomplish the things that I decided to be involved in. I think it's important to realize that the mandate has shifted towards SBDM and for teachers to be involved in the decision-making process. It is important because you have to live with those decisions. Those are decisions that a person works with everyday.

Alan made comments more in line with Belinda's opinion that the workload for staff may not have changed with the introduction of site-based decision-making. He made a case for changing the way certain tasks were performed. One of his suggestions was that there was insufficient time to do all the work, so tasks which could

be eliminated should be eliminated. Alan brought up the idea that the intensity and commitment had increased for decision-making, because central office had downloaded the authority to make the decision, but was not checking to confirm if the decisions made were sound. The uncertainty regarding the challenge of always making the "right decision" is illuminated. Alan stated that:

> A lot of people complain about the extra work and the extra involvement. I don't see that, quite honestly. I don't see that there's a whole ton more work. You need to get more efficient at your work, and you need to make decisions about what's important. I think some of the little things that you could track in the past, you don't track now. In the end it's not really critical to your job. I think more important than the time is the intensity of decisions. The fact that they've downloaded more here means that our decisions are much more critical because lots of them aren't checked. They're simply taken at face value. It's what you want, you're going to get that, and central office doesn't necessarily have the personnel or the time to check what you've done. They're simply assuming you've made good decisions. So, with each decision that you make there's an intensity and a commitment to making sure this is the best and the right one for your school. That's really difficult.

Angie commented on the evolving nature of school councils and how they function exactly the way they had prior to mandatory introduction of school councils and site-based decision-making. Angie stated that Able Elementary School had a parent association in place before the provincial government mandated that school

councils should be in place at all schools. She discussed the workload that ensued the previous year, as the "Parent Association" set new bylaws to conform with new government regulations to become a "School Council." Angie's views were similar to the other school council chairpersons who felt they had good parent councils previous to the requirement to form a school council, and that the formation of a new school council was just an exercise that was a non-productive use of parents' time who had good relationships with their schools. The exercise to change from a parent association to a school council was merely considered a change in name, because all three school council chairpersons felt that their present school councils performed exactly as they had in the past. Angie expressed her views accordingly:

> Our president went to meetings, there was so much work deciding how this is different from what we already had, and really realizing it wasn't different. What we have works very well, but the general consensus was we didn't really have to do it. But four or five years down the road, if we don't get this set up properly, will we, in some way, suffer. Last year was a lot of work trying to formulate bylaws and every meeting we went to was also a work in progress. The school council was evolving. We basically now run it as a school council according to all the regulations, but the work that we do is basically the same that we did before, because we had already found our place in the school. So it was just a lot of paper work to get in place where we are now Able Elementary Parents Advisory

> Council, and before we were Able Elementary Parents Association.

Another issue which increased the workload for the school council executive was trying to involve more parents and the community in the school council committees. Getting parents and the community to participate in volunteer activities was difficult and took a coordinated effort on the part of the school council executive members. Cam expressed his views accordingly:

> The busiest committee last year was the athletics committee. We surveyed all of the students in the school, we had 700 survey results, we surveyed 20 schools in the region and there was a lot of work in compiling all that and interpreting the data. One of the things that we noticed was we don't get a lot of participation of people outside the parents council, even at the meetings. There are only one or two people who show up and it's through our committees that we often bring in other people. On our committees, we make a point of not only having parents and council people, but we'll go out and we'll get parents who are not on the council.

Involvement in Decision-making

When the participants were asked if they wanted to become more involved in decision-making they all responded negatively. Alison wanted her working time to be focused on students in the classroom. She believed that administrators were hired to administer and that she was hired to teach. Alison commented

accordingly:

> No. If I wanted to be more involved with the decision-making process, I would have gone ahead and gone into administration myself. I was given that option, I tried it and I decided I like the classroom. That's where I want my energies and patience to be placed.

Amanda concurred with Alison, and brought forth the idea that staff work with limited resources. There was not total freedom to make decisions, rather, there were constraints of "finite dollars" that could be spent to resolve issues. Within the structure that Amanda was working, she felt that she was sufficiently involved in decision-making. Amanda commented thusly:

> We seem to be working with limited resources so we don't always get what we ask for. But I don't know, I don't think there's any area that I feel that I really need more say in. I think that we have as much as we need right now.

The teachers were cautious to not assume more responsibility in any additional areas of decision-making. They all expressed satisfaction with the level of input they had into decision-making at their schools. The teachers interviewed agreed they wanted to concentrate on their areas of teaching specialization and curriculum. The teachers interviewed expressed concern that professional decisions appear to come down to a matter of funding dollars. Casey

summarized these concepts accordingly:

> I don't know if that's my job, to be more involved in decisions, to be quite honest with you. I think that our administrators have accepted the responsibility that comes with their position. I feel that how the decisions are being made is being made quite well, and I'm satisfied for the most part. I'm territorial, I mean I look after myself, I look after my department. I wouldn't necessarily say that I want to have more say. I feel that we've been given enough lateral movement and enough independence to do what I think has to be done in most cases. The library and what type of resources would I like? That all comes down to money doesn't it? The more money we have, the more interest we'd have. At this point, we have less funds coming from Alberta Education. I just want to make sure, in the end, that I have available to me the resources that are necessary to run my courses well.

All three principals commented that they did not want to become more involved in the decision-making process than they were already. Alan believed that some principals in the district may even wish to return staffing and maintenance of school buildings back to central office personnel. Alan stated:

> I have as much involvement as I want in virtually every area, and there are some areas that I probably could have less involvement. Well, in maintenance, I don't need any more involvement in. I mean, goodness sakes, I'm not the plumber, and I'm not the electrician, and I don't really want to be their supervisor. I think that's handled centrally much better. Some of the other things that should be centralised are parts of the budget and staffing. The staffing is one where we really fail to see the big picture that the district could do. They can see pressure points in different grades, and different locations, so

> that they could actually shift .1 or .2 or .3 of a teacher not being used in one school to another school
> There's no economy of scale when you're working with individual schools. We're all these little satellites. We're all moving at our speeds and in own orbits, and we're orbiting our district.

Bob disagreed with some of Alan's comments. Bob did not want to give up making decisions with his parents and staff. He discussed the government's desire to have more input from teachers, parents, and principals into the decision-making process. Carl concurred with Bob, he did not want to lose decision-making authority for staffing. There were specialized areas of expertise such as building maintenance that could stay centralized, but over time, Carl suggested they may evolve to become the responsibility of the school principal. Bob expressed his stance as follows:

> Well, I think the economies of scale should work. A lot of our colleagues would like central office just to tell them how many staff they have. That sort of defeats the purpose of site-based decision-making. The government has put that on us and I don't think that we have too much of a choice in that. I don't want to give it up. If this is what site-based decision making is, then basically the only decisions that we have are what programs we're going to, who's going to run them, and how many people it's going to take to do that. And if that's it, then I want to do it with my staff and my parents.

Betty discussed the involvement, responsibility, and stress associated with parents making decisions in a school setting on a

day-to-day basis. Betty explained that, as a school council chairperson, she preferred to come to the school and to be an advisor to the principal and a catalyst for encouraging discussions. She did not want to be responsible for the day-to-day decisions that must be made by school staff. She felt there were far too many confidential issues in the lives of students that should not be the concern of school council members. She expressed her concerns as follows:

> Involved more than we are now? Personally, no. Simply because it's nice to come to the school as a chairperson and I don't have to have all the opinions. None-the-less I can spark that conversation. But to be responsible solely for a lot of these issues, I probably couldn't handle the stress. It's nice to come to school to work on it, yet I don't have it every day.

Cam, a fellow school council chairperson, also expressed a similar point of view with respect to increased school council involvement in school decisions. He was concerned about the confidentiality and credibility issues related to lay people making professional decisions about curriculum. He also discussed the risks of parents becoming involved in power struggles over issues. He believed the short tenure of school council members, which can change on a yearly basis, was detrimental to the decision-making

process. A yearly turnover in executive members would cause a lack of vision and lack of commitment to long term goals. Cam firmly believed that principals and their staff should be making educational decisions in their area of expertise. The concept of "expertise" and "commitment" being used as parameters guiding who should have access to the SBDM process is further elaborated on in chapter 5. Cam stated his views on involvement accordingly:

> Actually parents should not be making educational decisions. Because you have to recognize where your confidence lies and I think we've made a fairly sound decision last year. We recognized that we're not professionals in the area of education. We can have opinions and the school certainly listens to those opinions. But when it comes down to making decisions, I think the professionals should do that. I think one of the risks of becoming involved in very important decisions at the school for example, in terms of curriculum and so on, are that parent councils change. If they have a lot of power in making those decisions, you can end up having a very inconsistent education which probably reflects the view of a very small fraction of the community.

In analyzing the respondents' collaborative definition of SBDM, change in workload for respondents, and their level of involvement in SBDM, eight themes emerged as factors which impacted on the effectiveness of the practices used at all three schools in the study. These themes fall under the headings of: (a) collaborative process and multiple stakeholders; (b) information sharing; (c) pluralism

and power; (d) leadership style; (e) trust, morals, and ethics; (f) change in workload, time constraints, and involvement; (g) political intervention; and (h) concerns over the future role of school councils.

Discussion of Emergent Themes

Collaborative process and multiple stakeholders. Alberta Education (1996) defined SBDM as a collaborative process, involving a diverse group of stakeholders, namely: (a) parents, (b) students, (c) teachers, (d) principals, (e) superintendents, (f) trustees, (g) government, (h) business, and (i) other community members (p. 1). The government document also indicated that decisions are made at the school level about policies, instructional programs and services, and how funds are allocated to support them (p. 2). The conceptual framework presented in Figure 3 corresponds to the definition identified by Alberta Education, but not to the findings of the study as described in the following two paragraphs.

The conceptual framework indicated how the principal and the decision-making process interact with multiple stakeholders, and how the principal should consider the interests presented by each group. The findings identified the following stakeholders: (a)

students, (b) school staff, (c) parents, (d) school councils (e) the principal, (f) central office administration, and (g) the school board of trustees. The respondents did not identify the following groups, when interviewed individually, listed in the conceptual framework: (a) business partnerships, (b) volunteers, (c) nonlegitimate groups (e.g., special interest groups such as, pro-life and human rights), (d) teachers' associations, and (e) government.

At the group member check meetings, I was able to ask respondents why some groups were not mentioned as stakeholders during the interviews and if certain stakeholders had more of a legitimate reason to have access to SBDM then other stakeholders. The respondents believed that their primary focus should be on the "primary legitimate stakeholders:" (a) students, (b) staff, (c) parents, and (d) the school council. The organizations consisting of business partnerships, Alberta Teachers' Association, school board trustees, central office staff, Canadian Parents for French, and government were considered to be "secondary legitimate stakeholders." Special interest groups and taxpayers without children were not considered to have direct input into the SBDM process as it presently exists in Delta Regional School District and

could be classified as "secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders." This information provided the distinction between: (a) primary legitimate stakeholders, (b) secondary legitimate stakeholders, and (c) secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders" which were not identified in the literature. These three distinctions can be added to enhance the conceptual framework. McGrath (1992) stated that groups have legitimacy by their very nature. If their nature or primary function is to support schools in the endeavour to improve education for all students, then they would be considered to have legitimate reasons to interact with the principal and the decision-making process (p. 1).

Information sharing. The findings indicated that a flow of information, from individuals or groups who have a legitimate reason to involved in school-based decisions, does exist for principals to consider when resolving decisional issues. Dubin (1991) stated that if principals had the skills to understand "the information flow sources, had access to these in a programmed fashion that signalled potential problems based upon the information, principals could begin adapting leadership and decision-making styles in accordance with the school need" (p. 3).

Principals should use the information gathering process to signal potential problems or solutions. Principals should use the relevant information gathered from multiple stakeholders to further resolve decisional issues at hand. McGrath stated that these groups need to be recognized as important advisors to principals who must interact with them (p. 1). Fullan (1993) concurred with McGrath and reported that multiple stakeholders shape and own education; furthermore, he believed that educators can no longer make decisions in isolation (p. 95).

Power and pluralism. The previous discussions further confirm the literature reviewed which suggested that pluralism is very much a part of "everyday life" for principals and their staff; furthermore, this pluralism influences how power is viewed by all the stakeholders. Alan's perception of power sets the stage for a discussion regarding how power can be used to expand the influence principals can have on the decision-making process. Alan, a principal respondent, stated "it is using power, and giving away power, empowering people. Knowing which decisions you need to make and making them. And knowing which ones should be joint, and which ones should be deferred, or sent on."

McGrath (1992) defined pluralism as "collective participation in the decision-making process through some form of representation, either by a group acting on behalf of a constituency or by the educational institution reflecting the wishes of its clientele" (p. 7) The effects of pluralism are viewed by McGrath (1992) and by Hoy and Tarter (1992) as the benefits or impact of the advocacy on the principal who interacts with the participating groups. This can simply be viewed as "who has the power to influence the decision." Hoy and Miskel (1996) stated that the majority of principals' time is directed at "power-oriented behavior either developing or utilizing relationships to achieve a desired outcome" (p. 178). Hoy and Miskel indicated that "power matters: it's an important aspect of what an organization does and it affects what its members do" (p. 190).

The respondents did not talk about power in a coercive manner to build power bases and defeat opponents, rather they spoke of it as a paradox of authority. Hoy and Tarter (1992) stated that "to increase authority, leaders must be able to relinquish it" (p. 5). There are times when various stakeholders are in better positions to make the decisions, and other times when they are not. The

successful principal in the short run, and more influential principal in the long run, will be one who knows how and when to involve others. Hoy and Tarter explicated that "skilfully guided collaboration expands rather than narrows the influence" and thusly, the power of the principal (p. 5).

Principal as transformational leader. The theme of "leadership stye" was discussed by the respondents as being important for successful implementation for SBDM. Fullan (1993) suggested that principals must work with staff, parents, and the community to achieve the schools' goals (p. 95). Further to this end, Sergiovanni (1991) indicated that the principal has the lead role in bringing together the school goals within community expectations. The respondents did concur with the literature reviewed and the conceptual framework, presented in chapter 2, that the principal is ultimately responsible for ensuring that a process is in place for multiple stakeholder input into school decisions. After analyzing the respondents' comments on effective leadership style, I believe that they had described what Hoy and Miskel (1996) defined as "transformational leadership" (p. 392).

Hoy and Miskel (1996) stated that transformational leaders

are expected to: (a) define the need for change, (b) create vision, (c) muster commitment to the vision, (d) inspire followers, and (e) mentor followers to take greater responsibility for their own development and those of others (p. 396). This leadership style was also based on personal values that the respondents would classify as "moral and ethical principles." These principles are elaborated upon below.

Trust, morals, and ethics. The findings indicated that stakeholders trust the decisions made by principals who exemplified ethical and moral practices. This was considered an important factor in the successful implementation of the SBDM process. Hoy and Miskel (1996) identified "idealized influence" as a leadership characteristic representing the building of trust in followers which provides a basis for accepting "change" in the work place. By "demonstrating high standards of ethical and moral conduct" the principals' abilities to establish trust are attained (p. 394). The literature (e.g., Hoy & Miskel, 1996., Neal, 1991., Sergiovanni, 1991., and Fullan, 1993) concurs with the findings, that without such trust principals would have their interactions to collaborate with stakeholders met with resistance. Neal (1991) stated that "the

potential for conflict, misunderstanding, and political mischief is considerable, if the education family is not bound by a strong sense of trust and credibility" (p. 45).

In a similar manner, Sergiovanni (1991) discussed the importance of "the heart, head, and hand of leadership." The "*heart* of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to -- that person's personal vision, to use a popular term (p. 321)." The *head* of leadership relates to theories of administrative practice, but involves the ability to reflect on the decisions which have been made, and to reflect on those which still require resolution. The *hand* of leadership relates to the actions, decisions, and management behaviours undertaken by the principal (p. 321).

The principals, in this study, all commented about their need to reflect upon the decisions they were making, to ensure they were making the "right" decisions. Sergiovanni (1991) defined this reflection as the moral imperative to combine the *heart, head, and hand* of leadership to "doing right things," as opposed to "doing things right." Goodlad (1990) stated that schools can instill *moral responsibility* by "developing educated persons who acquire an

understanding of truth, beauty, and justice against which to judge their own and society's virtues and imperfections . . . " (pp. 48-49). The findings indicated that respondents wanted to engage in collaborative decision-making in a moral and ethical manner. Sirotnik (1990, cited in Fullan, 1993) described this as "moral requirements: commitments to *inquiry, competence, caring, freedom, well-being, and social justice* " (p. 9).

Change in workload, time constraints, and involvement. The findings indicated that the workload had generally increased for respondents because of the introduction of SBDM. There were a variety of arguments for how it had changed, but key factors emerged indicating it took more "time" to gather input, share information, and keep all of the stakeholders informed about the decision-making issues. Neal (1991) stated that two of the disadvantages of moving to SBDM are "an inevitable increase in the workload of personnel during the initial stages" and that "extra time will be taken away from the members' professional or private schedules." Because of the changes in workload and perceived demands upon their time, the respondents in this study generally did not want to become more involved in the decision-making process at

their schools.

Quinn (1996) stated that, for many stakeholders, the extra workload and time commitments were considered "add-on" duties to already hectic schedules. "Working towards building community and greater parental involvement requires time if all interest groups and stakeholders are to be brought into the process" (p. 29). Quinn's research indicated that just finding opportunities when all of the necessary stakeholders could meet is often an "onerous task" to accomplish. There was also concern expressed by the respondents that this "time" spent on decision-making was taking away from time in the classroom and affecting the quality of instruction. This concern was consistent with Quinn's (1996) findings.

The respondents commented that committee work had increased because of the collaborative nature of working with multiple stakeholders. Neal (1991) indicated that "teachers and parents must serve on committees. Principals must not only serve on such committees, but must learn how to write school plans, develop school budgets, follow new bookkeeping procedures, and learn new skills of leadership through collaboration" (p. 46). While working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders, the individuals

within the group must understand that they are making decisions within defined boundaries. Amanda stated that there were finite resources with which to solve the problems that arise during decision-making meetings. Neil (1991) and Quinn (1996) discussed the importance of knowing what the parameters are when groups are involved in various stages of the decision-making process. The issue of parameters is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The increase in workload, the commitment of additional time to work on committees, and the general view of the respondents to not become more involved in the existing decision-making process are inherent in the findings of this study. These findings support the existing literature. Another factor which impacted on the workload of stakeholders was political intervention, which will be discussed below.

Political intervention. The findings indicated that government initiatives in Alberta during the early 1990s impacted on the decision-making practices that are presently being utilized in publicly funded schools in Alberta. Rury and Mirel (1996) stated that "the politics of education is a relatively new field of study" (p. 64). The authors further explicated that school systems have been

relatively autonomous and sheltered from partisan politics during most of the 20th century. This professionally defined administrative isolation began to change over the past 15 years, whereby, political leaders have initiated school system decentralization, "a process that involves shifting power and/or resources from centralized educational bureaucracies to local schools or parents" (p. 89).

Holdaway and Ratsoy (1991) also support the above premise that political restructuring "in organization and governance of education have had a substantial impact upon how principals operate their schools" (p. 2). The authors explained the restructuring as a "devolution of decision-making control" from the provincial or central level to the level of individual schools. With the devolution of control to schools also came "increased authority for individual school councils and greater responsibility for principals in the key areas of selection and evaluation of personnel, budgeting, and planning" (p. 2). The literature supports the findings that political initiatives of Alberta Education policies 1.8.2 and 1.8.3, regarding mandatory implementation of "site-based decision-making" and "school councils" respectively, directly impacted on the operation

of schools in this study.

Further to the above, Peters and Richards (1995) stated that the most prominent change in the governance of education in Alberta was "the move to reduce the number of school boards in the province from 141 to about 64" (p. 3). This initiative created many newly regionalized school districts, including the one which is the subject of this study. Within the three previous school systems which form Delta School District, there was a strong perception that this mandatory initiative to restructure into a larger district had created communication challenges requiring numerous meetings and considerable committee work for the respondents to participate in the decision-making process.

Concern over the future role of school councils. An additional finding which emerged was the respondents' concern over what the future role of school councils will encompass. As was noted in the previous discussion "that political forces were at work in redefining the relationship between school and community" (Quinn, 1996, p. 32). The school council chairpersons indicated that they had reservations about lay people making professional decisions regarding curriculum or staffing. One chairperson

expressed his concern about the "risk of parents becoming involved in power struggles" with the school administration, and what the "expectations are for the parents' council over the long term."

This same chairperson stated that some parents "believe that in the future the parents' councils are going to replace, for all intents and purposes, the school boards. Which is a rumour, an undercurrent that is heard from time to time." Peters and Richards (1995) stated that the government of Alberta had made it clear in "its earliest news release of 1994," that school-based budgeting and decentralized decision-making at the school level, would "increase the involvement of parents, the community and business in the delivery of education" (p. 21). The authors also suggested that some of the concerns related to the expanding role of school councils "relate to the possibility of the development of a totally unwielding superstructure overseeing the in-school activities of teachers and administrators" (p. 21).

Peters and Richards (1995) indicated that the government might be "moving in the direction of establishing a mini-school board for every single school in the province" (p. 22). What the school council chairpersons indicated was that they felt unable to

provide the expertise and time commitments to undertake such a demanding role in the decision-making process at their schools. The chairpersons wanted the school staff to be responsible for the professional decisions which impact the operation of a school, and that the school council could "influence that through the mission statement, the vision, and the values that you set for the education process at the school" (Cam, school council chairperson).

The chairpersons indicated that they felt there was a need to retain the governance role of school boards, rather than devolve the authority to the school councils. The school board trustees had full time central office staff to provide expertise and advice regarding educational issues. The school board had the time during regular working hours to fulfil their duties. On the other hand, the school council chairpersons were volunteers who stated they did not have the desire or expertise to govern schools, nor were they able to spend the required time to fulfil such a demanding position.

Peters and Richards (1995) stated that the provincial government does not understand the wishes or limitations of parents who sit on school councils. The authors believed that:

One might be inclined to wonder where the entanglements

> come from and whose behest, given the changes which government is imposing on schools, in the area of school councils, with out any substantial demand for such changes from the parents who will be obliged to participate on these councils. (p. 22)

Williams, Harold, and Southworth (1997) stated that there was a "downside to this decentralization movement" with school councils (p. 269). This downside was viewed as the inability of isolated school councils to be able to organize effective and efficient school systems. Eric Bolton, a former senior chief inspector of schools (cited in Williams, Harold, & Southworth, 1997) stated succinctly, "It is surely a triumph of hope over experience to expect that such self-interested, isolated, fragmented decisions, made in thousands of separate institutions, will add up to a sensible, effective, and efficient national school system" (p. 269).

Response to the Question of Subproblem One:

Which factors impact the practices used in the decision-making process? The participants indicated that site-based decision-making (SBDM) was a decentralization of the decision-making responsibility from the district level to the school level, with the principal being held ultimately accountable. SBDM was not always a democratic process, rather, it was a collaborative

process to share information and gather input for decisions amongst multiple stakeholders. Categories for the stakeholders were originally identified in the conceptual framework, Figure 3, and were further refined. Primary legitimate stakeholders were identified as: (a) students, (b) staff, (c) parents, and (d) the school council. Secondary legitimate stakeholders were identified as: business partnerships, (b) volunteers, (c) teacher associations, (d) educational special interest groups (e.g., Canadian Parents for French), (e) school board trustees, (f) central office staff, and (g) government. Secondary nonlegitimate groups were identified as: non-educational special interest groups and taxpayers without children.

One of the key factors in successful implementation of SBDM, stated by the participants, was the importance of trust. This trust meant that the stakeholders believed the principal was making decisions in the best interests of student learning. The leadership style of the principal was also identified as an important contributor to effective SBDM. The practices used in the sample schools are new and evolving. This is due to the evolving nature of provincial government initiatives, such as mandatory school

councils and site-based decision-making. Other political factors, namely: (a) cuts to education funding in general, (b) decentralization of funding to schools, (c) accountability of schools for academic results and fiscal management, and (d) consolidation of smaller school systems into larger school districts have impacted on the practices used at the respondents' schools.

Participants described a change in workload as a shift in power, accountability, and money from central office to the school staff, primarily the principal. There was a notable increase in committee work for all stakeholders, to share information and collect input from teachers, parents, and principals. This has increased the demand on participants' time as they become more involved in the decision-making process. Another contributing factor to time constraints was the resulting impact of staff reductions due to government funding cuts. There were simply fewer people left to do the work required.

There were also contradictory opinions from two of the participants that the workload had not changed, rather, the intensity and commitment had increased for the decisions which now had to be made at the school level. Overall, participants were satisfied with

the decision-making process their schools had established. The participants wanted time to become familiar and comfortable with their new roles, and were not prepared to assume greater involvement in the process, as it presently exists.

The following chapter will focus on subproblem two, specifically: who provides input into decisions and within what parameters? Chapter 5 will first address the findings related to subproblem two, and the findings will be discussed in light of the literature.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Subproblem Two:

Who Provides Input Into Decisions and Within What Parameters?

Chapter 5 addresses "who provides input into decisions and within what parameters?" Five questions related to the subproblem were asked: (a) Do you have an opportunity to provide input into decisions at school? (b) What types of issues are they related to (budget, texts, curriculum, staffing, discipline policy)? (c) Do you feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision-making process presently used in your school? (d) Do you come across situations where the decision you want to make conflicts with the decision the organization, parents, or staff expect you to make? (e) Can you provide an example of a decision you have been affected by during the past few months you would identify as important?

The findings in this chapter are organized around the five questions addressing subproblem two. Supporting comments made by respondents relating to factors subsumed under each question are

provided. Four themes emerged from the analysis of the findings in this chapter, namely: (a) input, (b) conflict, (c) parameters, and (d) access. The themes which emerged are summarized and discussed in relation to the literature. This chapter concludes with a response to subproblem two.

Input Into Issues

To address this second subproblem participants were asked a series of five questions. The first three questions related to the opportunities to provide input into decisions at school, what types of issues they related to, and was there ownership and responsibility for the process. Carl, the high school principal, explained that he not only had the opportunity to provide input, but that he saw his role as providing the impetus for initiating and guiding the decision-making process. This input provided him a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision-making process employed at his school. The main issues that he and his staff were involved in were: (a) allocating educational monies identified as the "school budget," (b) establishing instructional programming for students, and (c) human resource staffing.

Carl believed it was his responsibility to develop a proposal to

take to the staff, during staff meetings, regarding which programs the school would offer, and in turn, how this would affect the staffing of the school. He also felt that it was his responsibility to conduct the interviews and hire the staff. He only involved staff in the hiring process if he required their expertise in French language or there was a direct relationship to be formed between the applicant and the teacher. Carl responded to the questions as follows:

> I totally feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the SBDM process presently used in my school. My role as principal is first of all getting things started, getting committees set up, getting involved once they are set up, being available as a resource type person, and just trying to work with committees to help set some direction. The main issues are budget items. We've never had more than $100,000 to deal with and that was just mostly for instructional supplies. Now we have the power to deal with 2.5 million dollars, which means we're involved in staffing. We literally have control of all the educational dollars earmarked for the students. In deciding staffing, I look at the programs we want to maintain. We talk at staff meetings, about programs, whether we should be continuing on with some of them. The program then determines the staffing required and I provide that information back to the staff. Staffing is my responsibility and I make the hard decisions on whether staff has to come or go.
>
> I interview and then I recommend to my assistant superintendent as to who I want and what programs. Central just basically "rubber stamps it." Sometimes, when it's support staff, I would involve a teacher in that process, because a teacher works very closely with them. I involve my

> vice-principal in immersion interviews because the language is an issue, and he's quite fluent in the French language.

When I asked Carl if the school council was able to provide input into the hiring of staff, Carl explained that he reviewed the educational programming with the school council and provided them with the dollar figures required to staff the school. He provided information to the school council and accounted for how the budget dollars were spent. School council members were able to ask questions and ask for clarification, but they were not actually part of the hiring process. Carl did not visualize school council members being involved in the interviewing or selection of staff. He commented that the school council could submit a "profile," of the characteristics, of the teacher they wanted to have hired. Carl stated his convictions as follows:

> I do not involve the school council in actual hiring of staff. The only way I involve them is basically I present my school plan as to what I needed to run. I outlined the programs I wanted to run and then basically this is what I would need for staffing, and then pointed out to them this is what it will cost me, staffing wise, in the budget to run that program. They had that information just like the staff had that information. So as far as the school council being involved in any sort of interviews and that sort of stuff, no they haven't been, and I wouldn't anticipate they would be.

Carl discussed the importance of working with the staff and

the school council regarding policies. He also commented that the superintendent expects principals to use a collaborative process to obtain feedback from multiple stakeholders across the entire district and to provide direction for district level policies. This meant that principals were doing two jobs. Their first job was to listen, share, and collect information with teachers and parents at the school level. Their second job was to provide these multiple stakeholder views as informed input into the district level policies. The principals' role had emerged to become a leadership position at both the school and district level. Bob expressed his views accordingly:

> You're going to the school council with policies, you're going to your staff with policies, you are responsible for the reaction of all of the these people to the superintendent. You have to document it and send it back, everybody looks for you to do that. I think, also in site-based, that there's a lot of committee work that gets done at the district level because, with the collaborative thing, it's expected that principals will have responses to many of the things, and principals are the ones that sit on committees and decide on, special ed funding, maintenance and operations.

Alison and the other teachers had similar comments on their involvement in decision-making. Teacher respondents had a sense of ownership and responsibility for the SBDM process and they were

able to provide input: (a) directly to the principal; (b) through sitting on committees; or (c) via a staff meeting, depending on the issues at hand. Alison summed up her views by saying:

> I have a sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision-making process used in my school. Teachers have input into virtually everything we want with the exception, perhaps, of staffing. And I think that there, again, if anyone on staff had some vehement ideas they would be welcome to visit and talk to the principal about this. If it was a common concern, we would, of course, discuss it in a staff meeting. Budget wise, definitely, the principal was looking just yesterday for people to work on the budget with him, to work on the three year plan with him.

The school council chairpersons stated that they felt a sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision-making process employed at their schools. School council chairpersons used the monthly school council meetings to provide: (a) input into school and district policy, (b) opinions on local concerns to professional staff, and (c) to encourage group discussion. To pass a motion, the chairpersons used the process of discussion and then a vote by the school council as a whole to ratify or nullify the motion. Betty summed up the chairpersons' views in her own words accordingly:

> Our principal brings items to our attention that he has discussed with his staff. As a chairperson for our parent council group, it is very much a part of my job to encourage discussion and multiple points of view. We do this once a

> month at our meetings in the hopes that we are giving our administrator a broader perspective of an issue he didn't think of. An issue is brought forward, it's discussed, it's voted upon, and passed or rejected.
>
> A big issue for me this fall were the discipline and expulsion policies. Because of the broad base of parent council you get a lot of opinion, and I think that's very good. Having an input in that, it makes you feel that, yes, maybe I did something that did make a difference for education. I'm not sure that there is any policy, whether it be from district, or from the school that is not brought forward in front of the parent council. I believe that we have a pretty open policy in our school, and that the staff of this school and our administrator believe that we provide good input and they want the feedback. We talk about everything from; books, to desks, to flooring, to paper. You feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for this process.

Conflict and Influencing Factors

The last two questions, pertaining to subproblem two, asked if the participants have had situations where the decision to be made conflicted with what the school system, parents, or staff expected; and what role the participant played and what factors influenced the decision. The participants had come across situations where the decisions they made were in conflict with the desires of what other stakeholders wanted. The two issues that were discussed by the participants were, firstly, development and interpretation of policy, and secondly, allocation of funds.

The principal and teacher participants discussed how

important it was for the school staff to have good public relations with the community at large, because good public relations meant parents would support the enrollment of their children in Delta Regional Schools. Since education funding, in Alberta's publicly funded schools, was directly linked to student enrollment, it was imperative that Delta Regional Schools maintain enrollments. The educational respondents commented that if a parent were to become dissatisfied and remove his or her child from a Delta Regional school and subsequently enroll the student in another system, then the educational funding would leave the Delta Regional school with the pupil. When an upset parent contacted Brian's principal and wanted Brian to change the way he interpreted a physical education policy, Brian became involved in a conflict of policy interpretation. Brian felt pressure to accommodate the wishes of parents, yet he did not want to compromise his professional ethics. The problem was resolved by Brian, the principal, the assistant principal, and all of the school's physical education teachers meeting as a "team." This team discussed various strategies which could be used to keep the integrity of the department policy intact, yet provide for a satisfactory resolution of the problem for the student. Brian

provided the following example:

> I have come across conflicts. We had been accepting a written note from a parent to excuse the student from the class. We have a policy, an understanding with all the phys ed staff and the administration. The decision we had made was that we would excuse 2 absences and then after that they would be losing a percent for every absence after. The administration wasn't too keen on that idea, but said we could try it. But just recently a parent had phoned up and challenged, got very irate with one of the teachers not accepting the note. So then we had to sit down, they had phoned the principal and the assistant principal, and the teacher involved. The principal came to us and said, well, we have to sit down and maybe look at this again, because it revolves around PR. So he'd like to see it a little more, keep the thing the same, but in retrospect accept these notes now as excused absences and not punish them by knocking a percent. Unless it's an abuser, that will abuse that by giving you note after note after note. Then the principal would deal with that, on that basis. We sort of changed our philosophy over it.

Brian was also involved in a conflict regarding allocation of school monies for school resources. Beacon Junior High School had a reserve of approximately $6,000 to spend on additional resources. The staff all had various items they wished to purchase, but could not readily agree on how to prioritize them. Lobbying and debating ensued at the staff meetings as Brian explained how the principal allowed for staff input and school council input in balancing the variety of requests and resolving the conflicting interests of individual teachers. The principal acted as the mediator, he

demonstrated good listening skills and an open approach for valuing all individuals' input. By sharing the funding concerns of the teachers with the school council, the principal was able to access additional funding and resolve conflict. Brian stated:

> We had some capital money that was left over from the year before, that we wanted to spend towards things that we needed here at the school. We had about $6000, and so, we prioritized the items we wanted. The principal went and figured out what the cost would be for each of them, came back to the staff and said, okay, this is how much money we have, this is what these items are going to cost, what would you like to do. So I lobbied for items, particularly for phys ed., for some volleyball standards. A couple of sets were going to cost $5000, so it was almost going to take up the whole shot. I got some support from some of the staff, and there was some debate, and some people had some other things. What ended up happening is it went back to the parents' council, and talked to them, and the parents' council ended up kicking in some more money, and so we ended up getting not only the standards, but about three or four more of the items down on the list. I feel good about the outcome. I thought the principal went out of his way to accommodate the other people as well.

Amanda was concerned that there were insufficient resources to pay for the professional diagnostic recommendations made for students with special needs. She felt that the government was demanding that teachers ensure that student needs be met, yet new government initiatives were making her attend more SBDM meetings rather than helping her to assist students. Amanda believed that

these demands were in direct conflict with each other; she was frustrated with the lack of resources available to help students. She voiced her concerns as follows:

> The provincial government added extra duties that aren't really helping you to teach, but are giving you more time spent on budgets and meetings. The education of children is suffering somewhat as a result of that, rather than being enhanced. I find that I have frustration when we see that there's a student, especially in the area of language arts, that really needs some additional resource time. And yet we don't have the finances to hire a resource teacher or to even get the materials that we need to allow for that. There's only so much money that you can use, and it seems that our needs are greater than our budget, especially with us being a small school. I think the provincial government definitely needs to provide more funding.

Connie identified three areas where conflict was apparent in the decisions affecting teachers in her school. They were related to: (a) funding being linked to student achievement, (b) substitute teacher coverage, and (c) voluntarism. The student achievement and substitute teaching issues are examples of policies that affect the monies utilized in schools. Connie believed that teachers were being placed in compromising situations because of the way the provincial government is using student enrollment in programs and student achievement to fund education. The decisions that faced Celestial Senior High School were steeped in ethical and financial

dilemmas, as to, how the outcomes would effect the learning needs of students and how the outcomes would effect monies allocated to the school. Connie stated her first point accordingly:

> The teacher is faced with a dilemma at the end of the course, or part way through the course, regarding marks that are earned by that student. Now the government tied student achievement to dollars and that poses a problem for teachers at the 30 level, when we know certain numbers, which are marks, relate to dollars for the school. The organization has the idea to get students into the courses because they bring dollars with them, however, sometimes those students maybe should not be in those courses. It's not in their best interest in terms of their success and particularly that's evident at the 30 level where achievement is so greatly monitored and teachers can be put in a bit of a dilemma about achievement. Achievement for students which has to be recorded and equated with money.

Connie's second conflict was with teachers being asked to provide substitute coverage for teachers who were not present to teach their own classes. In the past there was a central office pool of money to cover substitute costs. Now, Celestial High School has a decentralized budget, which must account for monies to pay for substitute costs. This was a new situation for the staff to enact, and there was a feeling of discomfort for the staff to be asked to provide this coverage. This discomfort could possibly be linked to the heightened awareness of who was absent from work, and who

would now have to provide coverage from their busy schedule. This could cause internal stress on the relationships between teachers and effect the general morale of the work site. Connie stated that she was not pleased with this extra demand on her time and that decisions were always being framed by the parameter of limited dollars for education. Connie expressed her second point thusly:

> Another decision that affects teachers is one of when teachers are unable to be at their class for whatever reason. In the past we've been able to have a substitute teacher cover and recently that's changed a little bit. Again, it's due to the dollars that are involved and there's an expectation that we as colleagues help one another out, and if we're able to help by covering classes, we do. And that's shifted from the past where a substitute teacher could be called in for legitimate coverage for teachers that have to miss time. That was certainly not a teacher initiated decision. So that was one where the decision was made at a higher level. So the factor that really influenced this decision wasn't the process, it wasn't anything that the teachers needed or even the school administration. It came upon this school because of dollars. I think it's unfortunate that we have to equate our decision making with dollars. I know it's a reality but, it's unfortunate.

The third point regarding voluntarism dealt with the desire of teachers to choose their own situations to volunteer for, where as, the parents wanted to have input regarding who could be involved and how. Connie felt that teachers were being dictated to regarding which volunteer activities the parents would "allow" them to

become involved in. This was an upsetting situation for Connie, who felt that her right to choose where she would volunteer her time was being violated by the pluralistic movement to involve parents in the decisions made at the school level. Connie made her final point accordingly:

> I do have another example, and that is regarding decisions that staff may want to make which conflict with decisions that parents want to make. An example here would be teachers volunteering for extracurricular involvement. I know it's a volunteer point, however I think teachers still are willing to volunteer for extracurricular activities because teachers get something out of it as well as the students. When that's in conflict with what parents desire, then it tends to make teachers less willing to volunteer for extracurricular activities.

Angie, a school council chairperson, discussed the need to be sensitive to the different stakeholder groups concerns and to involve them early in discussions to mitigate the potential of conflict. Angie explained that parents were interested in the opinions of the staff and in providing input for the staff to consider. This communication was meant to be a two-way interaction between the stakeholders. If this communication was not part of the process, then the decisions being made would not be supported by one or the other group. It was important for both school council members and

teachers to be aware of what the other was thinking. This open communication made for decisions which were understood by all stakeholders. This process enhanced the relationship between the school council members and the teachers. Angie stated:

> When we make a decision as a school council, we're always thinking if the teachers have to be involved, we're going to go and talk to them. And we want their input into it. We don't come in thinking we absolutely want this, we don't care what you think. When we come to the school council or the meetings, we feel that this is a need in the school. Then we say, okay, we want to meet this need, and then we say, how do we do that. Then we formulate a plan, and of course, the teachers have to be involved. Anything that involves the teachers or happens at school, we say, okay, we have to be sensitive to how does that fit into what's going on already and to what the teachers want. There's sometimes a clash of ideas. We'd like to see it this way, and maybe they'd like to see it a little differently. We also realize, if we ever get to the point they end up on that side and we end up on this side, nothing's going to happen, because we're just going to alienate ourselves. We have to have a good working relationship if anything is going to happen at the school.

Angie also noted that certain people have responsibilities for decisions within their sphere of control. This implied that certain decisions were bounded by the expertise, relevance, and level of commitment that was provided by the decision-maker. The issues that were considered to be the domain of the school council were related to projects which focus on the best interests of all students.

Able Elementary school council members had a major project as their focus: renovations to the school grounds and the addition of extra playground equipment. The school council would involve the students, staff, and the principal in the discussion as to what should go into the project, but the school council members wanted to make the final decision themselves.

The school council also considered the principal to be responsible for the overall operation of the school, including the school budget and the educational programs. Council members viewed the principal as having to be ultimately accountable for these areas, therefore, he or she should have the final authority to make decisions within those domains. Angie proposed that parameters exist for who should have control over the final decision as follows:

> I guess it depends on who has to make the decision. The principal has to run the school, he has his budget, and curriculum. He should have the final say on those items. And when it comes to the school council and if they have to make decisions, then it should be their decision on that. Things like renovations on the school ground, in conjunction with what would be best for the students. We want to make sure that all the students will benefit from whatever work we do. If we're putting the input in and the money, then the school should respect and say, okay, you decide if you're going to do this. The school may have input, but then the school council makes

> the final decision as to what kind of equipment we may buy or where we might move it. We want their input, but then the decision will be ours to make as to exactly what we do. We feel it's our school council project to do.

Carl commented that by taking the time to reflect on the decision one is about to make, addressing how it impacts the students and staff, allows a better understanding of the various groups' points of view and helps to avoid conflict. Focusing on what was educationally best for students and staff appeared to alleviate the stress that the principal felt during the decision-making process. Carl stated his view accordingly:

> You reflect sometimes on decisions and what some people want. You reflect on it long enough and properly, and you can understand where they're coming from, and then it's no longer conflict. Initially sometimes there have been issues where you kind of get your back up against a wall and foresee a conflict. Probably one of the tougher ones I've had to deal with this year was to add staff and not be totally sure, on what the pay out is at the end of June, when all the credits are counted up and we get paid for it. I believe the factor that influenced the decision was, what was the quality of education going to be like delivered to those kids in Math 30 classes. What were those guys going to learn or what sort of quality of education would a class of 38 or 40 in English 33 be, and then secondly, what would those teachers do. They'd be worn out dealing with that many students and so it not only affects that class, then it's going to affect the other classes that those teachers are teaching as well. It's trying to maintain some sort of reasonable balance of class sizes that I base that decision on. I look at all the ramifications. I feel completely comfortable in that, it worked out. So yeah, I feel quite good about those

> decisions and I think the kids received a fairly solid and a much better education because of that decision or those decisions.

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the findings in this chapter: (a) input, (b) conflict, (c) parameters, and (d) access. The following section discusses the findings as they relate to the literature and the conceptual framework.

Discussion of Emergent Themes

Input. The respondents explicated that they did have an opportunity for input into the decision-making process. What became apparent from the findings was that six modes of input were actively being used in the Delta Regional School district. These modes of input were via: (a) one-on-one discussions between the principal, a colleague, or parent; (b) committee work; (c) survey; (d) participation at department meetings; (e) participation at staff meetings; and (f) participation at school council meetings.

Of the six modes of input, all but one were collaborative in nature. The survey method was the only isolated, private, and anonymous mode of presenting ideas to school personnel. Neal (1991) indicated that stakeholders have diverse opinions and should have a choice as to how to express these opinions (p. 12). Not all

people feel comfortable discussing their ideas in public, therefore, the survey method provided them with an anonymous avenue to express their views.

The other five modes of input were collaborative processes providing all of the participants with numerous avenues to present their ideas. da Costa and Riordan (1997) stated that "the literature is replete with examples of collaborative processes that benefit not only the participants but also their organizations" (p. 1). The authors indicated that when school staff actively participate in regular, systematic consultation, they share their knowledge and reflect more on how their daily practices impact on student learning. This consultation and sharing of ideas is assumed to lead to improvements in the local school setting which consequently enhances student learning (p. 1).

The conceptual framework presented in chapter 2 did not take into consideration the interaction that occurs between individuals and the decision-making process that was identified by the respondents as an important avenue of input. The conceptual framework only identified groups which interacted with the process. This framework can be improved upon by the addition of individual

interaction with the decision-making process. Although interaction between stakeholders was a finding of this study, this interaction was delimited and was not addressed as part of the original conceptual framework.

Conflict. The respondents indicated that conflict was very much a part of the site-based decision-making process at their schools. When interpreting and implementing policy or making financial decisions, the principal and teacher participants felt a strong need to be aware of how their decisions will be viewed by the public. McGrath (1992) identified a number of perspectives on the effects of pluralism in educational decision-making. Examples included constraints or controls; conflict; and awareness. These perspectives are discussed below.

McGrath (1992) further expanded on conflict inherent in SBDM as political and psychological constraints that apply to the school principal. McGrath considered the constraints and influence of the general community as problematic for school personnel when making decisions. The author believed that school personnel, particularly principals, were compelled to "produce the kinds of outputs which they (groups) believe are desired by the general community" (p. 8).

The principal has been given the legal authority, via the School Act, to be the professional responsible for the overall operation of the school. Yet, these professionals must bear the "political" consequences if conflicts with the community arise from unpopular principals' decisions. "The issue for professional administrators is to judge the degree to which their decisions and actions are congruent with community demands" (p. 8). This type of pressure to meet the expectations of such a diverse stakeholder group was surely impacting on the stress level of school administrators in the present study. McGrath indicated that:

> the subject of stress on individuals as a by-product of group involvement in the decision-making process is all but ignored in the available literature . . . another concern pertains to the need for an update of the literature on groups in education in order to reflect current conditions. (p. 10)

McGrath (1992) stated that "psychological constraints apply to the attitude and state of mind of the administrator towards community interest groups" (p. 8). If such a group were attempting to influence a particular school policy, a suspicious principal might "distrust" the group as having "ulterior" motives. This type of distrust might cause the principal to disregard the input provided by the group. McGrath believed that the effect of this behavior by the

principal might increase conflict and "in turn cause the group to increase its opposition to both the policy and to the administrator" (p. 8). This type of conflict was caused by what the respondents in this study referred to as participants "having a hidden agenda." This concept is further elaborated on in chapter 6, as a factor which inhibits the decision-making process.

Neal (1991) stated that conflict and controversy is "inevitable" and is one of the "disadvantages" of SBDM (p. 45). Neal further explained that when decision-making is decentralized and democratized, it appears as if "everybody gets into the act." This can cause delays in resolving an issue, nonproductive daily operations, and "conflicts where none appeared to exist before" (p. 48). Conversely, Fullan (1993) indicated that "conflict (properly managed) is essential for productive change, . . . You can't have organizational learning without individual learning, and you can't have learning in groups without processing conflict" (p. 36). One can extrapolate from these two authors' views, that the individual or group that perceives conflict as an opportunity to better understand the opinions of others will be the one who succeeds in SBDM.

The teacher respondents, in this study, indicated that they felt

a conflict of interest existed when they were asked to decided on which programs might be eliminated in a school. Teachers felt discomfort with the possibility that they might be displacing a colleague and that this was contrary to their role in labour relations. Teachers were employees of the board of trustees, they were not to become involved in "management" issues and "collective bargaining rights" (Neal, 1991, p. 48). Neal further explained "that what is in the best interest of school-based management might not be in the best interest of collective bargaining, and vice versa" (p. 48). Williams, Harold, and Southworth (1997) indicated that roles may become "fuzzy" and lines between previous job functions may become "blurred" (p. 631).

Parameters. The respondents stated that parameters did impact on the decision-making process. Neal (1991) indicated that it should be made quite clear that "definite limits" exist which place boundaries on what school staff and the school councils can do under the auspices of SBDM. Neal stated the following broad parameters:

- All school plans must be legal. This is not a new parameter since all laws must be obeyed regardless of the management structure.

- All state [provincial and national] regulations must be obeyed. Only if there is permission from the state should a school system do otherwise. If a local school wishes to initiate a project which runs counter to some state regulation, it should request the local superintendent to ask for a waiver. Evidence from throughout the United States shows that such waivers are often granted in the name of sound educational innovation.

- School accreditation requirements must be met. However, existing accreditation requirements often allow for some deviation, and waivers can be sought.

- School board policy must be obeyed. This is true unless the board gives prior permission to do otherwise . . . school-based management, if successful, will likely put some additional pressure on the board to modify some of its policies to accommodate sound educational innovation.

- Administrative regulations must be followed. Only the superintendent can allow deviation . . . a superintendent cannot allow a school to deviate from a regulation if the action runs counter to a board policy.

- All contracts must be honored. Unless all parties agree otherwise, all contracts, including the labour contract with employee unions, must be carried out. . . .

- Other appropriate parameters which the board and superintendent feel strongly about should be determined. However, these parameters should be few in number. Since it has already been established that schools will follow all policies, regulations, and established administrative procedures unless otherwise approved, it is not necessary or advisable to make a long list of

things which schools cannot do. (pp. 67-68)

Another parameter identified by the respondents centred on provincial cuts to education funding. These cuts have limited the choices for all stakeholders, but particularly teachers, when addressing instructional strategies to improve instruction for students. Amanda stated that when she identified students as requiring additional resources to improve their language arts comprehension, her school did not "have the finances to hire a resource teacher or to even get the materials needed to allow for that." She felt that the provincial government had underfunded education. Similarly, Quinn (1996) argued that government was attempting to limit funding and "create competition among schools, thus creating inequity at a time when the government is trying to achieve fiscal equity" (p. 29). When school staff became involved in fiscal decision-making, Quinn indicated that budgetary decisions were to reflect better choices for student learning (p. 29). This was not the case at Amanda's school. Decisions were bounded by the cost factor - the actual dollar figure for the school to implement the decision was at issue. Amanda stated that there were insufficient funds to enact her professional recommendation of

remedial assistance for students experiencing difficulty in language arts.

Carver (1990) indicated that school boards set parameters for the school system by establishing policy. Carver further stated that "policies that are instructive to staff, that is, policies that tell staff what to do or not to do" set defined boundaries for the decisions that are made (p. 29). The respondents indicated that three levels of policies impacted their SBDM process. These policy levels included the: (a) local school, (b) school board, and (c) provincial government. The respondents did not initially suggest that national levels of government policy impact on their SBDM process. Upon further discussion at the group meetings the respondents indicated that national policies, specifically, French language education policy did affect school programs. Carver explained the importance of understanding the parameters and policies that "link day-to-day exigencies with the underlying importance of life" (p. 29). This understanding of parameters in a more "human" manner clarifies the discourse of the stakeholders, who are approaching SBDM from multiple points of view.

The conceptual framework presented in chapter 2 can be

enhanced by illustrating that stakeholders must be aware of the parameters that surround the decision-making process. The more aware stakeholders are of these parameters, the better the likelihood of "setting a tone of discourse that stimulates" open discussion and leadership (Carver, 1990, p. 29).

Access. The findings indicated that participants did not want access to all the decisions that must be made within a school setting. The participants wanted access to the decision-making process in areas: (a) they felt were relevant to them, (b) they choose to have involvement in, and (c) where their expertise and knowledge could help the school resolve decision-making issues. These findings support the literature reviewed and were in agreement with Hoy and Miskel's (1996) model of subordinate involvement in decision-making (see Figure 1).

Hoy and Miskel (1996) stated that school administrators were often too eager to involve teachers, and other stakeholders, in all decisions. The teacher and chairperson respondents all indicated that they did not want to be involved in every decision. A more appropriate method would be to "reflect upon the question: When should others be involved in decision-making and how" (p. 294)?

In a similar manner, Sergiovanni (1991) discussed the issue of when and where to fit people into the improvement planning process. Sergiovanni stated that todays' school issues are multifaceted and constantly changing, and decision-makers need to be able to adapt as required. He presented the following model:

> 1. First emphasize means (concentrate on people first, build them up, increase their commitment, link them to purposes, help them to be self-managed).
>
> 2. Then ways (let them figure out what to do and how).
>
> 3. Then ends (they will decide on and achieve objectives that are consistent with shared purposes). (pp. 52-53)

Sergiovanni's (1991) model links closely to Hoy and Miskel's model in figure 1 and with the leadership style of "transformational leadership" previously discussed. Sergiovanni proposed that the basis for establishing strategies that were more responsive to todays' complex school climate was "concentrating on means first is to build up the capacity for people to be self-managers and to connect them to shared values and commonly held purposes" (p. 53). When stakeholders choose "what to do and how" and are "committed" to the school goals and purpose, they are more likely to focus their efforts for maximum output (p. 53). The Hoy and Miskel

(1996) model went one step further than Sergiovanni's model and added the requirement of "expertise." This model can be expanded to include all stakeholders by asking: can the stakeholder provide the expertise to make a useful contribution to the decision-making process? The conceptual framework presented in chapter 2 can also be enhanced by including the Hoy and Miskel model as a parameter to focus the access and level of involvement of multiple stakeholders. A revised conceptual framework is presented in chapter 7.

Response to the Question of Subproblem Two

Who provides input into decisions and within what parameters? Principals, teachers, and chairpersons stated that they did have opportunities to provide input into decisions at their schools. This input occurred via: (a) one-on-one discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent, (b) committee work, (c) survey, (d) participation at department meetings, (e) participation at staff meetings, and (f) participation at school council meetings. The input covered a broad range of areas, including: (a) school budgets; (b) school and district policy; and (c) school philosophy, mission statements, and goals.

It was evident that "critical influencing factors" or what Neal

(1991) identified as "parameters" impact on the present decision-making process. The parameters of legal documents (e.g., the School Act), related regulations, and policies of the government, the school board, and the school, directly bound the decisions which can be made at the school level. The ramifications of provincial government cuts to education funding also serve as a further parameter limiting the choices for all stakeholders to make when addressing ways to improve instruction for students. Lack of adequate funding was linked directly to not being able to acquire additional support for computer technology, textbooks, library resources, educational assistants, and additional staff to lower student to teacher ratios. Participants felt a strong sense of ownership for their decisions, but commented that with limited room to manoeuvre within strict school budgets, recommendations to improve the learning environment for students were difficult to enact.

The implementation of SBDM has led to more demands being placed on principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons. Due to these demands, participants wanted access to the SBDM process in areas which: (a) directly affected them, (b) they choose to have

involvement in, and (c) where their expertise was useful. There was also an evolving issue which expressed concern for what the future role of school councils might become. This theme was introduced in subproblem one, and is further elaborated on as follows. Specifically, school councils should recognize: (a) their level of competence to make informed decisions, and (b) their ability to commit the time to take on greater responsibilities. Cam, a school council chairperson, stated that school councils must recognize their limitations and set reasonable targets and objectives for themselves.

The following chapter addresses the third subproblem, namely: how can the decision-making process be enhanced from the perspective of the participants. The characteristics of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons which enhance the decision-making process are presented in diagrammatical format at the conclusion of the chapter.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Subproblem Three:

How Can the Decision-making Process be Enhanced From the Perspectives of the Participants?

Chapter 6 addresses the question of "How can the decision-making process be enhanced from the perspective of the respondents?" To address this third subproblem participants were asked to provide their perceptions related to two questions: (a) What practices of the principal, teacher, and school council chairperson enhance decision-making? (b) What types of steps, processes, or actions would you like to see executed differently with respect to the way decisions are made at your school?

The presentation of the findings in this chapter is organised around the two questions addressing subproblem three. Supporting comments made by respondents relating to the factors subsumed under each question are provided. Using an inductive approach, four themes emerged from the data. The four themes were contextualized with related literature and were identified as: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic.

These four themes described the participants' characteristics enhancing the decision-making process and are presented in diagrammatical format. The chapter concludes with a response to subproblem three. The following discussion expresses the perceptions of the participants.

Enhancing Practices

To address the first question, all the participants presented similar views regarding which practices enhanced the decision-making process. Their concern was for qualified persons, not too far removed from the situation in question, to make decisions. There was a desire expressed for decision-makers to keep the students' interests in the forefront of their minds. The following were all considered to contribute to effective decision-making: (a) not wasting time, (b) having a team approach, (c) having open communication, (d) respecting confidentiality, (e) being positive, honest, and non-judgemental, (f) understanding the "bigger picture," (g) attending meetings well prepared, and (h) making "good" decisions based on the needs of the students. Another point discussed by all teachers and chairpersons was the importance of the leadership demonstrated by their principal. The leadership style

of the principal was also previously discussed in chapter 4 and it was reinforced by the respondents as being an important factor which can enhance the SBDM process.

Not wasting time and having a team approach. The SBDM practices employed in the three schools were based on a team approach. Committees were encouraged to be established and meetings were held to provide input into decisions. This allowed groups of individuals to come together and discuss their varied opinions. This collaborative team work required a substantial amount of time to be devoted to these meetings. With the demands of the regular work day and the addition of committee meetings the participants wanted their time spent in meetings to be focused on attaining the goal to be accomplished. There is a "fine balance" between allowing too much or too little time for discussion. Casey expressed his views accordingly:

> Our principal uses the team approach and allows everybody to have their say. This takes lots of time. I would not want to sacrifice that for expediency. We all have input and it is valued. The principal should assess and look through all the extraneous information and still see that the goal he or she is working towards is met. That's focus, staying on track, and not wasting time.

It can be difficult to satisfy the various stakeholders that

want to provide input into decisions. It takes tremendous time and effort to collect information, particularly by survey, yet the time spent gathering multiple points of view can be worthwhile if it focuses the schools energies. Cam stated his views accordingly:

> It's always tough trying to satisfy everybody. One of the things that, not inhibits, but slows down the process is just the information collecting. Extensive surveys initiated by the school board, the school, and the parents council actually slows down decision-making. But, I really do think the surveys provide an opportunity to address a lot of issues. They really helped to focus what it is we should be working on. So although the surveying and information collecting exercise is time consuming, it tends to be worthwhile.

Having open communication and respecting confidentiality. General background information on what decisions are made and why they are made is important for stakeholders to be aware of. The sharing of information is essential for stakeholder awareness of what issues are being dealt with at any given time. Providing open communication leads to stakeholders working together. The participants did not want second hand information (e.g., from third parties or the local paper), they preferred to be informed directly throughout the process. Conversely, there are confidential issues which cannot be shared with all stakeholders. Privileged information gained by professional

educators regarding their students, or parents of students, cannot be shared with the general public. Students' marks, their personal problems at home, their parents' marital status or financial situation, and who has legal custody of the student all fall in the realm of confidential information. Teachers' confidential information regarding their professional evaluations, personal information they share with the principal, and any remedial assistance provided to teachers cannot be shared with the general public. This also applies to school council chairpersons who, by nature of their position as chair, may come across information regarding students, parents, or educators that is confidential and should not be discussed. Alan summed up the views of the respondents as follows:

> The most important thing for enhancing decision making is having open communication. I've tried to make sure everybody's informed to make good decisions, and why decisions are being made. But, clearly, there are some things that I'm not prepared to share with them, some things that are confidential. Providing the information, explaining the process, getting input when it's appropriate, making decisions myself when it's appropriate, all lead to working together to creating a community, to working in a limited democracy. No one wants to be blind-sided by a decision, and all of a sudden they find out about it in a public staff meeting, or read about it in the paper. The same way I don't want to find out about changes to schools, or administration, or budgets in the paper

> from my district. I want the information in advance. I want to be able to make decisions and plan for it. And so do teachers and parents. I think the big key, is just keeping things open.

One of the best practices parents could follow to enhance SBDM was to approach the school staff directly and discuss their concerns. Going to the primary individual concerning the issue eliminates second hand information and misunderstanding. Cam stated:

> The best thing you can do as a parent when you have a concern is to talk to somebody about it. I think the parents are now going directly to the school rather than to the parents council and that's fine because I think a lot of the issues that they come up with probably would end up in the school administration office.

Being positive, honest, and nonjudgemental. By being positive, honest, and nonjudgemental, stakeholders are able to demonstrate a supportive attitude that they are willing to work together. If stakeholders were negative in their attitudes, had hidden agendas, and were judgemental they would tend to inhibit trust between the stakeholders. Trust was identified as an important factor in effective SBDM processes in chapter 4, therefore, practices which encourage trust will enhance the decision-making process. Belinda noted:

> Teachers enhance decision-making by being positive contributors at staff meetings, giving honest input, and not just sitting there. Teachers inhibit the process by saying nothing at all and then grumbling about it later.

In a similar manner, positive and supportive chairpersons have alleviated the fears of teachers who had suspicions about school council members becoming overly controlling. By being nonjudgemental and supporting the school staff, school council chairpersons enhance SBDM by, further, building trust and not bringing personal agendas to the school. Belinda stated her perspective accordingly:

> Our chairpersons, have always been positive and supportive of our school. They're supportive when they talk with people in the community. Teachers had fears that school councils were going to come in and say "this is the way it's going to go." That never happened. We've always had parents saying how great our school is, and how wonderful the teachers are so you have support, and you trust them. Our school council chairperson comes with the attitude that they're here to support what teachers do, not to judge or criticize what we do, or not to come with their little own agendas. If chairpersons would come with a negative attitude where they see themselves more as a check upon the system it would be difficult for the principal to work with them. That would inhibit decision making because everybody would have their own little camps.

Understanding the "bigger picture." Principals and their staff work in their own schools; they do not work in other schools

in various parts of the district. This allows them an understanding of their particular school needs, but does not allow for a broader understanding of all the needs of a school district. This narrow focus can also apply to the school level, whereby teachers only want to understand issues in their particular subject areas. By having an understanding of the "big picture" both school and district level decisions could be enhanced. Bob expressed his view as follows:

> I think we have a few teachers who are on their own little world. Their concern, sometimes, is number one for their area. They could enhance the decisions made in a school by looking at the "bigger picture." The decision-making process is inhibited by seeing only black or white. In reality there are always a few grey areas. This also applies to the district level where schools should be aware of what is happening in other schools.

Attending meetings well prepared. With the implementation of SBDM in Delta Regional School District there was an increase in the number of meetings that the participants attended. It was important for the participants that individuals were well prepared for meetings. This meant that material, such as policies, were read ahead of time and that individuals were well informed regarding the issues they wanted discussed and that they presented relevant facts and arguements in an organized manner.

Coming to a meeting without researching the topic or the policy beforehand was not seen as an efficient use of the time of others in attendance at the meeting. If meetings were held without accomplishing the desired goals this might frustrate the participants and lower involvement in future meetings. Bob stressed the importance of being prepared for meetings:

> The school council helps us by responding to school policy: dress code, attendance, promotion, and the school budget. They will have had the opportunity to look at the information ahead of time, and it's their job to be familiar with the information when they come here. The first meeting when somebody will say "I don't understand what's this all about"? And, another parent will say, "well, didn't you read your policies"? Everybody else thinks, "oh I'm expected to do some work before I come here." Parents police themselves in being prepared for meetings. As principal, I expect the same from teachers. We have some teachers that regularly read all the preliminary or background information and they respond and have the facts. This enhances decision-making.

Furthermore, teachers enhanced decision-making by attending meetings, providing input, and representing the interests of other staff when interacting with the school council. Teachers having taken the time to ascertain the opinions of others, reading the background information, and participating at school council meetings were considered to be "well prepared." Cam stated:

> Teachers on the school council have a direct opportunity to

> provide input and they do come to the meetings well prepared. They know what their constituencies interests and concerns are so they do a good job of representing the staff. So, being prepared, participating, and communicating enhances the decision-making process.

Making "good" decisions based on the best interests of the students. The importance of focusing the decision on the best interests of students and using qualified and informed personnel to make these decisions was paramount to making "good" decisions. A good decision had to take into account the views of multiple stakeholders, but more importantly, it had to take into consideration the needs of students. Professionally educated staff, who worked on a daily basis with and understood the students educational needs, were considered to be "qualified" and "informed." The respondents viewed teachers and the principal as the experts who should be making the final educational decisions at the school. Connie stated that individuals who were unqualified to make decisions inhibit sound decision-making. She believed that:

> To enhance SBDM we want to keep in mind the top priority - the interests of the students. Principals, teachers, and school chairs making or helping with the decision-making process must be well informed, qualified personnel. Then the interests of the students are kept as top priority and wise decisions are made. Good decision-making is inhibited when people, who are unqualified lay persons, are involved in making those decisions

> that impact the education of students. Having input is important. Informed input, because teachers and the principals are here everyday working in this environment. We, as school staff, know what's going on and I think that's really important. Perhaps people who aren't here to see how things work or not work, are removed from the situation and sometimes get misconceptions about what's occurring in the school and how to help if there are problems.

The school council chairpersons felt as strongly about this issue as the educators. The school council chairpersons wanted input into decision-making processes, but ultimately relied on the professional expertise brought to the process by the principal and their staff. Betty stated:

> A principal might inhibit the SBDM process if they didn't provide all the information. Whatever subject is being brought forward, all the information that is available to a principal, in their expertise or their staff's expertise, should be brought forward. So there's educated discussion with background.

The principal respondents felt a duty to the students, staff, parents, and people in the general community to make "good" decisions for each and every student. Bob expressed the following:

> This is my life. After your family your job is number one and you lose a lot of sleep worrying about whether you're doing the right thing. Being a principal is not the job that you can leave at four in the afternoon. You worry, did you do all you could do for that kid in that decision that you made? I have the obligation to make great decisions for hundreds of kids. I believe people in your entire community, not only your school community and your teachers, expect it. You have to make the

> best decision, whether it be on financial, policy, or discipline issues. They're your responsibility, and its your reputation.

All the respondents discussed practices which enhance or inhibit SBDM, in their schools, as being linked to the leadership style and philosophy of the principal. The following quote reinforces the importance of leadership style; being open, honest, and nonjudgemental; seeing the "bigger picture;" and making decisions in the best interest of students. Belinda stated:

> The principal in this school has always asked what others think, but will also demonstrate leadership. Our principal has a leadership style which lets people express what they need to do the job, but at the same time, they know that you're going to do what's best for the school. In my department, what I need might not be what's best for the school. The principal, as a leader, must say what's best for our school. A principal can enhance decision-making by not being too dominant, by having a clear philosophy and unwavering principles. Whatever's best for the school, morally and ethically. Our principal says very little after you speak at a staff meeting. He doesn't go "you're right, you're wrong, that's a good idea, have you thought that out"? Staff feel free to express themselves.

Procedures Requiring Adjustment

In addressing subproblem three, the final question asked concerned the steps, processes, or actions that the participants would like to see executed differently: regarding the way decisions are made at school. The participants provided a wide range of

responses: (a) return to the past, (b) better use of meeting time, (c) new committees, and (d) status quo.

Return to the past. Amanda wanted to go back to the way it was before the provincial government restructured school districts and amalgamated her jurisdiction with the two other jurisdictions, forming one larger regional school district. She believed that her jurisdiction "listened" to teachers, where as, the present district has abandoned teachers to deal with issues at the school level. This is consistent with Amanda's view of central office as being the part of the organization that should be responsible for decision-making. Amanda stated that the present SBDM process was not as effective in areas of communication or budgeting as her previous jurisdiction. This view was contradictory to the other participants who made no comments that they wanted to return to the "centralized" decision-making process prior to the introduction of SBDM in the new district. Amanda commented as follows:

> I feel a sense of ownership for the new SBDM process. I would prefer not to, but I do. I would prefer to go back to the way it was previously. Where the central office made the decisions. Central office always asked for our input. I felt that they really listened to the teachers, and took what we had to say to heart. I felt more of a part of that older process than I do this newer one. The present process is just doling it out and

> saying, "here you take care of this." I just don't like the way that things have been changed, the way we amalgamated the school districts and then we lost that personal touch, the closeness, and the sense of community. It's much more impersonal and we're just out there on our own. We never see anyone from central office anymore because they're so busy doing their administrating that they don't have time to come to the school. I feel abandoned even though they're trying to make us feel a part of the group, by having the school-based decision-making and having our input. I think we're less efficient with communication and the budget now.

Better use of meeting time. Casey wanted the practice of making department meetings, for teachers, to be a mandatory monthly activity. "Meeting time" needed to be managed in the most efficient way possible. The issues that directly affect the classroom teacher needed to be dealt with more often. Department heads were seen by the respondent teachers, as the professional staff who could assist them with their daily instructional duties. If teachers spent too much time at general staff meetings there was not sufficient time for departments to discuss specific issues. He stated his views accordingly:

> Our staff meeting time is not used as well as it could be. Sometimes people talk for the sake of wanting to be heard and it's just a waste of peoples time. We could get through a lot of the topics in a shorter period of time, and then in the half hour or 45 minutes that are left, we could spend that time meeting in our departments. I think that would be an excellent use of time. I would like to see departments, or the heads of the

> departments, to be able to get the other members in that department together more often and more frequently. We can work together making common exams, developing different teaching strategies, and share our resources. I don't think we do that enough here. I believe that meeting as a department frequently and regularly should be mandated.

New committees. Alan wanted to form new committees, where, as principal, he was not influencing the outcomes of all the decisions. This was contradictory to his staff's desire of not wanting to become overly involved in new practices concerning site-based decision-making. Staff were busy with their primary duties of instructing students and were comfortable with their present involvement in SBDM. Alan said:

> I'd actually like to see a couple of new committees where there were teachers only, without the principal. And maybe another committee or two where there were teachers and parents, and maybe without me. Having them coming up with decisions and recommendations outside of my particular role, and then presenting things. I think you'd get a different picture when the principal's not there, because regardless of what the person says, the principal is still in charge of a school, and they still affect responses. To remove me from the process, sometimes, could give us some different ideas. Our staff are unwilling to do a whole bunch. They say they have enough to do, and they don't mind me making decisions. And, as they said, they'll let me know if they think I make a wrong one, and they would.

Status quo. Angie was not able to think of new practices to improve the present decision-making process, but reiterated her

belief that trust was the most important factor in the process. She stated:

> Well, I don't know if there's anything that comes to mind regarding new practices, because so much is based on trust. We trust the principal to look after his decisions, the teachers to look after, like, curriculum decisions. In the same respect the school council, and parents trust us with decision making.

Bob thought he would not change the decision-making process too much, and with another year of experience behind him, he looked at starting to get stakeholders involved as soon as possible next year. Bob commented thusly:

> I don't think I'd do too much different. I think there are few little things that I'd do. Maybe, get a little earlier start. I'd like to involve the parents more in the budgeting process. It was all new in, and last year it was like a nightmare going through it. And so, basically, I got reaction from them. What I had to do is go back and figure out what is it that they wanted. And I think this next year they'll have a better idea of what it is that we can change, what can we do differently.

Brian and Belinda both commented that they could not think of any practices they wanted to change. The respondents' desire to maintain the SBDM process they have established suggests that they are comfortable with their level of involvement. Belinda expressed her views in the following manner:

> I can't really think of anything that I can complain about, because if something wasn't working well, we would complain

> and it would be changed. We have a system, in my view, that, as a staff, we've created. I think the best decisions are made when people feel that they had a part in making them, and they're made by people who have the same common goal.

Cam did not see the need for changes to the present practices his school council was using, but he had a concern about the future role of school councils. This concern was about possible future changes to "governance" surrounding the role of school councils. He did not want school councils to evolve into school boards. School council members are volunteers who do not have the time or expertise to commit to governance issues. Cam expressed his point of view accordingly:

> No changes, we're either lucky or good when we set this decision-making process up at the school. I wouldn't change the process of operating. The principal is ultimately accountable. That's his job. I guess there's some uncertainty about what the expectations are for the parents councils over the long term. Some parents believe that in the future the parents councils are going to replace, for all intents and purposes, the school boards. This is sort of a rumour, an undercurrent that you hear from time to time. The uncertainty is whether or not the parents council will really have the capability to do that. I believe that parents have to recognize: (a) their competence to make decisions and, (b) their ability to commit at the time if they take on greater responsibilities. Each parent council has to recognize two issues: (a) set themselves reasonable targets and objectives, and (b) set standards of behavior on how involved they are going to be in the school. If they want to have all kinds of decision making authority and only want to spend 1/2 hour a week on it, it's not

going to work.

In analyzing the participants' responses addressing: how the decision-making process could be enhanced, four themes emerged as factors which enhanced SBDM. These themes fall under the headings of: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic. These four themes are discussed below as they relate to the literature and Figure 4 illustrating the characteristics which enhance site-based decision-making.

Discussion of Emergent Themes

Openness. The participants indicated that stakeholders demonstrating characteristics of "openness" enhanced the SBDM practice in their schools. The participants used terms such as "keeping an open mind, sharing information, sharing expertise, providing opinions, listening to multiple points of view, understanding the bigger picture, accessibility, and not having a hidden agenda." In figures 4 these terms were placed as descriptors of the characteristics of openness.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) stated that the "distinctive features of the open climate are the cooperation and respect that exist within faculty and between faculty and the principal" (p. 146). Similarly,

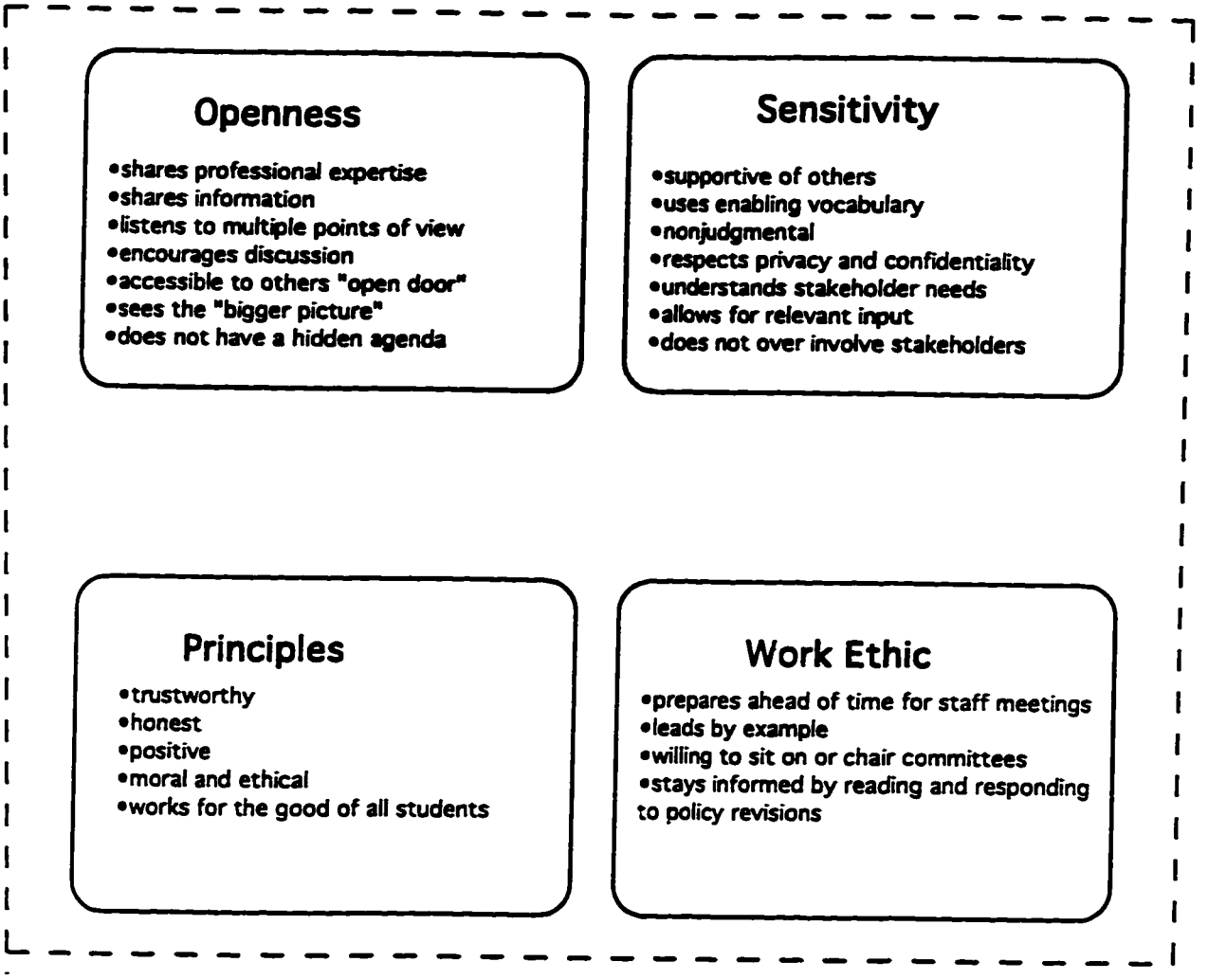

Figure 4. Characteristics of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons which enhance SBDM. Four themes emerged as: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic.

Note: The dashed line box surround the four themes indicate all four themes encompass characteristics which enhance SBDM. The "bullets" within each theme box indicate the descriptors which explain the specific elements of each theme.

Neal (1991) indicated that when all the stakeholders are openly involved in the sharing of information they are more likely to "support those decisions they have helped make" (p. 35).

One participant focused her comments on using the "expert" or qualified professional personnel to share their knowledge with the lay persons (parents). The Hoy and Miskel (1996) model in figure 1, indicated when to involve subordinates in the decision-making process and the model concurs with the findings. The participants also stated that because of the open SBDM process in their schools they felt a sense of ownership for the process. Neal (1991) explained that with "ownership" in decisions comes commitment which improves the quality of decisions. Halpin and Croft's conception of openness (cited in Hoy and Miskel, 1996, pp. 148-149) conceptualized a continuum from open to closed. A school whose staff were open to sharing information demonstrated a high degree of intimacy which encouraged further discussion and more openness. Openness was seen as an important factor enhancing SBDM. In contrast, closed behavior is "rigid, closed, and nonsupportive" (p. 149). Open behavior is characterized by "sincere, positive, and supportive relationships with students, administrators, and

colleagues" (p. 149). This definition leads directly into the importance of the following theme on sensitivity.

Sensitivity. The participants indicated that stakeholders demonstrating characteristics of "sensitivity" enhanced the SBDM process. The participants used terms such as "respects privacy and confidentiality, supportive and understanding of multiple points of view, advisor, nonjudgemental, and allows for relevant input without over involving stakeholders." These terms were utilized as descriptors for the theme of "sensitivity" in figure 4.

Hoy and Miskel (1996) indicated that sensitive and supportive behavior is characterized by genuine concern for the welfare of others (p. 148). Similarly, Sergiovanni (1991) suggested that "in this idiosyncratic world one-best-way approaches and cookie cutter strategies do not work very well" (p. 321). The principal and the stakeholders involved in SBDM enhance the process when they are sensitive to each others' needs.

Principles. The participants stated that the "principles" or values that the stakeholders embody either enhance of inhibit SBDM. Belinda discussed the importance of leadership style and personal principles. Her views are consistent with what the literature (Hoy

& Miskel, 1996) described as transformational leadership, or Sergiovanni (1991) discussed as the moral imperative to combine the *heart, head, and hand* of leadership to "doing right things." McGrath (1992) stated that the principal was interacting with more stakeholders. And Bob's concern to make "good" decisions concur with Hoy and Miskel (1996) and Sergiovanni (1991) confirming the importance of making ethically and morally correct decisions. These principles were included in figure 4 from the comments of the participants: (a) trustworthy, (b) honest, (c) positive, (d) moral and ethical, and (e) working for the good of all the students.

Work ethic. The participants identified the importance of all stakeholders being prepared to undertake the work that is inherent with SBDM. Neal (1991) stated that teachers, principals, and parents must serve on committees, develop school plans and budgets, and learn new skills of leadership through collaboration (p. 46). Neal indicated there was "an inevitable increase in the workload of personnel during the initial stages of" SBDM (p. 47). With all the work that was expected of the participants in the study, it was clear that participants wanted their colleagues to "share in the workload." Thus, the participants believed that a strong "work

ethic" would enhance SBDM. Hoy and Miskel (1996) identified energetic principals who lead by example as helpful, supportive, and task oriented (p. 148). This work ethic compliments the previous themes and focuses on the importance of completing the task at hand. The participants, whether they be teacher, principal, or school council chair, wanted their colleagues to be prepared to work. They stated their work ethic as: (a) prepares ahead of time for meetings, (b) leads by example, (c) willing to sit on or chair committees, and (d) stays informed by reading and responding to requests for policy revision.

Response to the Question of Subproblem Three

How can the decision-making process be enhanced from the perspectives of the participants? The participants considered the following practices to enhance SBDM: (a) not wasting time, (b) having a team approach, (c) having open communication, (d) respecting confidentiality, (e) being positive, honest, and non-judgemental, (f) understanding the "bigger picture," (g) attending meetings well prepared, and (h) making "good" decisions based on the needs of the students. Another point discussed by all teachers and chairpersons, which enhanced SBDM,

was the importance of the leadership demonstrated by their principal.

There was a wide range of responses indicating the steps, processes, or actions that the participants would like to see executed differently with respect to the way decisions are made at their schools. These responses encompassed: (a) return to the past, (b) better use of meeting time, (c) new committees, and (d) status quo. One participant wanted to return to the way decisions were made prior to provincial government restructuring of school systems. Another wanted to form new committees, where as principal, he would not influence the outcomes of all the decisions. His staff did not want to become involved in additional, new, practices concerning decision-making. Bob wanted to get stakeholders involved earlier in the process. Connie wanted to ensure that qualified, trained professional teachers retain the authority to actually make the decisions regarding education issues. Casey wanted the practice of making department meetings, for teachers, to be mandatory monthly meetings. Cam expressed his concern about the future role of school councils, that they do not replace elected school board trustees.

The characteristics of principals, teachers, and chairpersons which enhance the decision-making process are summarized in four themes in Figure 4. These four themes emerged as: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic.

The following chapter addresses the overview, conclusions, recommendations, and implications of this study. The first section provides a summary of the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and the research method used in the study. The second section summarizes the research findings. The third section discusses the general conclusions. The final section presents recommendations and implications drawn for the conclusions.

CHAPTER 7

OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of the study, a summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides overviews of the purpose of the study, significance of the study, and the research method employed in the study. Section two summarizes the research findings. Section three discusses the conclusions reached in the study. The final section presents the recommendations and implications of the study. The recommendations and implications are discussed in the context of: (a) an emergent conceptual framework incorporating how principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons might improve decision-making practices; (b) how the knowledge of decision-making theories could improve the training and professional development of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons; and (c) how future research might be focused.

Overview of the Study

The nature of this study, namely: site-based management and its impact on school decision-making, can be described in terms of the purpose of the study, its significance, and the research method employed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to obtain the perceptions of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons regarding the roles they play in the decision-making process at their schools. Their perceptions provide important insights into theoretical and practical applications regarding how decisions are made. In addition, these perceptions help in identifying stakeholder characteristics which enhance effective decision-making processes that principals may find useful for application in their schools.

Significance of the Study

Under recent restructuring initiatives, policies on "site-based decision-making" and "school councils" were mandated for all publicly funded schools in Alberta. These restructuring initiatives have changed the decision-making processes utilized by principals and their staff. According to Alberta Education (1996) the principal

is the staff member who should oversee the entire operation of the school. Given this mandate, the principal has a very important role to play in site-based management and school decision-making.

The significance of this study has both theoretical and practical elements. Theoretical significance lies in the refinement of theory regarding how site-based-decision-making processes develop between the principal and the various stakeholders. Theory building involved synthesizing themes which emerged both inductively and deductively. The practical aspect of the research for schools hinges on the recommendations which emerged regarding how practitioners might proceed to enhance the collaborative decision-making processes, which ultimately benefit pupils in the classroom.

Method

Twelve respondents from an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school were purposefully selected from a large Alberta suburban and rural district as the "multiple-sites" for this qualitative study. A purposive sample was selected to achieve an in-depth understanding of the selected individuals and to develop a deeper understanding of the decision-making process being

studied. The sample included the principal, two teachers, and the school council chairperson from each of the three identified schools. In accordance with the philosophy of interpretive enquiry and the design of this study, the instrument employed for data collection was the semi-structured interview. All of the interviews were audio-recorded on standard cassette tapes then transcribed to text. The richness of responses to the open-ended questions provided data on a number of themes related to the subproblems. As the researcher, I kept a field journal to record my thoughts and insights. Group member checks were later held with the respondents to confirm my interpretations of the data.

Summary of the Research Findings

The major findings are summarized in this section. The research findings are organized in accordance with the specific subproblems which guided this study.

Subproblem One: What Practices are used in the Decision-making process?

Finding 1. Site-based decision-making (SBDM) appears to be a decentralization of decision-making powers and accountability to the school level. SBDM was seen as a collaborative process focused

on sharing information and gathering input for decisions amongst multiple stakeholders. Peters and Richards (1995) stated that the government of Alberta expected collaborative decentralized decision-making to occur at the school level with increased involvement of parents, the community, and business (p. 21).

Finding 2. One of the key factors in successful implementation of SBDM was trust. Trust among the stakeholders must exist so that decisions can be made in the best interests of student learning. The identification of trust as a factor supports the research conducted by da Costa and Riordan (1997), Fullan (1993), and Sergiovanni (1991).

Finding 3. The leadership style of the principal was also identified as an important contributor to effective SBDM. A transformational leadership style, where the personal values and beliefs of the leader are viewed as key leadership qualities, was found to be preferential. Sergiovanni (1991) and Hoy and Miskel (1996) also supported the importance of the transformational leadership style of the principal to the "social well being" of the school.

Finding 4. The practices used in schools were new and

evolving over time due to the recent provincial government policy initiatives, specifically: mandatory school councils and site-based decision-making. This finding supports Peters and Richards' (1995) research on the restructuring of education.

Finding 5. Other political factors influenced the decision-making process, namely: cuts to education funding in general, decentralization of funding to schools, accountability of schools for academic results and fiscal management, and consolidation of smaller school systems into larger school districts. This finding also concurs with the research conducted by Peters and Richards (1995) on restructuring of education.

Finding 6. "Pluralism" was identified as participation by multiple stakeholders in SBDM in publicly funded schools in Alberta. The involvement of multiple stakeholders in SBDM supports the research of McGrath (1992) and Peters and Richards (1995).

Finding 7. An increase in workload resulted from a shift in power, accountability, and money from central office to the school staff, primarily to the principal. There was a notable increase in the amount of committee work for all participants, a need to share information with stakeholders and to collect input from teachers,

parents, and principals. This finding supports the literature put forth by Neal (1991) and Quinn (1996). There were conflicting opinions from two of the participants that the actual workload had not changed, but rather, the intensity and commitment had increased for the decisions that now had to be made at the school level.

Finding 8. "Time constraints" became a concern for all of the stakeholders. Quinn (1996) indicated that the extra workload and time commitments were considered serious factors for many stakeholders to consider (p. 29). The change in workload increased the demand on participants' time in order for them to become involved in the decision-making process. Another contributing factor to time constraints was the resulting impact of staff reductions due to government funding cuts to education. There were simply fewer staff left to do the work required. Participants wanted time to become familiar and comfortable with their new roles; furthermore, they were not prepared to assume greater involvement in the process as it presently exists.

Finding 9. Categories for the stakeholders were originally identified in the conceptual framework, Figure 3, and were further distinguished by three categories previously not in the literature.

"Primary legitimate stakeholders" were identified as: (a) students, (b) staff, (c) parents, and (d) the school council. "Secondary legitimate stakeholders" were identified as: (a) business partnerships, (b) volunteers, (c) teacher associations, (d) educational special interest groups (e.g., Canadian Parents for French), (e) school board trustees, (f) central office staff, and (g) government. "Secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders" were identified as: non-educational special interest groups and taxpayers without children.

Subproblem Two: Who Provides Input Into Decisions and Within What Parameters?

Finding 10. Principals, teachers, and chairpersons all stated that they had opportunities to provide input into decisions at their school. This input included: (a) one-on-one discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent, (b) committee work, (c) survey, (d) participation at department meetings, (e) participation at staff meetings, (f) and participation at school council meetings.

Finding 11. The input covered a broad range of areas including: (a) school budgets, (b) school and district policy, and (c) school philosophy, mission statements, and goals.

Finding 12. Critical influencing factors, or as Neal (1991) called "parameters," impacted on the decision-making process at the school level. These factors include legal documents (e.g., the School Act), related regulations, and policies of the Board and the school. This finding supports the work of Holdaway and Ratsoy (1991), Neal (1991), Peters and Richards (1995), and Quinn (1996).

Finding 13. The ramifications of government cuts to education funding, limited the choices for all stakeholders to make when addressing ways to improve instruction for students. Money was linked directly to acquiring additional support for computer technology, textbooks, library resources, educational assistants, and additional staff to lower student to teacher ratios. Participants noted that the scope of school-based decisions was limited by strict adherence to budget constraints. This finding concurs with the arguments, on restructuring in education, put forth by Holdaway and Ratsoy (1991), Neal (1991), Peters and Richards (1995), and Quinn (1996).

Finding 14. Overall, participants were satisfied with the decision-making process their schools had established. Participants felt a strong sense of ownership for their decisions, but commented

that there was limited room to manoeuvre within strict school budgets, consequently, recommendations to improve the learning environment for students were difficult to enact.

Finding 15. The implementation of SBDM has led to more demands being placed on principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons. Due to these demands, participants wanted access to the SBDM process in areas which: (a) directly affect them, (b) they choose to have involvement in, and (c) their expertise is useful. This finding supports the model proposed in Figure 1, for involvement of subordinates in decision-making, illustrated by Hoy and Miskel (1996).

Finding 16. There was an evolving issue, initially raised in chapter 4 and further elaborated on in chapter 5, concerning the future role of school councils. Specifically, the volunteer school councils should not become "mini-school boards." School councils should recognize (a) their levels of competence to make informed decisions, and (b) their abilities to commit the time to take on greater responsibilities. School councils must recognize their limitations and set reasonable targets and objectives. This finding concurs with Peters and Richards (1995) who indicated that

"governance" was an issue that should remain the domain of school boards (p. 22).

Subproblem Three: How Can the Decision-making Process be Enhanced From the Perspective of the Respondents?

The characteristics of principals, teachers, and chairpersons which enhance the decision-making process are summarized, as four themes, in Figure 4, namely: (a) openness, (b) sensitivity, (c) principles, and (d) work ethic. The following four findings concur with research by Fullan (1993), Hoy and Miskel (1996), and Sergiovanni (1991).

Finding 17. Stakeholders demonstrating characteristics of "openness" enhanced the SBDM practice in their schools. The participants used terms such as "keeping an open mind, sharing information, sharing expertise, providing opinions, listening to multiple points of view, understanding the bigger picture, accessibility, and not having a hidden agenda."

Finding 18. Stakeholders demonstrating characteristics of "sensitivity" enhanced the SBDM process. The participants used terms such as "respects privacy and confidentiality, supportive and understanding of multiple points of view, advisor, nonjudgemental,

and allows for relevant input without over involving stakeholders."

Finding 19. The "principles" or values that stakeholders embody which enhance SBDM were identified as: (a) trustworthiness, (b) honesty, (c) positiveness, (d) morality and ethics, and (e) working for the good of all the students.

Finding 20. A strong "work ethic" would spread the duties amongst more stakeholders, thereby, enhancing SBDM. This work ethic complements the previous themes and focuses on the importance of completing the task at hand. It was important that all stakeholders be prepared to undertake the work that is inherent in SBDM. Participants wanted their colleagues to "share in the workload." The participants, whether they be teacher, principal, or school council chair, wanted their colleagues to be prepared to work. They described elements of their work ethic as: (a) prepares ahead of time for meetings, (b) leads by example, (c) willing to sit on or chair committees, and (d) stays informed by reading and responding to requests for input into policy concerns.

Conclusions

The following statements and generalizations that follow are the conclusions reached based on the findings of this study.

Conclusion 1. Finding 4 indicates the stage at which the participants are functioning in SBDM is an important factor to consider. Practitioners or researchers reading this study should be aware that participants were in their first year of implementing site-based decision-making in their district and may find the data indicative of the early stages which stakeholders encounter. Stakeholder perceptions regarding the process will change over time, as they gain experience with their roles and each other. Due to the evolving nature of site-based decision-making, in Delta Regional School District, new procedures and policies will impact on the decision-making process.

Conclusion 2. Findings 1, 12, and 19 indicated critical influencing factors need to be clearly outlined for all stakeholders involved in the decision-making process. Decision-making is not always a democratic process based on multiple points of view. There are legal and ethical factors that provided a boundary for sound decision-making. Decisions which are ethical, based on sound educational practices, and constructed on the best interests of the students are considered to be "good" decisions.

Conclusion 3. Findings 2 and 3 identify the leadership style

of the principal as a key factor in the success of site-based decision-making. Principals who share information, are open, trustworthy, nonjudgemental, professionally ethical, and sensitive to multiple stakeholder views are considered to be effective leaders. These leaders exhibited traits of what Hoy and Miskel (1996) described as "transformational leadership."

Conclusion 4. Findings 10 and 14 indicate that the participants, in this study, had multiple avenues to provide input into decisions in their schools. The findings Indicated six modes of information sharing: (a) one-on-one discussion with the principal, a colleague, or parent; (b) committee work; (c) survey; (d) participation at department meetings; (e) participation at staff meetings; and (f) participation at school council meetings. Although the participants felt ownership for their decisions, the decisions that they could make were often circumscribed by limited financial resources. Under the present decision-making process utilized in their schools participants were not interested in taking on more decision-making roles.

Conclusion 5. Finding 15 indicates that stakeholders do not want to become involved in all decisions. Stakeholders do want to

become involved in decisions: (a) which directly affect them, (b) which they choose to have involvement in, and (c) where their expertise is useful. The study provided support for the Hoy and Miskel (1996) model, Figure 1, for determining when principals should use shared decision-making. As principals involve stakeholders in making decisions located in the stakeholders' "zone of acceptance" participation will be less effective and as principals involve stakeholders in making decisions clearly outside of their "zone of acceptance," participation will be more effective.

Conclusion 6. Findings 4, 5, 6, 12, and 13 indicate that political factors played a role in the process schools now use to make educational decisions. Because of the "conservative move to the right" by the provincial government, restructuring occurred in Alberta's schools during the early 1990s. Cuts to education funding were initiated and school systems were reorganized into larger school districts, thus reducing the total number of school boards. Decentralization of funds, based on student population, were targeted to go directly to the schools. Provincial policy was implemented to allow for more pluralistic involvement of multiple

stakeholders in the decision-making process at the local school level.

Conclusion 7. Findings 7 and 8 suggest that the decision-making process became more time consuming and intense. It involved an increase in workload due to committee work and the collaborative nature of shared decision-making. Furthermore, accountability and responsibility for decisions were shifted from central office to the school level. This shift in accountability and responsibility became the basis for the new role description for the principal. The principal was seen as being ultimately in charge of the total operation of the school.

Conclusion 8. Findings 2, 18, and 19 indicate the issue of trust is crucial in effective SBDM. Without "trust" in the principal, and trust among the principal, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders there cannot be an effective decision-making process. All stakeholders have multiple points of view and must ultimately trust the principal to make ethical, professional decisions, based on the best interests of the students.

Conclusion 9. Based on findings 17, 18, 19, and 20 school staff should be open, sensitive, principled, and share in the work

that is inherent in SBDM. It is also important to have a holistic understanding of the entire school district in order to ensure that all schools can grow from the collective knowledge of the multiple stakeholders.

Conclusion 10. Findings 1 and 9 indicated that the conceptual framework derived from the literature was inadequate given the context of Delta Regional School Division. SBDM was a collaborative process involving input from multiple stakeholders. The multiple stakeholders were identified as: (a) primary legitimate, (b) secondary legitimate, and (c) secondary nonlegitimate.

Recommendations and Implications

The conclusions drawn in this research lead to several recommendations, which, if implemented, have serious implications. These recommendations and implications are discussed in the following section according to their relevance to practice, and research.

Recommendations for Practice

From the conclusions presented emerged six recommendations for practice. The first four relate directly to schools and school

jurisdictions. The fifth is directed at teacher and administrator professional development. The last recommendation for practice is directed to university faculties and departments offering educational administration and leadership programs.

1. Schools and school staff should not become islands unto themselves was a theme in conclusion 9. As one of the participants noted, it is important to remember that there is the larger perspective of the entire school and school district to consider. Continually focusing on only your own department or school may not allow district initiatives to be effective. In particular, students of varied academic abilities require programs to meet their individual needs, and utilizing the resources of the entire district may allow for system programs to meet these needs. It is further recommended that schools use an approach, where all schools support each other, as parts of a whole that must work together. A metaphorical example would explain the strength of this recommendation. If the school district could be considered the "human body" and each school part of the body, such as a "liver, kidney, heart, or lung." To function well all the organs must be healthy and working in harmony. When there is a problem with one

or more of the organs, the entire body must work together to heal itself, or the body will threaten to destroy itself.

2. The constraints on all stakeholders' "time" and "involvement" were identified in conclusions 5 and 7. In order to make more efficient use of time, it is recommended that the decision-making process be streamlined to allow participants the opportunity to be involved where they have the commitment, expertise, and desire to be involved in the process. It is apparent from conclusions 5 and 7 that stakeholders do not want to be involved in all decisions; and that principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons all have a different primary job description where their energy should be focused. To put this in context: (a) teaching staff should be focusing on front line work with students, preparing lesson plans, marking student work, and evaluating students; (b) parents are important advisors to the principal; and (c) the principal is legally accountable for the operation of the entire school. Collaboration is important, but if the process used is extremely time consuming and has everyone involved at all stages and on numerous committees, then the primary focus of participants' energy will not be on front line interaction with students.

There are decisions that must be made by the principal and should not involve staff. Teachers realize that they are not able to contribute to all decisions and that they do not have the time to become involved. In these circumstances, teachers expect their principals to make decisions. Hoy and Miskel (1996) indicated that in noncollaborative circumstances

> teachers have neither the interest nor the expertise to contribute to the decision. Yet there is a strong norm about involving teachers in all sorts of decisions that school administrators often feel constrained to involve teachers regardless of their knowledge or interest. Such ritual is dysfunctional and illogical. (p. 295)

3. It is recommended, based on conclusion 2, that school and district policies clarify who has the authority and responsibility for making final decisions. Also important is that the parameters of the decision be clearly stated before the decision-making process begins. This should focus the participants input quickly and more effectively.

4. Based on conclusions 5 and 9 it is recommended that school councils not become involved in issues of governance, which are currently the domain of school boards. The respondent school council chairpersons identified relevance and expertise as factors

which should be considered. The respondent chairpersons also identified "commitment" of the school council membership as another factor which should be considered. A yearly turnover in executive members would cause a lack of vision and lack of commitment to long term goals.

5. Based on conclusions 1 and 2 it is recommended that inservice education for principals, teachers, school council executives, central office staff, and trustees be conducted in a joint professional development activity where the following issues are addressed: (a) collaborative decision-making, (b) pertinent legislation that defines the legal parameters for decision-making (e.g., the School Act, Alberta School Boards Association's Roles and Responsibilities of School Councils and Trustees, and School Council's Manual), and (c) district and school parameters that will guide decision-making (i.e., what areas can stakeholders make decisions on and within what parameters?).

6. It is recommended that universities continue, when educating future school administrators, to include instruction in the following areas as identified in conclusions 1, 2, and 3: (a) theories and models of decision-making; (b) theories of transformational

leadership; (c) theories of ethics; and (d) policy design, implementation, and analysis.

Recommendations for Research

7. Based on the first conclusion it would be worthwhile to further explore the experiences of other participants who are at different stages of implementing SBDM. It is recommended that this study be replicated in different locations and times, whereby, new insights could be examined from different contextual perspectives. Further research is required which should include more schools and more participants in each school and school council in the same and other school districts.

8. The political climate discussed in conclusion 6 led to a conservative movement to restructure education in Alberta. It is recommended that a study be conducted to explore the political decisions that lead to the formation and implementation of new policies. These policies could be further researched as to their design and if they were effectively implemented.

9. With all of the changes noted in conclusions 6 and 7 that have occurred in publicly funded education, in Alberta, during the past five years, it is recommended that research be done on teacher

and principal satisfaction. Further research could examine the new roles and additional duties that impact upon educational staff because of site-based management.

10. With "time" being identified, in conclusion 7, as an important factor in the lives of educators, it is recommended that research be conducted on what the impact of site-based management has on classroom instruction. The question of "do classroom teachers have sufficient time to devote their mental and physical energy to teaching students?" needs to be addressed.

11. Based on conclusion 6 it is recommended that the role of school councils be researched, in light of their expanded role, in today's pluralistic decision-making educational context. If all stakeholders are to have input into the education of students, how will issues of power, authority and influence be managed?

12. Because this decision-making process was new to Delta Regional Schools it would be valuable to examine gender differences regarding perceptions to SBDM. Based on conclusion 1 it is recommended that research be conducted into gender differences in site-based decision-making.

13. The most critical of the recommendations for future

research is the extension of the conceptual framework developed from the literature in chapter 3. The tenth conclusion suggested that modifications be made to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3, Figure 3. An expanded conceptual framework, Figure 5, emerged from conclusion 10 and was incorporated as emergent theory. This conclusion demonstrated that SBDM was a collaborative process involving input from multiple stakeholders. The "primary legitimate stakeholders" were identified by the respondents as: (a) students, (b) school staff, (c) parents, and (d) the school council. The respondents identified the primary legitimate stakeholders as being those individuals or groups that have daily involvement with the students in their school. The tenth conclusion demonstrated that the respondents acknowledged that other, "secondary," stakeholders were interested in gaining access to the decision-making process at the school site. These secondary stakeholders were further broken down into legitimate and nonlegitimate groups. Secondary legitimate stakeholders were identified as: (a) business partnerships, (b) volunteers, (c) teacher associations, (d) educational special interest groups (e.g., Canadian Parents for French), (e) school board trustees, (f) central office staff, and (g)

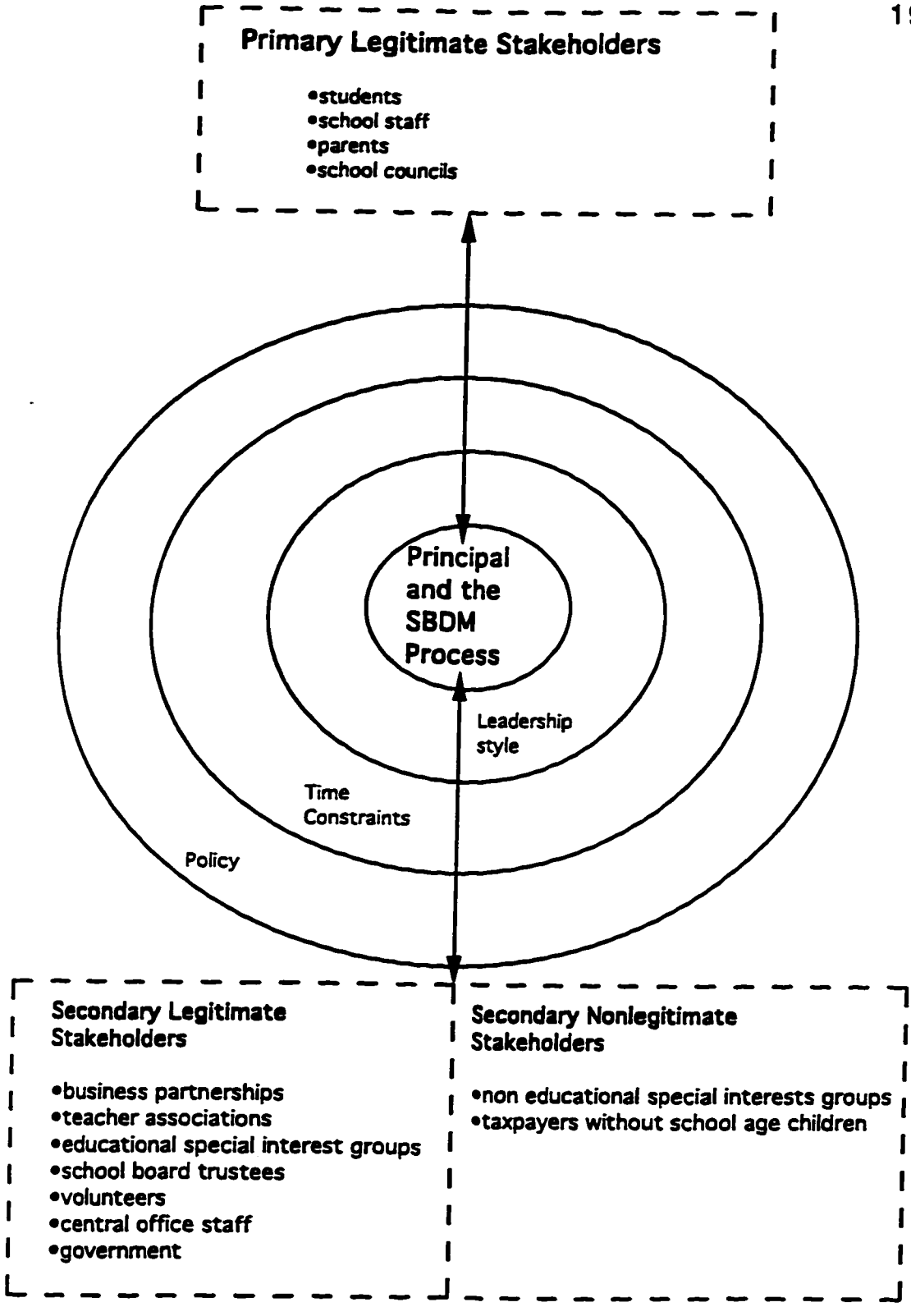

Figure 5. Primary Legitimate Stakeholders', Secondary Legitimate Stakeholders', and Secondary Nonlegitimate Stakeholders' interaction with the principal and the school-based decision-making process.

government. Secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders were identified as: non-educational special interest groups and taxpayers without children.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The implication of recommendation 1 is that a school district which ensures that the educational needs of all district students are met will be providing equitable service. A school district is a complex organization; a competitive approach to education may temporarily allow schools to attract specific types of students, but over time, programming for a diverse range of students will deteriorate. Only the larger schools or schools in a position to access additional funding from business will survive a competitive approach. These inequities among schools will result in "have and have not" schools with many students not having their specific needs met.

The participants viewed their primary focus as the education of students in their school. With this student centred focus and the demanding workload the participants therefore concerned themselves mainly with the interactions of the primary stakeholders. The implications of recommendation 13 are two fold.

First, if schools focus their attention on only their primary legitimate stakeholders they may under-value the expertise provided by secondary legitimate stakeholders. Secondly, that if schools ignore the desires of secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders they may feel societal pressure to listen. I believe the dilemma is how to be aware of secondary nonlegitimate stakeholders, when to use the expertise of secondary legitimate stakeholders and how to remain focused on the primary legitimate stakeholders.

Based on recommendation 13 two policies implemented by Alberta Education (1996) were designed to encourage input by multiple stakeholders into the decision-process: (a) Alberta Education policy 1.8.3 mandating the implementation of school councils, and (b) Alberta Education policy 1.8.2 mandating "school-based decision-making" for all schools. These two policies have implications for theory development by prescribing guidelines by which publicly funded schools must incorporate multiple stakeholders' views into the decision-making process. These two documents also established the principal as the individual responsible for the overall operation of the school and the one to establish a collaborative SBDM process. Furthermore, the literature (e.g., Blanchard & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Boyan, 1988; Dubin, 1991;

Estler, 1988; Holdaway & Ratsoy, 1991; Quinn, 1996; Rideout, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1991; and Williams, Harold, & Southworth, 1997) also identified the pivotal role of the principal in school decision-making. For the above reasons, I chose to place the principal at the centre of the initial conceptual framework design, and to retain this category in the new conceptual framework in Figure 5.

Recommendation 3 indicated that the respondents felt there were parameters and factors which they encountered when they were involved in making decisions at their schools. This recommendation was used to construct the concentric circles in the emergent conceptual framework (Figure 5) which denote that the stakeholders encounter parameters and factors which must be dealt with when interacting with the decision-making process. The concentric circles are metaphorically "layers of an onion" which stakeholders must "go through" when attempting to provide input or influence a decision.

The final chapter in this dissertation concludes with my personal perspectives regarding the study. The chapter examines: (a) the issues regarding conducting research on sensitive topic, (b) the interpretive qualitative method, (c) computer software problems, and (d) the future role of the principal in Alberta.

CHAPTER 8

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter contains my personal perspectives and reflections regarding the research method employed in this study. A study involving intense face-to-face interaction between participants and a researcher is bound to have affected them on a personal level. This chapter examines the thought processes of why the study was: (a) constructed around an interpretive qualitative method, (b) undertaken in a district where the researcher was not employed, and (c) completed using software translation programs to overcome computer compatibility problems. The chapter concludes with my perspective of the future role of principals in Alberta's publicly funded education system.

Conducting Research on Sensitive Topics

Introduction

I conducted research with educators and parents who work in schools in a suburban and rural school district. These people have reputations to consider and a personal stake in the manner in which I handled their views on sensitive issues. Lee (1993) discussed the kinds of research that are permissible in society today, the extent

to which this research might intrude upon their lives, the problems with ensuring data quality, and the ability of the powerful to control the research process. Lee maintained that "sensitivity potentially affects almost every stage of the research process from the formulation of a research problem, through the design and implementation of a study, to the dissemination . . . of the findings" (p. 1).

Sensitive Research Issues

At each stage of the study, problems and issues arose that took a variety of constructs. These constructs were ethical, political, legal, and methodological. Sensitive research on humans has potential effects on the personal lives of those being researched and on the researchers themselves. When I began to ask questions of the participants in my study, they illuminated the personal views of their principal or colleagues. Lee (1993) stated that "sensitive topics may therefore aid theory-building because they challenge taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world" (p. 3).

Lee (1993) described a working definition of sensitive research as "research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it" (p. 4). Lee discussed

three broad areas which would be expected to be threatening to the research process. The first is an "intrusive threat" dealing with areas that are considered private, stressful, or sacred. The second relates to the research of deviance and social control, and that the release of the data may be stigmatizing or incriminating. The third is usually problematic when it encroaches on political alignments. Lee defined political in its widest sense "to refer to the vested interests of powerful persons or institutions, or the exercise of coercion" (p. 4). I believe my study was sensitive, to some degree, in all three areas described by Lee (1993).

As principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons were involved in this study, each participant had a personal stake in the research process. Principals may have viewed my study as an intrusive threat to their private sphere of decision-making in their school. My presence may have possibly revealed that not all was well in the areas of collaborative decision-making. How would others view this deficiency? This was potentially directly threatening to the formal authority of the principals and to their future career choices.

Teachers may have viewed my presence as what Lee

(1993) defined as, "spying" to collect "discreditable information." In situations of conflict or tension, accusations of spying for the establishment are most common. When I first went into the school, I did not know what the working relationship was like between the principal and the staff. I could not anticipate the type of reception I would receive as an outsider. Was I seen as a spy, or as a colleague?

The school council chair was a quasi-political position, and attached to the role may be hidden agendas which conflict with the advisory nature of school councils. Did the school council chairperson view me as a serious researcher interested in improving education, or as an over-educated bureaucrat costing taxpayers too much money? In today's political climate of cost cutting and devaluing public employees, I am not sure how I was first perceived. In the larger political picture, if the data I collected and disseminated were negative in nature, this would reflect poorly on the superintendent, the principal, the trustees and the entire system. It was easy to see how one could threaten the three broad areas Lee (1993) described as private, stigmatizing, or political.

Threats to the Researcher

Lee (1993) discussed the possibility of creating "occupational

stigma" when conducting research on sensitive topics, which in turn can produce personal and professional risks. If researchers undermine social traditions, then they may be viewed as subverting traditional values and as being different from the norm. "Jobs or promotions may be closed to them because administrators fear difficulty or controversy" (p. 10). Strategies to avoid this threat available to researchers include withdrawing from the controversy altogether, or selectively revealing their research findings only to sympathetic audiences.

To avoid negative stigma to myself as a researcher, I decided not to conduct research in my employer's school district. In my discussions with university doctoral candidates, there was considerable concern as to how I could guarantee the anonymity of the participants in my own school system. They also expressed polite concern regarding how I planned to disseminate the information after the study was completed. I sensed a fear that if I discovered negative factors and shared them openly, that I would be publicly airing "dirty laundry." This would, most certainly, impact adversely on my career and the career of my colleagues. To avoid this controversial stigma, I decided to conduct my research in a

suburban and rural centre where I was not employed. This allowed me the freedom to be more aggressive in my questioning of participants, and to draw conclusions that I might not be able to make in my own system. I was sensitive to the impact the research process had on those involved in the study and proceeded ethically and professionally with all the participants. Being granted access to conduct research in their school district was an honour and I will always be respectful of that privilege. The participants involved in this study gave freely of their time and provided their views on the decision-making process at their school. It was a pleasure to have spent time speaking with individuals who believed in providing the best possible decisions for students.

Defining Interpretive Methodology

Schwandt (1994) stated that interpretive researchers believe that "to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors" (p. 118). In a similar manner, Hoy and Miskel (1987) also defined the interpretive perspective as "based on the notion that individuals construct their own social reality: more-

over, it is oriented toward understanding the nature of the social world as it exists rather than it might be" (p. 27). Hoy and Miskel debated that since the interpretive perspective denies the idea of an independent social reality, it does not concede the existence of organizations [such as schools] in a concrete way.

Hoy and Miskel (1987) explicated that the interpretive perspective has become more popular in educational administration in recent years beginning with the Greenfield-Griffiths debates. In these debates Thomas Greenfield suggested a subjectivist perspective as an option to the traditional positivistic approach used by many researchers. Hoy and Miskel inferred that the main goal of interpretive research is "not to . . . predict aspects of organizational life but rather to achieve--basically through inductive and qualitative modes of inquiry--understandings, interpretations, and meanings of particular contexts" (p. 27). Because the interpretive researcher rejects the ideas of an independent social reality, I concur with Hoy and Miskel that knowledge is not general; and that social reality is constructed as images in the minds of individuals. "Thus, the interpretive perspective denies the existence of independent generalizations that

explain the structure and dynamics of organizational life" (p. 27).

Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) stated: "I argue for research that looks at social reality from a variety of perspectives, particularly from the perspective of different actors in a given social situation" (p. 68). It was my intention to look at the reality of 12 participant perspectives as they view the decision-making process in their school. The variety of perspectives from principals, teachers and school council chairs provided insight into what is actually happening with the process, not just what the politically correct response should be. Schwandt (1994) indicated that interpretivist views are decades from their origins in challenges to scientism, and that the main thrust of interpretive research is to restore a primary focus on human inquiry of lived experience. "[The] phenomenological-interpretive perspective is now being blended with insights from constructivist epistemology, feminist methodologies, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and critical hermeneutics" (p. 130). This reconceptualization is often bewildering to doctoral candidates, such as myself, who are struggling for simplistic or practical definitions of philosophical methodologies. It also demonstrates for me that controversy and

intellectual debate is alive and well in graduate studies.

Asking Sensitive Questions: Interviewing

Techniques for asking questions and getting answers from people are more difficult than it may at first seem. Fontana and Frey (1994) indicated that "interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings" (p. 361). They illustrated that interviewing can take on a multitude of forms: individual face-to-face verbal interchange, face-to-face group, mailed or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. According to Fontana and Frey, the most used type of interviewing is individual face-to-face verbal exchange. These interviews can also be structured, semistructured, or unstructured.

Structured interviews provide very little flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered. The nature of structured interviewing is usually designed at minimizing errors. Unstructured interviewing often provides more depth with open-ended questions, allowing the participant the opportunity to answer in their own manner (Fontana & Frey, 1994). I used a semistructured interview process which included a list of questions that need to be addressed.

As long as the participant answered these questions at some time during the interview, I did not need to adhere to a rigid and inflexible pattern. It was my intention to be aware of the differences among participants, and I hoped to be able to adjust for circumstances as they arose. If, for example, a participant required more clarification about the question I provided more information. If a participant seemed to "go off topic," I listened to understand if they were addressing an issue requiring consideration.

As a researcher, I must remember that the participants each had their own view on the way decisions were made at their school. I treated them as professional people, not just subjects in a study. They revealed their perceptions to me in their own way and at their own pace. I had concerns regarding how "objective" and "faceless" I was over the months it took to collect data. How much of myself did I reveal to the participants? Did my biases show through my body language or comments? Fontana and Frey (1994) inferred that "as we treat the other as a human being, we can no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves, learning about ourselves as we try to learn about the other" (p. 374). I can only reiterate that I was privileged to be

allowed access to this system and to interview the participants and, I always treated their openness with dignity.

Importance of the Journal

When I first began interviewing the participants, I felt that recording the interviews on tape and, then transcribing them would be sufficient to obtain good data. But, as I indicated in my dissertation proposal to my research advisory committee and is recommended in the research literature I would use a journal to keep a record of my perceptions. I would recommend, to other researchers, that this process of using a journal is highly valuable as a means to begin interpreting and writing about the data. I showed these notes to the participants and discussed with them my understandings. Their feedback on these notes was invaluable.

Transcription and Computer Problems

All of the interviews were audio-recorded on standard cassette tapes. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) and Best (1970) advocated that recording interviews on tape is convenient, inexpensive, and the actual wording of the responses is retained. The recorded interview tapes were transcribed by a typist, who maintained the confidentiality of the respondents and provided me

with a hard copy and an electronic copy on disc.

One of the problems I had to overcome, was the compatibility of computer wordprocessing software and hardware configurations. I was using a Macintosh 540 PowerBook, commonly known as a portable laptop computer. The portable laptop also proved to be an invaluable tool. I was able take the computer with me to university, to home, to interviews, and to my university dissertation advisor where I could immediately open a file on a chapter and begin discussion or wordprocessing. This kept my writing on paper and then typing into a wordprocessing document to a minimum. What a time saver! The problems began when the typist hired to type the transcripts gave me an IBM formatted disc with the data saved in the wordprocessing software of Wordperfect 7.

I was not able to open the IBM formatted disc on my Macintosh computer. My laptop is approximately three years old, and is able to open IBM formatted discs. The typist had a new IBM computer with the very latest version of wordprocessing software. After some research with individuals who are familiar with changing computer technology, the typist and I developed a plan of attack to overcome our programming incompatibility. Firstly, her computer was able to

save data on Macintosh formatted discs which I could open on my computer. This solved the formatting of discs problem, but created a new problem. The files on the disc could be opened, but were not able to be read as text, the information looked like "alphabet soup" without spaces, returns, and paragraphs.

The solution to the compatability problem came in the form of a software translation or conversion program to decipher the text. The software conversion program MacLink Plus 7.5 was used to convert the transcripts from Word 5 to the program which my computer was operating - Wordperfect 3.0a. After much frustration, the formatting, software and hardware problems were overcome. With the proliferation of new and more powerful computers constantly being introduced to the public, the researcher must be aware of the configuration problems that can and do arise when working with computers.

No electronic software package was used to sort the raw electronic data by key words or phrases. After discussion with my advisor, it was suggested that the qualitative software analysis packages may not function satisfactorily. After my initial problems with software and hardware computer programs, I felt quite

comfortable using the manual methods of highlighting, and then "cutting and pasting" the quotations myself. Besides, there was an added benefit, in that I became extremely familiar with what was said in those transcripts.

Future Role of the Principal

Due to the political factors of restructuring and decentralizing education in Alberta, the role of the principal has changed. The principalship has become the focal point for students, parents, teachers, the Alberta Teachers' Association, business, trustees, superintendents, government, and the community at large to express their views and influence decisions at the local school level. This pluralistic perspective is extremely difficult to lead, since each individual or group has their wants and desires at the forefront of their point of view. Often these views are diametrically opposed. The parent may want smaller class sizes, while the government wants to control spending and keep class sizes at a level they deem appropriate. This places the principal in a dilemma, because parents are told that education dollars are decentralized to the school, based on student enrollment, and that the principal has the flexibility to organize the school accordingly to the specific needs of the

community. What the parents do not understand are the limiting factors which define parameters that cannot be changed. The principal cannot simply reallocate funds to hire additional staff. The funding which is allocated to schools is usually only sufficient to run the school with the fewest number of staff required. A principal cannot just pull money "out of thin air."

The "power" to make autonomous decisions based on the best interest of the students is becoming extremely complex for principals. The recent reforms have forced principals to become "managers of money" and has severely limited their time to act as instructional leaders. In Williams, Harold, and Southworth (1997) one principal stated that site-based management has "turned the role of the principal upside down" (629). Too many stakeholders are "drawing the principal away" from student-centred issues. The principalship has become a contested position of interaction among all of the stakeholders, and this interaction has increased the principals' workload, time commitments, and stress levels. Yet, my experience with decentralization, and interaction with principals' over the past five years, has led me to believe that not one would want to return to the more centralized management system.

Williams, Harold, and Southworth concurred with my view and stated accordingly: "With all its challenges, they [principals] seem to prefer the choices and autonomy that the new system [SBDM] provides over the limitations that are inherent in complex bureaucracies" (p. 629).

How will the role of principal evolve over the next decade? An important factor will be the degree to which the provincial government initiates policy which places school councils in positions of influence at the school site. If school councils become more like "mini-school boards," then principals will become more like "superintendents." The issue here is how will governance of schools be managed over the next decade? The school council chairpersons in this study were not interested in taking on school board governance responsibilities. If the provincial government listens to these parents, then governance will remain the role of school boards. The position of principal will probably evolve into an executive administrative position, outside of the teachers' union, with the principals' as managers of schools. Only time will tell if these predictions come to fruition.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What does school-based decision-making mean to you in your school? How is it implemented in practice at your school?

2. Do you have an opportunity to provide input into decisions at school? Can you provide examples?

3. If so, what types of issues are they related to? (Budget, texts, curriculum, staffing, discipline policy, etc.)

4. Has your workload as a principal, teacher, or school council chairperson changed because of school-based decision-making? Provide an example.

5. Do you want to become more involved in decision-making?

6. What issues would you like to have more say in? Less say in? Why?

7. How would this affect your workload, or committee workload?

8. Do you come across situations where the decision you want to make conflicts with the decision the organization, parents, or staff expect you to make? Provide an example and explain how you handled it?

9. Can you give an example of a decision you have been affected by during the past few months you would identify as important? What role did you have in the decision-making process? What factors influenced the decision? How did you feel about the outcome?

10. What practices by the principal, teacher, and school council chair enhance/inhibit decision-making? Can you provide examples?

11. Do you feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision-making process presently being used in your school? Why or why not?

12. What types of steps, processes, or actions would you like to see executed differently; regarding the way decisions are made at your school?

Appendix B

Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate
in the Study:
"Site-based Decision-making"

December 12, 1996

Dear educator or school council chairperson,

My name is Norman Yanitski, I am a graduate student in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. As part of doctoral degree requirements, I am conducting research on "Site-based Management: Its Impact on School Decision-making".

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to obtain the perceptions of principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons regarding the roles they play in the decision-making process at their schools. These perceptions should provide important insights about how decisions are made, and help in identifying characteristics of effective decision-making processes, which principals may find useful for application in their schools.

Nature of Involvement of Human Participants

The population of interest includes principals, teachers, and school council chairpersons from schools in Alberta. The sample will consist of the principal, two teachers, and the school council chair from each of the identified elementary, junior, and senior high schools. Three schools will be identified by asking the superintendent of one large Alberta district to nominate schools that are perceived to have an involved staff in the decision-making process, and who have active school councils. This will provide a total of 12 interviews across three levels of schooling.

The participants will be interviewed by the researcher for 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews will be audio-recorded on standard cassette tapes. The recorded interview tapes will be transcribed by a typist, who will maintain the confidentiality of the respondents. Transcripts of the interview will be reviewed later with each participant, to verify that the information is accurate.

Providing for Exercising Right to Opt Out

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time. This will be explained orally, and this written statement will also be provided to each participant by the researcher. Participants can contact the researcher by telephone (449-6611) or mail (Ed. Policy Studies, 7th Floor Education North, University of Alberta, Edmonton, T6G 2E1), if they have concerns or questions regarding any part of the study.

Addressing Anonymity and Confidentiality Issues

Each participant will be guaranteed anonymity by using pseudonyms in the dissertation. The school(s) and the district will not be identified. Each interview will be conducted in a private setting and the participants will be informed that they have the right to opt out at any time during the interview, and that they do not have to answer any questions with which they feel uncomfortable. The participants will be asked if a tape-recorder can be used to record the interview. The participants will be informed that only the researcher and transcriber will have access to the interview tapes; and that these tapes will be magnetically erased at the conclusion of the study.

Consent to Participate

If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate this by signing in the space provided below. An extra copy of this letter will be provided to you for your information.

I Give Permission

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the consent form, and I _____ give permission for Norman Yanitski to include me in the research study as described in this form.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Appendix C

Correspondence

June 11, 1997

McGraw Hill Companies
1221 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020-1095

Dear Mary Johnson:

This letter is a hard copy follow-up to the fax already sent .

Re: Copyright Permission

I am presently a doctoral candidate at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I am requesting permission to include the model "Decision Situation and Subordinate Involvement" from Hoy and Miskel, *Education Administration: Theory, Research and Practice,* 1996, page 293, in my dissertation. The title of my dissertation will be, Site-based Management: Its Impact on School Decision-making.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Norman W. Yanitski
Doctoral Candidate

644 Village Drive
Sherwood Park, AB
Canada
T8A 4K8

Date 6/20/97 The McGraw-Hill Companies

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Appendix D

Policy

Education Programs and Services

School-Based Decision Making

BACKGROUND

Alberta Education believes that major decisions about policies, instructional programs and services and the allocation of funds to support them must be made collaboratively. School-based decision making should involve collaboration between the principal, superintendent, teachers, instructional support staff, parents, and the community in keeping with the policies of the board of trustees. School-based decision making enables schools to be responsive to local needs.

Under section 15 of the School Act, and the direction set by the *Three-Year Business Plan*, the principal is the key educational leader at the school level, who will provide leadership in successful school-based decision making. Principals must work with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a school-based decision making process to develop school policies and budgets as well as establish the scope of the school program and extra-curricular activities. Establishing an integral relationship among teaching, learning and the decision-making process should result in higher levels of student performance.

Alberta Education supports excellence in teaching and learning and the involvement of parents and the community in the education of students.

POLICY

A school and its community shall have the authority and the support to make decisions which directly impact on the education of students and shall be accountable for the results.

STATUTE

School Act

Principals

15 A principal of a school must

(a) provide instructional leadership in the school;

(b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;

(c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;

(c.1) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;

(d) direct the management of the school

(e) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board;

(f) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;

(g) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;

(h) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;

(i) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board.

School council

17 (4) A school council may, at its discretion,

(a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,

(b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation,

(c) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,

(d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent, and

(e) do anything it is authorized under the regulations to do.

REGULATIONS

The *School Councils Regulation* A.R. 124/95 must be referred to in conjunction with this policy. See Section 5, School Act Regulations, in this manual.

ADDITIONAL DEFINITIONS

In this policy,

1 "school-based decision making" involves the whole school community in teaching and learning in order to ensure high levels of student achievement. School-based decision making is a process through which major decisions are made at the school level about policies, instructional programs and services, and how funds are allocated to support them; and

2 "community" means a school's students, their parents and other community-based support elements available to the school.

PROCEDURES

1 Each school board shall develop, keep current, and implement written policy and procedures for school-based decision making consistent with provincial policy and procedures. These shall be a matter of public record, available upon request.

2 School board policy and procedures for school-based decision making shall:

(1) be applicable to all schools in the jurisdiction but provide for the flexible approaches of school-based decision making;

(2) focus on teaching and learning;

(3) encourage input from all staff, parents and the community into school-based decisions on programs, instructional services, extra-curricular activities and the allocation of funds to support them;

(4) include goals, objectives and expected outcomes for school-based decision making;

(5) identify the types of decisions expected to be made at the school level;

(6) ensure through established criteria for funding an equitable allocation of funds which respects differences in school populations;

(7) define the roles, responsibilities and relationships with a focus on broad distribution of power and authority for decision-making among all participants: principal, teachers, instructional support staff, parents, school councils, the community, central office and the board of trustees;

(8) provide for a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the school-based decision making process in place in its schools;

(9) define procedures for widespread communication and information sharing among stakeholders, including: appropriate involvement in school-based planning, evaluating and reporting processes;

(10) include guidelines for inservice and professional development opportunities for staff and school council members to facilitate changes in roles and responsibilities including: problem solving, management, and communication skills of all stakeholders;

(11) be consistent with *School Councils* (Policy 1.8.3) and regulations; and

(12) be consistent with *Services for Students and Children* Policy (1.8.1).

3 A school board, with staff and school council members, should develop an inservice and professional development plan to support implementation of school-based decision making. This plan may be developed in collaboration with the regional professional development consortium.

REFERENCES

Please refer to the following for additional information:

Framework for Funding School Boards in the 1995-96 School Year

Guide for Developing 1995/96 School Board Interim Education Plans

Guide for School Board Planning and Reporting

Roles and Responsibilities in Education: A Position Paper

School Authority Education Plan (Policy 2.1.1)

School Councils (Policy 1.8.3)

Services for Students and Children (Policy 1.8.1)

Three-Year Business Plan

Use and Reporting of Results on Provincial Assessment (Policy 2.2.3)

See Section 7 for information on where the above document(s) may be obtained, and for Department / Branch addresses, phone and fax numbers.

Education Programs and Services
School Councils

BACKGROUND

Parents should have meaningful involvement in their children's education. Such involvement includes ensuring that their children are ready to learn as well as being able to choose education programs that best meet their children's learning needs.

Other members of society also have a responsibility to contribute to the education of young people and an important role to play in education. Everyone has a role and everyone's role is important. In an education system, few decisions can be made by one person or group alone. Parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, trustees, government, business and other community members are all participants in the educational endeavour and have a responsibility to work together, cooperate and communicate with one another.

Section 17 of the School Act recognizes and reaffirms the right of parents and the school community to have meaningful involvement in the education of their children through school councils. School councils are responsible to the parents and the community they serve.

POLICY

Alberta Education recognizes the right of parents to be involved in their children's education and for parents, community members and school staff to be involved in key decisions about the education of students. In each school operated by a board, parents and the school community are to be provided with the opportunity to establish a school council. School councils will have a role in advising and consulting with the principal on any matter relating to the school.

STATUTE

School Act

Interpretation

1 (1) In this Act,

(s.01) "school council" means a school council established under section 17;

School Council

17 (1) A school council shall be established in accordance with the regulations for each school operated by a board.

(2) The majority of the members of a school council shall be parents of students enrolled in the school.

(3) A board of a separate school district or a division made up only of separate school districts, by resolution, may require that the parents of students enrolled in a school operated by the board who are members of the school council must also be of the same faith as those who established the separate school districts, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.

(4) A school council may, at its discretion

(a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the school,

(b) perform any duty or function delegated to it by the board in accordance with the delegation,

(c) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister,

(d) consult with the principal so that the principal may ensure that the fiscal management of the school is in accordance with the requirements of the board and the superintendent, and

(e) do anything it is authorized under the regulations to do.

(5) Subject to the regulations, a school council may make and implement policies in the school that the council considers necessary to carry out its functions.

(6) A school council may make by-laws governing its meetings and the conduct of its affairs.

(7) Subject to the regulations, a board may develop and implement policies respecting school councils.

(7.1) A board shall establish an appeal process or conflict resolution procedure under which the principal or the school council may apply respecting disputes on policies proposed or adopted for a school.

(8) The Minister, on the request on the board, may dissolve a school council without notice at any time if the Minister is of the opinion that the school council is not carrying out its responsibilities in accordance with this Act and the regulations.

(9) The Minister may make regulations

(a) respecting the election or appointment of the members of a school council and the term or other conditions of election or appointment and the dissolution of a school council;

(b) respecting the roles of the principal and the school council of a school and their respective powers, duties and responsibilities;

(c) respecting any other matter the Minister considers necessary respecting school councils;

(d) exempting a school or a class of schools from the application of this section.

Powers of Boards

44 (1) A board must

...

(b) in respect of its operations

(i) keep in force a policy or policies of insurance,

(ii) with the approval of the Minister, participate in an arrangement under Part 15 of the Insurance Act, or

(iii) with the approval of the Minister, participate in an alternative arrangement acceptable to the Minister,

for the purpose of indemnifying the board and its employees and school councils in respect of claims for

(iv) damages for death or personal injury,

(v) damages to property, and

(vi) damages to property owned by the board in respect of which the board has an insurable interest

(A) that the board has agreed to insure, or

(B) for which the board otherwise has or may have assumed liability,

in an amount and form prescribed by the Minister; ...

Other sections:

s.1(1)(h) Interpretation - "Independent Student"

s.1(1)(l) Interpretation - "Parent"

s.1(1)(w) Interpretation - "Student"

s.1(2) Interpretation - "Extended Definition of Parent"

s.1(3) Interpretation - "Independent Student"

REGULATIONS

The *School Councils Regulation* A.R. 124/95 must be referred to in conjunction with this policy. See Section 5, School Act Regulations.

PROCEDURES

1 The general procedures or steps to be followed for establishing a school council are set out in the *School Councils Handbook* and the *School Councils Regulation* noted above.

REFERENCES

Please refer to the following for additional information:

Guides to Education

School Council Resource Manual

School Councils Handbook

See Section 7 for information on where the above document(s) may be obtained, and for Department / Branch addresses, phone and fax numbers.