Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Schools

by

Graham Charles Jackson

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an organisational case study of the legitimacy behaviours of two Outreach schools in Alberta, Canada. The study used Organisational Theory to examine how institutional processes, policies and practices impacted alternative education and in what way members of these schools experienced isomorphic pressure. The themes that emerged from the research included: Learning and Knowing, Responsiveness, Legitimacy, Power, Scarcity and Organisational Identity. These themes lead to the discussion norms and values highlighting and contrasting personalisation and isomorphism. The findings of this case study noted unintended tight coupling of Outreach schools with governing bodies and the significant blurring and overlapping of educational boundaries. The findings also noted legitimacy and status actions continued to drive the behaviours of organisations that do not have social capital. The notion of a "last stop" identified a significant cultural change within and outside of Outreach education. The phrase "dynamic coupling" was used to explain the fluid nature in which these schools were capable of moving from tight to loose coupling with other organisations according to the needs of the school. Finally, the case study suggested alternative education would continue to remain in the margins.

Key Words

Alternative Education, Case Study, Coupling, High School, Isomorphism, Institution, Learning and Knowing, Legitimacy, Organisational Theory, Outreach Schools, Responsiveness, Scarcity

PREFACE

This is an original work by Graham Jackson. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, project name “Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education”, No. Pro 00030766, June 14, 2013.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and many friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, Christopher and Rajo Jackson whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears to this day. I specifically dedicate this work to Jenn, who was patient and loyal and who made me see the light when I could not, to our amazing son Denver and wonderful daughter Scarlett for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate program. You have been my best cheerleaders. You will never know the depth of appreciation for all you have done.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Although schools may not always be the way that we would like them to be, they are places where teachers and children dwell together, suffer together and—despite all odds—learn together.”

(Future of Teaching in Alberta, 2011, p. 15)

The Why

The journey that brought me to this research started long before my involvement in alternative education. In my early teaching experiences as a special needs elementary educator I created ways for most of my students to achieve success in some form. What happened to those who could not experience this? Over time, I taught in junior high and high school special needs schools and programs. Still, I wondered where the reluctant/resistant learners went to “get an education”. The “one size fits all” approach challenged me to evaluate the point at which our actions, or lack of, become malpractice. The transition to an alternative education setting offered me the chance to live both mainstream and alternative educational models. Working in an alternative setting where the teaching style consists of “one size fits one”, I had the firsthand opportunity to view education from a new vantage. The learning that was taking place was unusual on so many levels; there was less concern for bureaucracy, less emphasis on power or hierarchy, there existed higher levels of student input, and student and teacher autonomy were the norm. I experienced internal and external pressure for alternative programs to validate the learning experiences of its students. Many see these schools as a “last chance” learning environment and yet these schools experience the same educational expectations and measures while attempting to operate in a fundamentally different way.

The purpose of my research is to examine the pressures and tensions placed from mainstream educational organisations as experienced by alternative schools in Alberta. Pressure from mainstream education and its governing agencies result in specific personal and institutional responses from staff and students in alternative settings. Pressure is an important concept to my research and as such, pressure refers to institutional and organisational forces that can be

external, internal or both that encourage certain behaviours over another. These interactions offer insight into the institutional operations of alternative schools in a mainstream culture. Alternative schools work with students who are typically the system's largest educational failures, or from an alternative schooling perspective, students who have been largely failed by the system. In response, alternative schools may be required to operate in opposition to educational policy and practice in order to serve student needs. This creates a paradox between serving basic student needs and preserving educational mandates and policies.

Background of Outreach Education

As a way to focus my research I used a case study approach to examine Outreach education, an area in which I have direct experience. In Alberta, Outreach schools have experienced a long and difficult growth from a single site in Calgary in the early seventies (Isberg, 1995) to currently over 127 schools across the province (Alberta Education, 2009). The genesis of these schools arose from the needs of the community and resulted in highly responsive and divergent schools sharing titles of *Fresh Start, Off Campus*, or *Outreach* schools. Currently, Outreach schools continue to operate in a variety of settings and contexts to meet a diversity of student needs.

The notion of "Outreach" education requires community connection and is commonly found in K-12 education, universities, religious studies, and in medical prevention and support (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The common thread found in Outreach education models highlights partnerships, high accessibility and receptivity to the needs of the learner. Educational Outreach models vary from basic behaviour supports and basic literacy skills to advanced specialty learning. Outreach educational models tend to be constructivist in nature, offering a personalised creation of meaning that honours developmental readiness and previous experience (Lamanauskas, 2010).

Outreach schools work to address diverse student issues such as academic and social failure, pregnant or parenting teens, addictions, abuse, learning disabilities, expulsions and mental and/or physical health issues (Housego, 1999; Alberta Education, 2009). Former Alberta Education Minister, Ron Liepert,

claims Outreach schools "give students a chance to finish high school in a non-traditional learning environment, while also making sure that they can access the different types of community supports they need to succeed" (Alberta Education, 2007, para. 2). For these students, mainstream schools tend to continue the experience of social deprivation and disengagement (Croninger & Lee, 2001), further marginalizing this group. Students in Outreach schools tend to have experienced inequity in the distribution of educational resources such as staffing, access to jurisdiction supports and educational materials resulting in less opportunity and a lower likeliness of high school completion (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

On a pragmatic level, these schools operate as a safe place for students who have not found acceptance in other schools. The schools are often small with closely connected staff and students. These schools often demonstrate a wide acceptance for students and provide opportunities to develop beyond curriculum. The Guide to Education (2013) and the *School Act* (2000) describe the specific requirements for constructing special education programs based on the "student's behavioural, communicational, intellectual, learning or physical characteristics, or a combination of those characteristics" (47(1)). Special education and alterative education are closely related and Outreach schools often provide services to students in special education programs. The *Outreach Program Handbook* (2009) is clear about the process of developing and implementing Outreach schools in Alberta. The handbook outlines specific application process for school boards, eligibility for students and roles for all stakeholders. The handbook clearly defines the policy for establishing outside agency supports, how to the structure the schools and the expectations for flexibility in the schools. The schools are also governed by the jurisdiction's interpretation of government policy. As policy changes, so too does the jurisdiction's mandates for the schools.

Context of Change

Alberta is currently on the verge of significant educational reform. Understanding the changes taking place in Alberta is important, as the changes will and have impacted many areas of learning including Outreach schools.

Historically, Outreach schools have adapted to a wide variety of change over the last 40 years. However, the reforms that are currently taking place have and will change the way in which Outreach schools operate. Further, these changes will also alter the way in which Outreach schools are identified and how they identify themselves relative to mainstream schools. The *Action Agenda 2011–14* (Alberta Education, 2010a) proposed by the Alberta government aims for "Transformed Education" through "action initiatives". Action initiatives consist of reform and review in the areas of curriculum, inclusion, teaching and leadership, legislation and First Nations education. The government drive for change is also seen in increased emphasis on interest-holder input through Inspiring Education (Alberta Education, 2010b) and Speak Out (Alberta Education, n.d.) initiatives. Alberta's notion of *transformational* education centers on curricular reform, engagement and delivery through Alberta's encouragement of "a flexible approach to enable learning any time, any place and at any pace" (Alberta Education, 2010b, p. 70). A culture centered on "hyperpersonalized digital spaces" (McCrae, 2010), characterized as the intense student drive for a fully customisable learning experience, has also impacted the government's *transformative* view towards educational decisions, delivery and development.

Compounding the environment of "transformation" is the fundamental and rapid social change taking place for students, involving new notions of community, pervasive media exposure and effective exclusion of adult involvement in the lives of young people. This change is taking place in part due to rapid technological advancement, individualization and pluralisation of life and the change in demographics (Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2009). The shift in the notion of family, the diversity in work place and blurring of work and home boundaries (Wickham & Parker, 2007) also add to this complexity.

Finally, provincial financial instability has already begun to affect current negotiations of provincially aligned teacher contracts. Reduced government funding and the collapsing or elimination of programs such as the Alberta

Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)[3] has added to the volatility of the educational climate. Also, the notions of high school completion and educational flexibility, seen in the Flexibility Framework pilot, foster change and, if adopted, could and would likely challenge the current usage of the Carnegie Unit,[4] funding models and hours of instruction. In short, there is much change afoot.

With a government appetite for educational change in almost all policy areas, my study examines the issues and dynamics of *legitimacy*, *autonomy* and *power* in Outreach education. The study examines the security of consensus and convergence and the resulting impact on the diversity of educational organisations (De Cock & Jeanes, 2006) such as Outreach schools. My study is qualitative in nature, affording room for nuance in the highly relational environments of schools. That is, theory, document analysis and the *experiences* of staff and students will enable me to learn how members act and are acted upon by structures that govern Outreach policy and practice. My intention is to share a summary of these findings with the existing Outreach schools in Alberta and make my detailed findings available to the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and Alberta Education. I also hope to further this research by examining the long-term impact of alternative schools on students.

Conceptual Framework

As an introduction of my conceptual framework I have chosen to use Organisational theory and Institutional theory to frame my research. Institutional theory focuses on behaviours such as legitimacy (socially assigned value or worth) and isomorphism (the tendency for one organisation to imitate another) and "considers the processes by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social

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[3] The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) was implemented from 1999 to 2013 and provided additional funding beyond the basic school grant to all school jurisdictions in Alberta. Funding was intended for specific local initiatives and research with the intention of goal of improving student learning and performance (Alberta Education, 2009).
[4] Carnegie Unit is the means by which student credit and school funding is awarded based on the number of hours the course has been instructed. For example, currently in Alberta 25 hours of instruction results in 1 credit and funding of approx. $172-$210 (Alberta Education, 2010c).

behavior" (Scott, 2004, p. 412). Institutional theory offers explanations of how institutions create, develop, use and transform these rules over time. This is particularly relevant to the questions of pressures and rules driving isomorphic behaviours in schools. Organisational theory speaks to understanding the interrelationship of social organisations and the environment in which they operate. Reviewing the way in which organisations "behave" with each other provides a framework to understand the interactions and responses of Outreach schools in its organisational environment.

My research aimed to examine the way in which alternative, specifically Outreach schools, met student needs with the external pressures of mainstream educational models. Further, little current Canadian research regarding the Outreach schools exists. I worked to advance education through insights into the behaviours of the staff and students within Outreach education from an institutional perspective. The use of Institutional and Organisational theories highlights how schools create particular actions, behaviours, cultural norms and outcomes in response to these pressures. My experiences, framework and reasons for research have added a unique perspective to this work.

Background, Beliefs and Bias

I view Outreach schools through a neoinstitutional lens (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; DiMaggio, Walter, & Powell, 1991; Powell, 2007). Organisations by their nature involve human beings; due to this notion neoinstitutionalism suggests *organisations* are also capable of sociological interactions. That is, organisations are capable of acting and behaving and interacting with organisations, just as people are capable of interacting and behaving with other people. I am also focused on human values with a concern for ethics and social justice. I operate through a social constructivist epistemology where I believe meaning is an endless process of experiences, events and reflections, where highly personalized meaning is created or constructed. I believe an ongoing construction of meaning encourages personal growth and change.

It is also necessary to acknowledge my personal experiences and predispositions I bring to this field of study. Said (1978) notes there are no

methods for "detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his [sic] involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society" (p. 10). In my case, I have been deliberately and fully engaged as an educator and Outreach school administrator; as such, I am deeply immersed in the processes and culture of schools. Secondly, I have spent most of my educational career focusing on marginalized high-risk and high-need youth in a variety of settings. I value the human capacity to seek change in unjust environments. I view social justice as a critical, moral imperative and powerful factor in the education of our children. Through my experience as an educator I believe teachers in alternative schools need to act in ways that embody what alternative education was intended to do. That is, they should find and offer unique and divergent means of solving problems and accomplishing tasks. I believe Alberta's mainstream educational models exert conforming pressure on alternative schools, even with policy reforms encouraging flexible and responsive learning, and I must be cognisant of this in my undertaking to seek understanding.

I make several assumptions. Firstly I work from the belief Outreach students require supports beyond what may be readily available in regular schools. I come to this belief through my experience as an Outreach educator observing and interacting with the students on a daily basis seeing areas of strength and need. I also carry the belief that students desire to be educated. I believe this through discussion with Outreach students who are attending Outreach schools; they are motivated to finish their schooling and move on to something else. Further, I make an assumption that alternative schools experience coercive governmental and jurisdictional pressures. I have assumed this through my own personal experiences as a teacher and administrator. I also operate on the supposition that tension exists in Alberta between Alberta Education, the Alberta Teachers' Association and local School Jurisdictions. I come to this supposition through interaction with the various agencies and through discussion with other administrators within and outside of the jurisdiction.

Research Question

I approach this research on Outreach schools from an organisational theory perspective, observing how Outreach schools attempt to meet the competing needs of regulating agencies and of the divergent needs of their learners. This study of organisational interactions, regulations and self-preservation actions in schools introduce several questions that have driven my research. The questions are:

1. What is Alternative Education from an Organisational Theory perspective?
2. How do institutional processes, policies, practices and expectations in mainstream high schools impact alternative high school education?
3. In what way do staff and students in alternative educational settings experience pressure to adopt mainstream institutional behaviours and what logics are used to respond to these pressures?

Limitations

As with qualitative inquiries, I value direct experience and detail, making my research non-generalizable. The factors of scope, duration of study and confined time limited my research. The time is limited to the available negotiated time to connect with teachers and students during the school year. Further limitations arose from the willingness and permission for operational schools to participate in the study in addition to their regular duties. The nature of the Outreach education also results in difficulty gathering information from students due to their highly transient nature, the ebb and flow of student attendance and their desire to be involved in such research studies. Another limitation that developed during the data collection consisted of redacted statements that spoke to some of the areas I hoped to study, in particular in the areas of power and control. Finally, for manageability reasons, the research was limited to Alberta schools and Alberta content. An external party did not follow my audit trail during the construction of themes. However, by including the audit trail in the research the reader can follow the construction of the themes but it is difficult to accurately follow the trail based on the limited information provided to the reader.

Methodologically, the weaknesses of constructivism can allow for an entirely subjective experience of the researcher that may be interpreted an entirely different way with a different researcher. Finally, the schools I examined were in a similar environment to the school where I had worked as an administrator, which may also be an important awareness as it may impact my expectations as a researcher. The data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis are impacted by my previous experiences as administrator and must be aware that I may unintentionally indicate experiences that were my own and not that of the respondents

Delimitations

The boundaries I chose for this study consisted of geographic location, schools, respondent groups and time of year. For the geographic location of schools, I accessed schools in central Alberta to provide reasonable and timely accessibility. I located a jurisdiction with several Outreach schools in different locations. The Outreach schools were located in public spaces in strip malls in both locations. The number of students in the focus groups and the number of staff involved in interviews were limited by accessibility to and availability of participants. In addition, I addressed junior high and senior high school students within the ages of 14-20. Further, the timing to access the schools during the school year focused my data collection from September to December, to fall before the administration of diploma exams and semester two.

Significance

Historically, the development of Outreach schools has been driven, at least in principle, by the idea of creating a "progressive culture" by establishing a haven for students' internal growth and personal development (McGee, 2001). The tendency, however, to identify students by their difficulties reduces the opportunity for schools to operate as "inspired outlets to serve students whose needs are not being met by conventional schools" (McGee, 2001, p. 3). Outreach schools tend to be identified as places to send troublesome students to protect the population of mainstream schools. Outreach schools "struggle with negative stigmas as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who are falling

behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents" (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 207). The negative image of alternative schools remains an obstacle to the success of Outreach schools today.

Outreach schools as an educational alternative provide a way to "rescue students" (Housego, 1999) rejected by mainstream schools. The critical role of alternative and Outreach education offers options and possibilities (Alberta Education, 2007) to students who are unable or unwilling to meet mainstream standards. In essence, Outreach education provides opportunities for young people to find institutional autonomy through the development of agency, self-regulation and cultural capital (Housego, 1999).

This research aims to increase awareness and understanding of the operation and behaviours of Outreach schools in the complicated mix of power, organisational models and legitimacy. The contradictions of convergence and autonomy embedded in social structures, such as schools (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), can foster change. It is difficult to predict what the future will look like and how it will occur due to the nonlinear complex nature of change (Aragon, 2010). Of one thing we can be certain, in the Alberta context, the role of Outreach schools will continue to evolve.

There is a small body of research specifically directed to Alberta Outreach schools in the Canadian K-12 environment. Housego's (1999) paper *Outreach schools: An educational innovation, a mixed methods research on Alberta Outreach schools*, Isberg's (1995) *AbOutreach: One practitioner's narrative analysis of teaching secondary Outreach school in rural Alberta* offers insight from an Alberta perspective, and Schreiber's (2007) *Reaching In, Reaching Out: Teachers' Experiences in Outreach School Communities* offers interesting and rich narratives on Outreach Education. A fourth Alberta research document, *At-Risk AISI Project* (2005), identifies what Outreach schools are and what they do. Much of this work relates to complexity, uncertainty and uniqueness and employs qualitative measures to maintain richness and nuance.

The contribution of this research focuses on Outreach education. Outreach education has been recognized by Alberta Education as an important part of the

education of young people; however, the context of educational and political uncertainty calls into question the future direction of such schooling. The extreme range of locations, small number of schools and teachers, small student populations, high level of student need and lack of provincial cohesion weaken the voice of Alberta Outreach schools. Organisational effectiveness is addressed regularly in the literature, yet it tends to be a matter of comparison and is a multidimensional social construction (Herman & Renz, 2008) examining a wide variety of influences and factors in the effectiveness of the organisation. The contribution of this research is to offer a contemporary review of the institutional pressures on Outreach schools in Alberta. The research identifies how Outreach schools create and provide educational legitimacy and autonomy in a mainstream environment, and how mainstream institutional behaviours, policies and practices impact alternative schools through isomorphism, legitimacy and power.

Over the next chapter I review the literature related to my questions about Outreach education, organisations and the existing power dynamic. In Chapter 3 I explain in detail my collection and examination of the data. I share my findings and the themes related to my findings in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 I discuss the way my findings influence the way I see Outreach education and its organisational power. Finally, I share my recommendations in Chapter 6. I have also included in the appendix the tools, examples and audit trail of the coding process for the reader to follow.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Alternative schools have worked, in systems, with systems, and even apart from systems to provide outlets for students who do not quite fit into schools."
(Housego, p. 85, 1999)

My questions investigate the institution of alternative education and examine the organisational impact of mainstream education on Outreach schools. In order to see how the alternative schools and its members respond and interact with other organisations it is important to first review the history and notions of alternative schooling. Alternative education has generally been systemically recognised as a part of successful educational systems, yet has typically been poorly understood by mainstream stakeholders. The desire for educators to meet the needs of students through a wide variety of means and methods is not a sole behaviour of alternative schools (as will be discussed later, organisations as well as individual actors can "behave"). The literature review is not intended to diminish the hard work and diligence of mainstream schooling but rather to focus on the needs and behaviours of alternative schools.

The literature review is gathered from both qualitative and quantitative research with the scope limited to journals, books, government documents, and policies. My research revolves around the tensions between the institutional legitimacy of alternative education and regulatory pressures from mainstream policy and paradigm. The study takes into account the ways alternative programs, specifically Outreach schools, create educational legitimacy and autonomy and how mainstream institutional behaviours, policies and practices impact these schools and the people within them.

What is Alternative Education

Outreach students have often been excluded from formal structures of education, have reduced access to resources, and have frequently opted out of school altogether (Bryson, 2010). Students regularly display a reduced ability to cope in mainstream classrooms. As a response, some educators have embraced the notion of deschooling (Illich, 1971), the belief that students can learn better by

themselves in informal settings. In the end, the opportunity for decision-making and self-determinism while avoiding discrimination and exclusion attracts these students to Outreach schools (Bryson, 2010).

Students are drawn to attend Outreach schools for specific reasons, so I ask: What are Outreach schools and how do they help these students? In Alberta, alternative programs have been officially defined as “an education program that: (a) emphasizes a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter, or (b) uses a particular teaching philosophy” (The *School Act*, 2011, Sec. 21). This definition highlights the necessary high level of ambiguity in defining non-traditional education (Sprague & Tobin, 1999) due to the highly contextual and diverse needs of each school. A rather more pragmatic definition identifies Outreach education as “an educational alternative for junior and senior high school students who, due to individual circumstances, find that traditional school settings do not meet their needs” (Alberta Education, 2009, p. 1). These schools are “characterized by volunteerism, small size, egalitarianism, humanness, participatory decision-making, organizational flexibility, individualized learning, and school community commitment” (Housego, 1999, p. 103). I believe Housego (1999) captures the essence of Outreach schooling best, stating Outreach educational sites consist of:

> Small, flexibly organized schools in which young people who choose to attend are treated with consideration and allowed an equal and fair share in decision-making may, it appears, cultivate the degree of acceptance and sense of community necessary to provide a foundation on which some floundering learners can begin to rebuild their self-respect and, with individualized assistance, continue their education. (p. 104)

Sprague and Tobin (2000) researched a variety of alternative schools' education strategies in the United States to study violence in schools and the community. Their research consisted of a meta-analysis of a wide variety of “school-based interventions that have been effective with students who have behavior disorders and/or antisocial behavior” (p. 178). Their study was useful in highlighting educational strategies of successful alternative schools. Its literature

review was filtered by searches for antisocial behaviour, school failure, the practicality of school implementation and the demonstration of "convincing evidence of positive outcomes" (p. 178), all within the last ten years. Sprague and Tobin did not further clarify the specifics of what positive outcomes look like.

The results of Sprague and Tobin's (2000) research included a detailed description of school and organisational strategies with specific school examples from their research followed by points for discussion. Their research highlighted eight recommendations for alternative school success, consisting of a low ratio of teacher to student; highly structured schools and classrooms; positive behaviour management; adult mentors in the school; individualized behaviour interventions; social skills education paired with high quality academic instruction; and the involvement of parents. Cox (1999) and Powell's (2003) separate findings also mirror Tobin and Sprague's (2000) recommendations.

Characteristics for successful learning environments include non-competitive performance assessments and flexibly structured classrooms (Cox, 1999). Alternative schools that tend to focus on teaching work readiness, vocational education, General Educational Development (GED) preparation and functional curriculum (Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006) enrich and offer opportunities for students. Environments that offer customized curriculum, reduced attendance expectations, extended hours, an employment-friendly setting, and access to specialized counselling services (Alberta Education, 2009; Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12, 2013) foster student success. Even with the wide variations within the Outreach model, the educational strategies for these schools consist of maintaining a small size, fostering one-to-one interactions, developing an encouraging environment and creating flexibility through the focus on student-driven decision-making (Sprague & Tobin, 1999).

Composition of the student population is also a good place to look for insights into what Outreach and alternative schools do and are. This is difficult, as learners in schools are different than previous generations (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). The added educational, social and emotional challenges, driven primarily by technology and media (McRae, 2010), have affected our learners. An

attempt to identify a typical Outreach student is unrealistic, if not unreasonable; however, in what follows I identify some broad characteristics that exist among this diverse population of students.

Students who attend Outreach schools are often directed by internal and external factors and have been alienated through organisational policy and labelling. Alternative students fall within the 12 to 21-year-old range (Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006), likely due to alternative programming being offered only at the junior high and secondary level (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The students are more readily identified by indicators such as lack of social or educational engagement (Alberta Learning, 2001) and disengagement due to a sense of irrelevance, boredom and/or personal and/or family problems (Peled & Smith, 2010). Students in Outreach schools also experience environmental factors of poverty, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, pregnant/parenting (Peled & Smith, 2010; Alberta Education, 2009), low social status, lack of autonomy, and perceived rejection (Siegrist et al., 2010). A high number of students with disabilities such as EBD (Emotional Behavioural Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), impulsiveness (Guerin & Denti, 1999), and mental health or mental impairment issues (Peled & Smith, 2010; Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006) attend Outreach schools. As a result of these challenges, students experience and display further alienation in schools. Poor literacy, inadequate social, emotional and behavioural skills and low self-esteem (Guerin & Denti, 1999) reduce the chances for students to be successful employees and/or students in mainstream schools. Students in Outreach schools also experience powerlessness, self-estrangement, isolation, meaninglessness and academic deficiency (Alberta Learning, 2001; Siegrist et al; Knutson, 1996; Alberta Education, 2003), increasing emotional instability in these young people. This results in the compounding of social/emotional issues, truancy (Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006) and academic underachievement (Powell, 2003). The response from the students' mainstream school is likely to involve suspension or expulsion (Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006), and referral to alternative sites. The final outcome of this process creates a higher potential for student dropout (Alberta Education,

2009) and tends to organisationally and systematically identify the student as “at risk”.

Housego’s (1999) study of Alberta Outreach schools, students and staff defined the attributes of Outreach schools. The research questions aimed to; identify the features that contribute to the success of Outreach schools; characterize typical Outreach staff and their perspectives; find the reason for student enrolment in Outreach schools and their school experiences and finally; identify the value of educational alternatives like Outreach schools. The research made use of a mixed methods approach consisting of a case study and quantitative student questionnaire. Housego interviewed 12 staff and 15 students and surveyed 191 students. The findings offer wide and focused insights into the operations of Outreach schools in Alberta.

Housego’s study identified students in Outreach schools as “the working, the wounded or the wise,” (p. 93) identifying three main and often overlapping types of students. These students were often excluded from school culture due to their need to work or physical/emotional needs. The main reasons for students leaving mainstream schools tended to be conflict with teachers or peers, and the highest reason for attending Outreach was the high flexibility in accommodating for student needs. Future and career aspirations consisted of a vast majority of the students seeking professional status. Further, Housego found most students had positive self-images and high belief in self as a learner in Outreach schools. Finally, the highest value by teachers and students was the development of meaningful relationships with each other.

Staff in these organisations reveal conscious and unconscious assumptions about what alternative education is. Staff displayed a wide breadth of experience and practiced a low-pressure, autonomous, self-directed pedagogy. Teachers enjoyed the ability to operate in unconventional means, bypassing some of the mainstream bureaucracy. Outreach teachers, Housego (1999) noted, identified “irrelevant curricula, poor teaching, and an overly bureaucratic school system as possible reasons for the large number of at-risk students” (p. 92) and operated

with an awareness of their own limitations and responsibilities for student success.

Many challenges exist in preparing and recruiting educators to support the diversity of need in non-traditional environments (Quigney, 2010). Teachers in Outreach schools tend to use unconventional instructional delivery models ranging from transitioning, behavioural intervention, academic, therapeutic, punitive, vocational and community partnership approaches (Reimer & Cash, 2003). Alternative schools tend to foster creativity (Raywid, 1994) and staff are predisposed to relinquish systemic power to meet the individual needs of students (Housego, 1999) by “flexibly, reasonably, and caringly, playing down authoritative relations in favour of ‘influence’ relations” (Housego, p. 91).

Teachers in Outreach schools tend to have diverse backgrounds (D’Angelo & Zemanick, 2009) and offer a wide variety of experiences and ties for students. The breadth of knowledge offers students opportunities to learn and relate with adults who entered teaching in less traditional ways. Above all, the teacher’s ability to *connect* and establish rapport (Alberta Education, 2009) offers the highest levels of social capital development for students in schools, noting the highest level of benefit is experienced by students at academic or social risk (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Teachers themselves may also experience underclass and marginalized treatment from within the organisation (Bryson, 2010). This treatment is compounded by teacher “maverick sensibilities” (Housego, 1999, p. 92), preferring to focus on the needs of students at their personal cost such as feelings of exclusion from the jurisdiction.

Alternative teachers’ professional and personal identity is highly influenced by access to professional development (Ashcroft, 1999), as Outreach schools require teachers to display high competencies in behaviour management, pedagogical practice, and an awareness of community or cultural needs (Guerin & Denti, 1999). Teachers in Outreach settings are also highly aware of the importance of trust, rapport, creativity (D’Angelo & Zemanick, 2009) and the influence of environmental factors on learning. A unified and committed staff and

administration (Alberta Education, 2009) can set the right climate for supporting learners.

Efficacy of Outreach Education

The challenge of defining efficacy for this research is the inherent comparison to an external desired standard, which is, essentially a form of conformity. Notwithstanding, is worthwhile understand the efficacy of Outreach education while also recognising its role as a conforming pressure on schools. Efficacy within school setting can be seen as the student's ability to complete tasks in the manner desired (Bandura, 1993) by both the teacher and student. The greater the perceived efficacy, the more likely the student will have the ability to demonstrate self-control and persistence to complete the task (Bandura; Putney & Broughton, 2011). Efficacy is affected by past performance and thinking strategies and is highly related to achievement anxiety (Bandura, 1993) through reinforcing patterns of thought and behaviour. Efficacy can also craft the way in which organised activities and successes are framed. In this way, successes could range from marks, to attendance or attitudes. This section reviews the concepts of program efficacy, environmental and cultural efficacy, school policy and community. When these categories are combined they offer indicators of the effectiveness of outreach education within the mainstream model.

No one good program exists. Due to the highly contextual nature of Outreach schools (Powell, 2003), schools offer varied programs to meet varied needs (Tobin & Sprague, 2000; D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). As such, there are also no clear predictors of program success (Reimer & Cash, 2003). Rutherford and Quinn's (1999) research paper noted success can be related to the presence of some or all of the following organisational behaviours in schools: a functional assessment model, a functional pragmatic curriculum, effective and efficient instruction, transition programming/procedures, a comprehensive system of coordinating special education and appropriate staff resources. Further to their findings, the presence of early social and academic interventions, established transition strategies, and community involvement (Alberta Learning, 2001) also offer higher success rates for students. Some models and jurisdictions use dropout

rates as measure of efficacy (Siegrist et al., 2010), which may not be a true indicator of student success. The challenge of identifying success rates of students is confounded by what “high school completion” means, as leaving school to apprentice or work may indeed be a success for those learners.

Outreach schools’ positive effects are limited, and students do not always demonstrate significant changes (Cox, 1999). It is difficult to ascertain effectiveness of Outreach educational models due to the relative absence of longitudinal studies for students completing their “formal schooling” at alternative education sites. Sprague and Tobin’s (1999) research recommends more research into the long-term efficacy of such programs.

Culture and environment play a key role in all institutions and in particular schools. The construction of a positive culture in Outreach schools requires a break from traditional educational services (Sprague & Tobin, 2000). Schools can develop an environment fostering student interest and involvement (Siegrist et al., 2010) by offering high autonomy and wide community supports. The typically low student-to-teacher ratios (Siegrist et al., 2010; D’ Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Powell, 2003; Manning, 1993) offer opportunities to establish close connections with students, encouraging a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Kim’s and Taylor’s (2008) case study of American alternative high schools made use of interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. Their purpose was to identify the common characteristics students sought from the teachers and school. Kim’s and Taylor’s findings identified students’ need for: trust and respect, a sense of belonging, teachers to operate as facilitators, opportunities for students to be responsible, regulated autonomy, the presence of a caring culture and opportunities to succeed. Further, the requirement for schools to have qualified staff paired with effective professional development (Powell, 2003; Manning, 1993) creates a culture that is highly responsive to these students’ needs. Supported by an understanding of the importance of curricular relevance, responsive and effective emotional supports (Powell, 2003; Manning, 1993) encourage self-evaluative properties (Powell, 2003) and create the culture for school efficacy.

The advantage of small highly structured classes, a positive classroom atmosphere, adult mentors, an Individual Program Plan (IPP), skills instruction, high quality academic instruction (Sprague & Tobin, 1999: 2000) and the involvement of parents or guardians (Sprague & Tobin, 1999; 2000; May & Copland, 1998) creates a climate supportive of learning and growth. The challenge to garner parental involvement includes students not wishing for parents to be part of their learning process (Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006) and/or the absence of engaged parents. Adult facilitators often act as parents in these schools, encouraging participation, fostering individualized learning through a nurturing environment and offering dignified, meaningful learning for these learners (Siegrist et al., 2010; De La Rosa, 1998).

Policy is an important indicator of the beliefs and values held by institutions and organisations. Schools use policy to regulate and order behaviours within the school while the schools themselves are subject to jurisdictional and provincial policy. Successful Outreach school and program policies are varied but have several general recurring themes. First, is the understanding that "one unified curriculum is not sufficient for all" (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 207), suggesting a policy position for schools to "individualize curriculum" (Guerin & Denti, 1999). Second, the use of policy to construct learner autonomy through a realistic and practical, student-centered approach (Cox, 1999) fosters engagement. Third, is construction of a clear intake and screening policy (Alberta Education, 2009; Sprague & Tobin, 1999) to establish clear expectations and determine student need.

Policy recommendations surrounding teachers and administrators revolve around the need for continuous professional development for staff. Professional development is essential for effective schools (D' Angelo & Zemanick, 2009; Leone & Drakeford, 1999); it allows a focus on academic needs driven learning and the autonomy for professional decision-making (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). Finally, vision and leadership through administrators, or teachers working in the capacity as administrators, is of critical importance to create professional development practices and policies as the norm (Mendez-Morse, 1991).

The term community has changed meaning and has become more encompassing, involving members who may not live in the school area and whom staff have never personally met, evident in the schools' connection with post-secondary learning and support agencies (Cox, 1999). Community is directly related to program flexibility and the establishment of cooperative partnerships in education (Alberta Learning, 2001). Community is an extension of the internal culture of the school intended to include other stakeholders and members of the wider community. *The Alberta Education Outreach Program Handbook* (2009) sees community support as a significant factor for success and sustainability of Outreach schools. Success through external interest-holders offers a sense of community (Leone & Drakeford, 1999), which fosters engagement (Raywid, 1994). Again, the importance of parental involvement and partnership in Outreach through volunteering and learning with the students (Simon, 2004) can consolidate community connections to students who are typically excluded from society.

Through connection and community, Outreach programs offer a range of benefits to young people. Shifting from a teaching model based on cultural transmission to one that embodies education for change offers a meaningful addition to the traditional educational models (Leone & Drakeford, 1999; McGee, 2001). Risk of high school dropout is reduced (Sprague & Tobin, 2000) through academics, relationship building and school size (Manning, 1993). The creation of a culture that fosters self-concept (Manning, 1993) and creates resiliency (Alberta Education, 2009) acts as a safety net for marginalized learners (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Further, the effectiveness of alternative and Outreach educational models has consistently been related to effective relationships (Lee & Burkam, 2003) and the development of a supportive and nurturing school culture (Housego, 1999). Cox (1999) reminds us that: "Students attending alternative schools are believed to have higher self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward school, improved school attendance, high academic performance and decreased delinquent behaviours than when they attended traditional schools" (p. 325). In many ways,

the innovation of this genre of schooling models the future of education (Knutson, 1996).

Organisational Theory and Culture

According to Scott (2008), three pillars of organisations: the normative, the regulative and the cultural cognitive are the vital ingredients of institutions. These three pillars are reminiscent of Powell and DiMaggio's (1983) coercive, mimetic and normative institutional drives. On one hand, the normative and regulatory pillars are clear in terms of the impact of social obligation and rules. Culture, on the other hand, in this research, plays a significant role; after all, social reality and social order provide stability and meaning to life (Scott, 2008). Cultural behaviours, from an organisational standpoint, are important to this study. The research suggests legitimacy is not just legally and morally governed but is also culturally governed (Scott 2008).

Institutions are often described by their resilience to change and ability to regulate behaviours through stability (Rusch & Wilbur, 2007; Bonner, Koch & Langmeyer, 2004), and schools are no exception. The complex relationship of influence, environment and pressure (Sauder & Espeland, 2009) offers a means of regulating the diverse needs of organisations (Rusch & Wilbur). The pervasive power of embeddedness, systemic preservation and cultural persistence (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Garson, 2008) all factor in the one-size-fits-all mentality affecting the rigidity of schools (Johnson, 2006). External pressures create social order, or, as Zucker (1983) puts it, "institutionalization simply constructs the way things are: alternatives may be literally unthinkable" (p. 5). This suggests the natural tendency to self-organise into hierarchy through social construction and status (Waite, 2010). This "unending social reproduction of an environment that creates and re-creates the same kind of organizations over time" (Rusch & Wilbur, 2007, p. 303) perpetually challenges the membership for atypical partners such as alternative schools. Embeddedness and cultural preservation of fundamental "truths", regardless of whether they are purposeful or not (Eyben et al., 2008), are often late to acknowledge other ways of knowing (Curado, 2006).

The use of culture (i.e., social order) as a means of change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998) is important, but organisations may not be able to control culture for change in a conscious, significant way (Waite, 2010). Sociological norms influence decision-making in schools (Bonner et al., 2004) and account for the deep regulatory, cognitive and normative power of social value (Scott, 2008). Outreach schools challenge this socially and structurally developed hierarchy through egalitarian groupings, where communities work to transfer tacit and explicit knowledge through shared wisdom (Lorenz, 2001). Further, social networks help to solve problems in novel or unique situations experienced in alternative schools (Lorenz; Rowan, 1982). In this way, social pressures (perceived and real), subjective norms, attitudes and perceived control (Ho & Kuo, 2009) can create the parameters for normative and appropriate behaviours for schools.

Organisational behaviours are also influenced by self-interest and culture. Culture plays a large role in determining the internal and external behaviours of schools. Cultural membership of the individual into the ethos of the organisation identifies the importance of *fit* and value congruence to find connection in organisations (Sarris, 2008). The school's worldview influences the ways in which the elements of culture and power are produced and manifested (Aragon, 2010). Rusch and Wilbur (2007) noted, "institutionalized environments are powerful forces that shape individual and organization perceptions, but […] the process of shaping is more complex than institutional theorists have suggested thus far" (p. 309). The influence of culture, resource dependency and interested/invested parties are complex and often covert in the way they exert pressure on Outreach schools to behave in certain ways. Theses types of behaviours are often translated into a culture of embeddedness.

Part of understanding the embeddedness of organisations, such as Outreach schools, involves the understanding of their social order: "No organization can properly be understood apart from its wider social and cultural context" (Scott, 1995, p. 151). Social interactions operate on both an impersonal and personal level (Johnson, 2006) and do not require a mutual awareness

(DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Bonner, et al., 2004). The social order of schools requires structural, political, human and symbolic organisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) maintained and established through the process of "structuration" (Giddens, 1986). Giddens' book *The Constitution of Society an Outline of the Theory of Structuration* identifies structuration as the established social structure of norms and rules that govern behaviours. These rules are continually maintained and modified by human interactions. Giddens notes that structural principles are deeply entrenched, shown in the reproduction of social and cultural environments. That is, these principles of structure have forms of domination and power through rules and laws that create the conditions for the reproduction and maintenance of social order and structure. Structuration uses the organisational concepts of signification (the production of value), legitimation, societal order, and domination in the production of social norms. The theory of structuration recognizes social norms as a human constructs and social norms' control over human behaviour (Giddens, 1986). Thus, the interaction of organisations is in some ways predetermined but is also capable of influencing the rules of social order.

Organisations and Outreach Education

Organisational studies seek to understand the motivations, rules, patterns and reasons for behaviours within these organisations. Organisations can also be viewed as organic, capable of growth, learning and interacting (Campbell, 2007). As such, emergent spontaneous, cultural and corporate learning can take place in organisations (Curado, 2006). In order to focus on questions of isomorphism, the pressure to be the same, and legitimacy, I have divided this section into the categories of structure, influence, embeddedness, social order, legitimacy and isomorphism.

While our language permits the regular and synonymous use of the words institution and organisation, for my purposes it is important to draw the distinction between the two. An institution is encompassing, subtle, value driven and self-sustaining, such as the notion of education (Scott, 2004). Organisations, such as schools, are rule driven, ordered, controlled and over time some

organisations mature to become institutions (MSS Research website, n.d.). These so-called "soft organizations" (Scott, 2004) regularly make use of cultural rules (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), sense making and alignment (coupling) with other organisations (Weick, 1974). My research questions investigate how the *structure* of organisations and organisational *behaviours* effect each other (Scott, 2004).

Over the last 30 years, institutional and organisational research has evolved from Weberian bureaucratic understandings to seeing organisations as complex "rules, norms, and belief systems [that] undergird all stable social systems, including economic systems" (Scott, 2008, p. 437). In order to move from the study of individuals to the study of organisational field (Scott, 2004), I use a neoinstitutional lens to review Outreach schools. The concepts underpinning a neoinstitutional approach observe institutions as capable of *acting* in order to address needs of order, dependency, control and legitimacy (Campbell, 2007). Institutional Theory identifies how organisations act and react to environmental stimulus. Neoinstitutionalism returns the focus to institutional *behaviours* rather than individual actions. This focus on the broad view of organisations does not reduce the value of the individual and its impact on organisational knowledge (Curado, 2006). The "new" institutionalism focuses on the need to establish institutional legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) as the requirement for acceptance of stakeholders.

Several pivotal works have influenced the direction of my research. Their findings have influenced my understanding of organisations' norms, laws and rules and of the nature of political, cultural and social environments (Powell, 2007). The first is Anthony Giddens' (1986) theory of *structuration*, the power of social structure to determine norms and rules. Second, DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) *The Iron Cage Revisited* identifies the strong desire for organisations to resemble each other in the quest for value and legitimacy. Finally, Weick's (1974, 2005) work with loose coupling, mindfulness, and sensemaking offer integral understandings of how organisational members engage and work with each other. I will refer to each in more detail throughout this section.

Structure

Organisations are born from struggle and negotiation (Campbell, 2007) and operate to address a shared goal through specific structures. The way in which the goal may be achieved varies from organisation to organisation and goal to goal. Goals often determine an organisation's response to the notions of collectivism and individualism or competition and collaboration (Waite, 2010) and determine the type of structure the organisation will adopt. The structure of organisations follows a continuum of change, moving from stability, to conflict, to innovation and back to institutional re-stabilization (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Organisations such as schools are structured by status, dominance and hierarchy (Waite, 2010). These organisations and the members within them make assumptions about the "effectiveness" and efficiency of bureaucratic structures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Regardless of the variety and evolution of organisational theories the work is the same: to explain organisational behaviour. These theories operate to identify the tacit knowledge and behaviours of a fluid and evolving organisation (Pålshaugen, 2006).

The impact of structure and the agents within the structure on each other (Giddens, 1986) overlaps and compliments neoinstitutional ideologies. The impact of the environment and its members on the organisation highlights the demands and expectations needed for organisations to exist and to perpetuate their existence (Scott, 2008). Some of the demands identified through neoinstitutionalism, consist of the behaviours of isomorphism, legitimacy and self-preservation (Scott, 2004). Interestingly, these organisational behaviours reduce the value of efficiency in favour of legitimacy (Scott, 2008) and social order.

Legitimacy

As previously mentioned, organisations strive for legitimacy. For this research, legitimacy is described as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy "affects not only how people act toward organizations, but also

how they understand them, thus audiences perceive the legitimate organization not only as more worthy, but also as more meaningful, more predictable, and more trustworthy" (p. 575). The process and state of legitimization becomes a method of addressing scarcity through tactical and strategic planning (Meyer & Scott, 1983; Scott, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Mukherji, 2009). In schools, pubic notions of worthiness and desirability drive the concept of legitimacy necessitating the organisation's need to find ways to meet these demands (Scott, 2008). Organisations that achieve a reasonable level of legitimacy through actions, which I will identify shortly, are more capable of obtaining resources to ensure their survival while further modelling to other organisations the behaviours required to meet organisational demands (Scott, 2008).

As mentioned previously, stakeholders can confer legitimacy; in this case the social actors involved are the government (regulatory endorsement) and the public (public endorsement) (Deephouse, 1996, p.1024). Organisations (schools) work to attain scripts for developing legitimacy through conformity, manipulation, symbolism, organisational formalization and mimetic actions (Suchman, 1995; Rusch & Wilbur, 2007, Oliver, 1991). Oliver (1991) observed responses to the legitimacy pressures and noted the motives for these behaviours revolve around resource dependence and institutional stability. She identified five strategic behaviours consisting of acceptance, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation (Oliver, 1991). The cost of strategically creating legitimacy calls into question the effort needed to maintain or elevate status (Waite, 2010) and whether the tendency to compete for legitimacy (resources) strengthens (Kaufman, 2009) or strains the organisation (Waite, 2010). Of interest is Deephouse's (1996) study of commercial banks reviewing isomorphism as a means to create legitimacy and finding evidence that "suggests a positive relationship between strategic isomorphism and multiple measures of legitimacy, even when age, size, and performance are included" (p.1033). Social assets of status and legitimacy encourage persistence and varying degrees of isomorphism (Mukherji, 2009) that are generally damaging to schools that seek to be different.

Influence

One such tacit behaviour in organisations is the ability to influence. Members involved in regulating and influencing the operations and decision-making of schools are often collectively known as stakeholders or interest holders. Stakeholders influence decision-making through forms of pressure, cultural dynamics, resource dependency and established normative behaviours. Stakeholders can offer power and legitimacy to organisations (Garvare & Johansson, 2010) by providing essential supports in order to create stability and sustainability for organisations. Stakeholders can withdraw support (Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006), and with this knowledge, schools attempt to satisfy demands of stakeholders through the behaviours of the school (Garvare & Johansson, 2010).

Resource dependency, the limited availability of resources such as human qualities, information and economic goods (Schmidtlein, 1999) can determine the effectiveness of organisations (Curtis et al., 2000; Davies, Quirke & Aurini, 2006). Schools are challenged to find ways to make resources and funds available and are often required to not only gather resources from a finite source, but must also find ways to allocate resources to the areas of highest need in schools. School leaders, as resource managers, are often challenged to be effective in an area where most administrators have had little formal training and preparation. The tendency for educational models to centralize resources further increases a scarcity mentality and encourages competiveness among schools. Educational competition increases the *coercive*, *mimetic* and *normative* pressures for legitimacy experienced by organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These pressures and response behaviours will be discussed in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

Isomorphism

Isomorphism "posits that organisations seek internal and external legitimacy by engaging in similar activities, codifying the same practices, following approved procedures, and developing comparable structures" (Tucker, 2010, p. 22). DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) response to Weberian bureaucracy, *The Iron Cage Revisited*, explains isomorphism as a "process that forces one unit

in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (p. 149). They identify competitive and institutional isomorphism as a means for political power and legitimacy resulting in “social as well as economic fitness” (p. 150). Schools adopt behaviours of successful organisations to capture status, prestige (Rusch & Wilbur, 2007; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and the appearance of competence (Tucker, 2010). DiMaggio and Powell report that the gathering of evidence to find ways to prove isomorphism and not infer it involved the use of indicators consisting of normative elements such as media or social behaviours, and regulative elements such as lawsuits (Scott, 2008). These research methods changed the research from finding the *effects* to discussions of institutional *process* (Scott, 2004). As such, high levels of uncertainty drive the process of conformity in educational arenas resulting in legitimacy and acceptance offered through endorsements of regulating professional bodies (Rowan, 1982). Conformity for stability, as identified, has implications for Outreach education that can be highly problematic.

Predictors of isomorphism in schools involve the presence of professional organisations (Rusch & Wilbur, 2007; Davies, Quirke & Aurini, 2006), reliance on centralized resources, ambiguity, resource dependency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and competition (Tucker, 2010). The fundamental consequences of isomorphism on organisations result in external legitimation at the potential cost of efficiency (Scott, 2004). “As a result, it is argued here, institutional isomorphism promotes the success and survival of organizations” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 349), but at what cost and to whom?

The underlying behaviours of the school “translates the actual into the institutional” (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 253) and motivates the school to behave in specific public ways. The school experiences these specific pressures that appear in the form of *coercive* pressure, consisting of punitive and power-driven pressure; *mimetic* pressure, fostering the reproduction of desired behaviours for support and recognition; and, finally, *normative* pressure, driven by imbedded practices and the expected behaviours of schools (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Scott (2004) further developed this work by including *regulative*

(the rule setting and monitoring), *normative* (obligatory social behaviours) and *cultural-cognitive* (shared reality and meaning) processes. The combination of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive institutional pressures and processes encourage the isomorphic behaviours of schools. Acute regulative pressures experienced through government policy, the *School Act* (RSA 2000), Credit Equivalent Unit (CEU) funding models, public school performance measures, the *Accountability Act* (2006), and high-stakes testing serve to methodically regulate school behaviours.

Schools seek resource stability, driving "organizations to seek legitimation, achieved by the agency becoming embedded in the political, legal, organizational, and cultural relationships which confer legitimacy" (Garson, 2008, p. 3). The educational sector is highly susceptible to these isomorphic demands due to constant comparison, the differentiation of roles, hierarchical power structures, and homogenization through curriculum and/or standards (Sauder & Espeland, 2009).

Functioning within the confines of a normative model tends to be difficult for institutions that work to be or appear to be highly divergent as "difference is now value laden, a shortcoming rather than a viable alternative" (Sauder & Espeland, 2009, p. 189). Normative pressures influence the symbolic, rational and political responses of the school. Schools must operate with an understanding of costs of resource dependency and of the ruling relations of government and other governing bodies. The drive for legitimacy, intensely experienced by alternate schools, and isomorphism, as a tool for legitimation, offers alternative schools status and significance. These institutional behaviours directly challenge the divergent nature of Outreach schools.

Agency

Agency is the ability to act within a social structure and can be found in organisations (Oliver, 1991); in this way isomorphism offers agency through the strategic actions previously mentioned. Alternative schools address organisational pressures through a variety of methods, consisting of primarily *loose* and *strategic decoupling* (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Loose and tight coupling is derived from

Organisational Theory and refers to the “tightness” of the alignment of institutions and organisations. For example, schools that are loosely coupled to a specific district expectation would demonstrate the expected behaviour when required and would operate independently when not being observed. Tight coupling signifies explicit alignment and adherence to guidelines. The natural tendency for organisations is to be loosely coupled with others (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Responses to regulative pressures tend to be more predictable than normative and cultural-cognitive institutional pressures (Scott, 2008). Normative pressures may encourage tight coupling, as normative behaviours make it difficult to see things any other way. Cultural-cognitive pressures are complicated, focusing on tacit underlying norms that may not readily show alignment of the organisation. Decoupling should not be seen “as the hallmark of an institutional effect, it was seen as one among many other responses, and hence, itself requiring explanation” (Scott, 2008, p. 432). Decoupling consists of varying degrees of response and can be structural or procedural in nature and can reshape the organisation (Edelman, 1992).

Douglas Orton and Karl Weick’s (1990) work in *Loosely Coupled Systems: A Reconceptualization* studied approximately 300 works revolving around the notion of “loose coupling.” Their work identified five arguments regarding loose coupling consisting of: causation (factors producing coupling); typology (different manifestations of coupling); effects (coupling as a managerial tool); compensation (the need to reverse loose coupling); and organisational outcomes (results of loose coupling). Their purpose was to review the five arguments and then to redirect the notions of loose coupling in research. The research identified the need to reduce the simplification of the connection and autonomy paradox. The researchers valued the complexity of organisations and identified coupling behaviours as the start of the inquiry, not the end. The challenge for Outreach schools is to identify how loose coupling is used to address uncertainty, responsiveness and distinctness of organisations (schools).

Further, Orton and Weick’s (1990) research identified five organisational outcomes consisting of persistence, buffering, adaptability, satisfaction and

effectiveness. *Persistence*, the ability to maintain stability through loose coupling, refers to the selective and varying adherence to the policy and rules according to need and supervision. Decoupling can maintain stability through deliberate disengagement of the institutional norms and expectations. Decoupling allows for alternative sites to buffer and "hide" activities (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). This embedded agency can work even under the constraint of institutions (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Buffering, the ability to decouple, is a means to offer symbolic responses to conform to expectations *and* ensure the appearance of legitimacy (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). Buffering behaviours offer opportunities to decouple in organisations such as schools where measuring productivity can be difficult (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977). There are some areas that cannot be buffered, and those may offer mixed results. Some of the beneficial outcomes result in satisfaction through addressing the conflict, security and efficacy. In essence, loose coupling offers flexibility; tight coupling offers stability, and to be completely distinctive is to be fully decoupled (Orton & Weick, 1990).

Adaptability is the ability to choose how and when to couple and decouple. Therefore, "buffering need not be a purely symbolic, strategic, or static reaction; it can be a contingent, evolving, and interactive response" (Sauder & Espeland, 2009, p. 79) capable of providing autonomy for Outreach schools. Adaptability offers schools independence and understanding through sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) behaviours. *Satisfaction* refers to the higher satisfaction between organisations and individuals, evident with buffering and coupling methods. The organisation has some freedom within the jurisdiction to balance legitimacy and autonomy. *Effectiveness* of loose coupling becomes evident in the short and long term ability of the organisation (school) to balance need and freedom to operate. Loose coupling and decoupling are a means of developing agency in institutional power relations (Waite, 2010; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Both loose coupling and decoupling require initial institutional autonomy and opportunity found in school-based leadership.

Douglas Orton and Karl Weick's (1990) research identified the costs and benefits that must be balanced between autonomy and stability with organisations moving along the continuum according to need and context. Their work identifies a mechanism to balance the power of the organisation with sub-members within the organisation. The ability of Outreach schools to create a unique culture, formulate policy and operate outside the bounds of standard practice results in issues with power and control.

Outreach schools are challenged by the concepts of structure, legitimacy, influence, isomorphism and agency. These schools as members of an organisation have found ways to operate within the confines of established structure. Behaviours of the schools such as isomorphism serve to provide agency through legitimacy conferring influence and autonomy. These schools continue to struggle to find the balance between independence and stability; often power relations drive this balance.

Power and Control

"Persuading people to participate in their own subjection […] can be seen as a cunningly efficient ruse of domination. However, it can equally be argued that the ability to regulate and conduct oneself is in fact the very basis of autonomy and freedom" **(**Gallagher, 2008, p.78). Gallagher's identification of self-regulate as freedom and power to is similar to the desired behaviours of Outreach schools. The tensions between Outreach schools and governing bodies have a natural connection to the power dynamics of organisations. With organisational studies, the inevitability of conflict and conflicting needs can identify issues of power and status in relationships. Power and status attained by certain schools encourage other schools to adopt similar behaviours to gain status by proxy (Mukherji, 2009), which can threaten diversity. The need to support student learning and educational policy can result in competing interests where schools must make difficult decisions (Waite, 2010). I have divided this section into the topics of structures of power, power relations and conflict.

Organisations are imbedded in structures of power and power relations, and schools are no exception. Power is maintained as a means to keep order

(Mukherji, 2009) through legislation, professionalization and administrative control (Rowan, 1982). Bureaucracy revolves around hierarchy, impersonality, written rules of conduct, expectation of achievement, division of labour and efficiency (Ricken, 2006; Elwell, 1996), all of which are imbedded in organisational and/or legitimate power. Legitimate power is often seen as a coercive tool for manipulation and remains the standard interpretation of power relations (Ricken, 2006). Such a dated means of interpreting power dynamics in schools misses the notion that legitimate power is often based on norms (Kimberly & Zucker, 1973). In cases where power takes diverse forms or is widely dispersed (Gallagher, 2008), such as in Outreach schools, power relations become less ordered and predictable.

Power should be seen as more than just the “possession” of private or social capital. The complex nature of power contains causality (Ricken, 2006); that is, power has consequences on the operation of the school. There is a duality of opposition that exists in power dynamics that is often associated with negativity (Ricken, 2006). However, power is open to the interpretation of the individual and the organisation (Ricken, 2006). As such, power plays an important role in supporting and subjugating organisations and individuals.

Power has been theorized as “social control” (Gallagher, 2008; Foucault, 1975) operating through cultural and symbolic means (Liukkonen, 2008). The normalizing behaviours of comparing, differentiating, stratifying, categorizing conforming and segregating (Foucault, 1975) embed disciplinary power and ranking as tools in schools (Sauder & Espeland, 2009), amplifying anxiety and resistance. Power must be enacted in order for power to exist. Schools experience this through, political, cultural, economic and social legitimacy pressures and controlled access to resources (Gallagher, 2008). As social interactions take place, competition for resources and power occur (Liukkonen, 2008). Schools that can attain capital are recognised, resulting in the formal and informal ordering of schools and staff. The final result can be the domination of organisations by others (Liukkonen, 2008). In seeking organisational stability, schools seek an

established, predictable power dynamic with the inevitable result of power for some and not others.

Conflict occurs as a natural extension of power relations. Definitions of conflict tend to consist of "descriptions of the antecedents of conflict or the conditions under which it can occur, not what conflict is" (Barki & Hartwick, 1993, p. 217). Cannon and Griffith (2007) offer a more practical working description of conflict, where "two or more parties perceive their interests, behaviours, or attitudes as mutually incompatible" (p. 173). Recognition of conflict as a "productive way of making progress towards the organization's objectives" (Marra & Holmes, 2004, p. 441) reduces some of the negative associations of conflict in education.

Educational conflict emerges on several levels: within the school, between schools, between the school and central administration, and the school and its governing bodies. Conflict in schools revolves around the same central issues of autonomy and legitimacy but is tempered according to power relations. The larger the variation in power, the more likely the power dynamic will result in concessionary behaviours such as avoidance and accommodation (Brockman, Nunez, & Basu, 2010). The reduction of organisational disruption through avoidance and accommodation are driven in part by normative, regulatory and cultural-conflict pressures and processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2004) that work to produce conformity.

With regulatory conflict, schools operate with a clear understanding of resource dependency and the ruling relations of governing bodies. Regulatory power is manifest through economic, bureaucratic, legal and social mechanisms. As an effective means of controlling behaviours, organisations can deliberately create systemic environments that promote and sustain governing and intimidation behaviours (Stevenson, Randle & Grayling, 2006). These environments can operate with a construct of power that results in submission and will create avoidance and/or withdrawal behaviours of its members (Dijkstra, van Dierendonck & Evers, 2005). Secondly**,** normative conflict uses the drive for status and significance to systemically encourage organisations to model other

successful organisations. The normative behaviours of these organisations can take place without the following organisation understanding why the behaviours originated. The conflict occurs within the organisation; as the organisation becomes more like others, its significance increases and its identity decreases. Finally, cultural-cognitive conflict, the functioning within the confines of beliefs, norms and rules (Scott, 2008), tends to be difficult for institutions that need to be highly divergent. Actions that run contra to an established "standard" belief system are problematic for schools that choose to diverge paths from the expected. The power of embeddedness, preservation and persistence (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996) place alternative schools in a crisis of self-vindication. Cultural pressures of mainstream schools can exclude alternative models. A clear vulnerability exists in the tendency for organisations to seek consensus and the resulting convergence behaviours (De Cock & Jeanes, 2006).

"Rarely is a series of interactions solely based on objective, rational dialogue about the topic of interest; the negotiation of disagreements is as much about establishing connections between individuals who carry multiple group memberships, as it is about finding solutions" (Proudford & Smith, 2003, p. 39) highlights the complexity and significance conflict in organisational models. De Cock and Jeanes (2006) recognise the importance of conflict, pluralism and diversity providing healthy rigour to organisations. As such, Outreach schools exist like their students: in the margins. The tendency for natural competition beyond the issues of scarcity and status (Lumby & Morrison, 2006) complicates the matter and identifies the deep and intricate nature of social interaction and power relations (Roy, 2006). Further, within organisations exists a conflict of efficient performance and institutional requirements (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) resulting in "socially legitimate albeit inefficient organizations" (Scott, 2008, p. 436).

Current Alberta Organisational Documents

The evidence of organisational documents was gathered from two primary sources. The first area consisted of information from outside the jurisdiction including Government of Alberta and Alberta Teacher Association public

documents and references. The specific Alberta Education documents reviewed consist of The *School Act* (R.S.A 2000), *Alberta Education's Guide to Education* (2013), *Outreach Programs Handbook* (2009), the *Alternative Programs Handbook* (2003), the *Action Agenda 2011-2014* (2010a), *Curriculum Redesign - Understanding the shifts* (2011) and the news release "Alberta Empowers More Students to Succeed" (2013). In conjunction with the government documents my review also included Alberta Teacher's Association research and documents. The documents included *The Impact of Digital Technologies on Teachers Working in Flexible Learning Environments* (2011), *The Future of Teaching in Alberta* (2011), *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* (2012) and finally, *The Changing Landscapes in co-creating a Learning Alberta* (2011). The second source for the documents was from within the district, consisting of the division's "Three Year Education Plan", school and division information booklets, the division and school websites, public board meeting minutes relating to Outreach education and school level documents and publications.

The High School Flexibility Enhancement program, consisting of no longer linking credits to instructional time, has moved from a speculative pilot of 16 schools to over 100 participating schools in Alberta, including all Calgary Board of Education high schools (Alberta Education, 2013c). The nature of change has been highlighted in the *Action Agenda*, which stipulates revisions in curriculum, inclusionary behaviours, teaching and leadership, legislation and research (Alberta Education, 2010a). The concept of transformation was referred to in numerous Alberta Education documents, in particular documents identifying ECS–12 educational delivery (Alberta Education, 2010a, Alberta Education, 2013a). The specific areas of "transforming" consist of: assessing and reporting student learning, curriculum development and implementation, digital technologies and learning, inclusive education, optimal conditions of practice, differentiation, professional development, public assurance, school leadership, teacher leadership, early learning, governance and community (*A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta*, 2012). Further, the transformational process has begun to reevaluate the structure and behaviours of jurisdictions,

schools and teachers' roles in schools. The changes reorient organisations to becoming less system focused and more centered on the learner, a reducing of content and increasing competency, moving to a more flexible curriculum and to reforming student assessment (Alberta Education, 2011a). *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* (2012) also reiterates this transformational approach at the school level, identifying the behaviors to be centered on the "teach less, learn more… test less, learn better" (p. 11) approach.

A key part of the transformational model consists of the notion of personalization. Alberta Education (2010b) uses the term personalized learning in setting out its vision for educational transformation in Alberta by finding "ways to personalize learning and provide learning opportunities with flexible timing and pacing in a range of learning environments, while maintaining high student expectations" (Alberta Education, 2010a, p. 7). The *Outreach Program Handbook* outlines that, each school is unique, created to meet the specific needs of its students and, as such, "Outreach programs are, by definition and practice, different from regular school programs" (p. 8). These differences are valuable and perplexing for learners, staff and school jurisdictions (*Outreach Program Handbook*, 2009). The inherent and fundamental personalization behaviours bring Outreach learning into direct alignment with the process of change taking place in Alberta. The school *District Information Booklet* (2013), "District website" and "School website" also show alignment to these personalisation mandates. The organisational behaviours of district Outreach schools consist of a "flexible, individualized approach" (District Website, 2013) with "a more flexible approach to instruction" (School Website, 2013); the district and school websites also highlight the relational environment of the school paired with the flexibility of pace and attendance requirements. The school supports this statement by explicitly stating that "we believe: all students can be successful, all students have a right to education, that learning rates, styles, and abilities vary from individual to individual, that learning takes place in multiple settings" (School Website, 2013, para. 6).

Legislation was another notable topic that became apparent through the document review. The mandated and expected behaviours of Outreach schools were very clearly articulated. To maintain the uniqueness of the Outreach schools the *Alternative Programs Handbook* (2003) directs specific behaviours. Schools are required to have consistent and sustainable "educational approach that affects the entire schooling experience of a child" (*Alternative Programs Handbook*, 2003, p. 6) and the development of a unique culture with a focus on the "specific educational interests or needs of students and their parents"(p. 16). Further, the *Outreach Program Handbook* (2009) requires outreach schools to provide an educational alternative with supports such as "personal and career counselling, conflict resolution and anger management techniques, time management and study skills, parenting skills, learning strategies and addictions counselling" (p. 8). The *Guide to Education* (2013) encourages "students to access resources that improve their ability to succeed academically and socially. A flexible approach is taken to teaching and learning in recognition of individual student need" (p. 67). The school district's "Three Year Ed Plan" (2013) prioritizes embracing uniqueness, critical thinking and problem solving, safe and caring work with the goal of success for every student. These documents demonstrate a strong coupling and alignment to the legislated behaviours of Outreach schools.

The benefits and challenges of these schools were highlighted in the *Outreach Program Handbook* (2009) and require mention as they relate directly to research findings. According to the handbook, the benefits to students consist of: customization, flexibility of pace and attendance, extended hours, relational development, and a better chance of success with "access to specialized training and support services" (p. 9). Benefits to staff include: low student/teacher ratio, greater success rates, less discipline issues, and a chance to "assist students to realize their goals and have confidence in their own abilities" (Outreach Program Handbook, p. 9). The research paper of the ATA identifies teachers working in outreach settings as "more satisfied with the support they receive than their face-to-face and primarily digitally mediated colleagues" (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011a, p. 8).

Some of the challenges Outreach schools experience are noted in the *Impact of Digital Technologies* document (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011a) which noted the need for physical, emotional and academic readiness for learning, which is a problem for Outreach students as they are often missing the appropriate depth and/or development for such learning. Students experience a wide variety of challenges consisting of, developing self-discipline, learning to use flexibility to their advantage, overcoming previous negative experiences and establishing realistic goals (*Outreach Program Handbook*, 2009). The challenges experienced by Outreach staff are similar to the challenges experienced by teachers in traditional schools. Staff challenges consist of balancing personal and professional time and the importance of creating boundaries for teachers (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011a), motiving students, dealing with heavy marking loads, expectation for a wide variety of subject expertise, experienced isolation, "diverse mental, physical and emotional needs of students" (*Outreach Program Handbook*, 2009, p. 11) and the wide variety of roles outreach teachers are expected to assume (*Outreach Program Handbook*, 2009; Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011a). Teachers experienced inequities such as feeling "they should have the same level of flexibility with respect to scheduling their work as do their students" (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011a, p. 29) in digitally mediated environments. Further, school jurisdictions were challenged with issues of funding, provision of needed supports and services, tracking students, selecting appropriate staff, and "justifying the value of an Outreach program to the community" (*Outreach Program Handbook*, 2009, p. 11).

The review also identified a series of trends currently taking place and projected trends for the future of Alberta. The ATA article, "The Future of Teaching in Alberta" (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011c) identified the *greying* of the population with the continued dependence on primary resources that results in consumptive, high material expectations even with the awareness of environmental unsustainability and impending environmental crisis (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011c). The *Changing Landscapes in co-creating a Learning Alberta* document (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011b) supports the

argument that a province with high resource dependence paired with our current funding model could mean high fiscal uncertainty for years to come. Further, the impact of globalization and the broadening of learning opportunities have and will result in rethinking the notions of citizenship and civil society. Finally, the document identifies the development of a fluid personal identity as a result of blurred boundaries and emerging technologies.

Emerging technologies have also been associated with intensification of childhood (McCrae, 2010) and creation of learning partnerships, including the privatization of learning, that continue to be trends in Alberta (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011c). The Future of *Teaching in Alberta* (2011) document refers to the importance of personal identities and the changing nature of the workplace, also noting a continued increase in screen time and expansion of the digital divide (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011c). The trends of globalization of the work force and economic pressures have continued to transform and mechanize the process of learning as a product. Broadening learning opportunities will capture learning outside classrooms and the importance of the physical space of schools will diminish as the importance of media literacy continues to climb (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2011c).

My literature review has noted several relevant areas for further research. First, a gap exists in researching the long-term effectiveness of Outreach education models. Outreach schools work to meet the needs for a diverse population with diverse needs, and more research is necessary to identify the impact on the students of these schools over a long term. Secondly, Knutson (1996) explores the need to study the availability and effectiveness of middle school alternative programming. Much of the research is directed at high school completion and many unanswered questions regarding alternative middle school operations exist. Research into the operations and existence of junior high programs is important to understanding the continuum of alternative educational models. Outreach is an alternative program where some students are not offered choice. This poses certain problems for students and schools and has been a discussion point in some of the research; this seems to be an area that can and

should be further investigated specific to Outreach educational models. Finally, the question of the adequacy and effectiveness of measures of alternative schools requires further investigation, as the school's instructional focus may be different than that of standardized school measures of performance (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

The simple presence of mainstream schools exerts a natural pressure on Outreach schools. The sheer number and size of mainstream schools relative to Outreach schools offer significant differences in influence and ability to sustain existence. As identified in the previous sections, this dynamic drives the creation of structures as a means of developing legitimacy.

Summary

Outreach education works in the margins for the populations in the margins. These types of schools have a highly developed culture that values the individual, and as such, embraces diversity. The schools experience pressures by the presence of large mainstream schools. While mainstream and alternative education models carry the same fundamental goal using differing means to educate young people, Outreach schooling works to establish a generalised diversity with less typical educational norms. Both mainstream and alternative schools exert pressure on each other; the mainstream model offers power and stability and alternative education offers uniqueness and autonomy. This has resulted in the blurring of distinctions and the creation of characteristics that model each system, including regulatory, normative and cultural changes. Tension between systems may be experienced when schools are involuntarily driven to resemble other successful or effective schools (isomorphism) to gain value and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Both types of schools are further regulated through social structures (structuration) that apply determined norms and rules (Giddens, 1984).

Isomorphic pressure on schools does not seem to be deliberate but operates as a response to the complexity of the organisations and their interactions (Organisational Theory). The tendency for schools to be publicly compared, involved in resource competition, regulated by authorities, culturally embedded

members, and experiencing power dynamics can result in a tacit drive for sameness. This undercurrent of conformity=stability=legitimacy is problematic for alternative schools. Alternative schools find it difficult to maintain diversity as they themselves may be driven by the notion of “typical” alternative educational practices. The isomorphic pressure from mainstream education is driven by regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive behaviours (Scott, 2004). The response from alternative schools is loose coupling where the school finds ways to systematically buffer external pressures (Weick, 1999). Buffering allows schools to engage and disengage when necessary and is demonstrated by most organisations within and outside of the educational sector. The ability to redirect these pressures offers more effectiveness for schools to do their job, higher career satisfaction and the ability to adapt to changing needs.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

I just like being able to spend more time with the kids, right. Because for me, the kids are why I'm here. Sometimes I say, if the grown-ups would just stay away, our school would be a whole lot nicer place.

(Sarah, p.5)

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section one outlines my research paradigm and examines the ontological and epistemological approach I used to investigate the pressures experienced by Outreach schools. In the second section, research method, I identify the rationale for the mechanisms of inquiry I have chosen. In the next section, I include the specific research instruments and data collection procedures used. At the end of this chapter I review how trustworthiness was established for this study.

Research Paradigm

Our perceived world is understood and influenced by personally held beliefs, behaviours and tacit understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to understand the logic behind my choice of methodology and method, the reader must first understand my ontological and epistemological positioning. As previously mentioned, my ontology is relativist in nature, accepting the existence of multiple truths or realities (Guba, 1990). My social constructivist epistemology acts as to construct *individual* meaning through experince. This paradigm "recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject outright some notion of objectivity" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545).

Social Constructivism and Research

I am continuously challenged to rethink assumptions regarding the way in which schools prepare students for the standardizing, conforming pressures of education. I approach the notion of *understanding* from a social constructivist perspective. I find deep value in the construction of personal meaning and understanding, allowing for endless worldviews (Guba, 1990). A constructivist perspective identifies that developmental learning (Piaget, 1928) is created through experience and emotional or cognitive readiness (Blair, 2002). In this way, it is appropriate for the learner to be "wrong", and the construction of

meaning becomes the process where incompatibilities and discrepancies are reconciled (Lamanauskas, 2010). My research embraces social interaction as a way of knowing and creating meaning.

Constructivism is a naturalistic means of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that understands humans as the active makers of knowledge. Constructivists believe we do not discover knowledge but, in fact, create it (Williams & Morrow, 2009; Baxter & Jack, 2008). That is, meaning and understandings are created by the ways in which we interpret and understand events and experiences, thus knowledge is not "'found' or 'discovered' from existing facts but constructed as the invention of an active engaging mind" (Rudestam & Newton, 2007, p. 35). The social constructivist creates meaning through the social exchange process (Rudestam & Newton, 2007) where mindfulness/sensemaking plays a role in understanding relationships of and between organisations and individuals (Weick, 1974; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). The process of constructivist research establishes a "fit" with the information or the data to ensure "the constructions 'work' or provide a credible level of understanding" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.179). Using a constructivist lens through which to view this research provides me with the opportunity to construct meaning from the data and the experiences I bring to the research as a former Outreach educator.

I believe "we are all influenced by our history and cultural context, which, in turn, shape our view of the world, the forces of creation, and the meaning of truth" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, p. 2). Constructivist perspectives assert there is not one objective reality; rather many constructions of reality exist (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). Constructivism is widely used in social sciences to investigate the unmeasureable. This relativist epistemology can be seen as a dualism of internal and external realities where social "reality" is not driven by natural sciences (Canaparo, 2012). That is, "the world consists of multiple individual realities influenced by context" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, p. 2). This belief acknowledges:

> existence of an autonomous reality world called nature, (2) the 'clear evidence' that this nature has its own organization and logic and (3) the

> 'unquestionable fact' that human knowledge's aim is to provide tools to represent that world reality. Constructivism then is an approach that discards these assumptions at the same time as it attempts to develop a credible alterative to knowledge. (Canaparo, 2012, p.186)

The literature review has made me aware of the shortcomings and tensions of this framework. First, the question of trust is raised when using a relative epistemology to frame an investigation. “The possibility that the development of (our) knowledge constructions itself may contribute to generating self-fulfilling effects” (Romm, 2002, p. 496) required me to be continuously aware that this possibility may confound the findings of the study. Confidence in this approach, however, can be earned through means of establishing methodological trustworthiness. It has been also noted that this type of research has an untestable character, that is, it is difficult to reproduce the findings with any certainty. Romm (2002) responded to this critique by acknowledging “stories are designed to open up new (unexplored) possibilities for seeing and acting, they cannot meaningfully be judged in terms of the (imperialist) adoption of realist-oriented criteria for assessing ‘scientific’ accountability” (p.461). That is, we create out own and personal meanings of the world around us.

“Constructivism emphasizes the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant, and the co-construction of meaning” (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, p. 2). Thus the researcher and the event being researched are simultaneously impacting each other resulting in the construction of new meanings. Further, the selection of Institutional Theory (DiMaggio, Walter & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995) is my way of engaging with the rich social interactions driven through pressure, legitimacy and conformity. The space of alternative education is also related to my framework as the high personalisation and opportunity for independence aligns with my own epistemology.

Further, as neoinstitutionalist I see how organisations *act* in response to the rules and the actors in the environment. Organizational isomorphism accounts for change in institutions and the heterogeneity of members and practices in fields

(Scott, 2008). Thus, a neoinstitutional lens identifies how schools are treated by each other and the resulting pressures exerted upon each school. As an administrator, I was also particularly interested in practical applications of these findings in my own school and context. I directed my focus towards governmental and jurisdictional pressures with assumption of the intent to conform.

My methodological approach makes use of qualitative research methodologies in the form of a case study. I use case study to examine the specific ways in which Outreach schools address pressures of legitimacy through conformity. The value of meaning over the measure (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) allows room for the complexity and subtlety of organisational behaviours. Educational organisations are highly relational structures and qualitative inquiry affords the opportunity to capture the essence of the interaction and experience. Further, qualitative research contains naturalistic and descriptive data with no intention to prove or disprove (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this way, the qualitative approach accepts human experience and allows me to engage personally within my question (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Quantitative work, while valuable in its own right and an important partner for qualitative research, has less capacity to register experience and can reduce individuals to subjects and numbers (Denzin et al., 2006). The diminished opportunity to measure individual differences through quantitative methods (Rudestam & Newton, 2007), in the social sciences in particular, encouraged me to gather information from experience and understanding in the more suited qualitative research domain.

Research Method

The use of case study is an appropriate and effective means to research my question. Case study research has a high compatibility with constructivism, as it “builds on hermeneutics, that is, on understanding a phenomenon” (Kyburz-Graber, 2004, p. 54) and gathers information about interactions of groups (Corcoran, Walker & Arjen, 2004). Case studies are good means of research especially if:

> focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545)

The use of case study and, specifically, interview, focus groups and the literature review are methods often used together to answer questions of *how* and *why* in complex and fluid environments (Corcoran, Walker & Arjen). Case study offers a window into school operations and behaviours, in essence providing a snapshot of ongoing and evolving interactions (Lincoln & Guba 1994). The case study can be employed for explanatory, descriptive and exploratory (Yin, 1999) types of research; all of which address my questions of what and how in Outreach schools. Case study as a means of inquiry allows the exploration of the topic from the inside and views the question in its real life context (Yin, 1997). A case study allows room for interdependencies and complex social processes between groups (Dopson, 2003). The case study is bounded by different parameters (Yin, 2009), for this research social interaction and functioning of the two Outreach schools within its environment act is its natural arena. The edges of this case study are the interactions with the school and the school jurisdiction (central office). This is important as the study of the organisation can help to reveal the behaviours of the schools and the members within.

Corcoran, Walker and Arjen (2004) identified four critical considerations for institutional educational case studies. These considerations consist of having a *purpose*, the clear rationale for the inquiry; an understanding of the *role* of the players, the power base and diverging interests; recognition of *tensions* from "within and across institutions" (p. 12); and the *challenge* of the researcher in terms of institutional change. Further, they postulate the researcher can "compare institutions in an effort to identify practices that work and those that do not" (Corcoran, Walker & Arjen, p. 11). Finally, case studies can be readily triangulated, can display a richness of data and can consist of a single study (Yin,

1997). Thus, the use of case study was a good choice to examine the perceived pressures taking place in Outreach schools.

Primary criticisms of case study methodology consist of non-generalizability, researcher influence (Diefenbach, 2008), and data saturation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Responses to *how* and *why* questions tend to be highly contextual (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). As such, qualitative research requires a reduction of generalizability for a depth of understanding (Diefenbach, 2008) and "explain[s] the causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies" (Dopson, 2011, p. 218). Researcher influence can be addressed by understanding the impact of the researcher's bias on the study and through disciplined and deliberate research methods. The researcher must be aware of the presence of the power dynamic and the way in which certain questions can shape responses of respondents. Finally, data saturation generally can be addressed by keeping a specific focus on the research questions.

Research Instruments

This case study collected evidence using interviews, focus groups and participant-observation (Yin, 1984). As mentioned, the case study aligns well with the constructivist paradigm (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Accepting the truth as relative and dependent on the individual's perspective (Baxter & Jack 2008) allows the notion of objectivity in subjective analysis through discipline (Yin, 2003). Research data were gathered through a duo-case study of two separate Outreach schools in Alberta, consisting of one-time, open-ended student focus groups and two semi-directed interviews for individual staff members. During the visits I spent time onsite observing the interactions and behaviours of the members of the schools. The study drew on a cross-section of students and staff to examine the schools' "point in time" response, where I was able to identify the deep complexity of interaction and contextual behaviour in schools.

The interviews are an important part of eliciting personal experience and were conducted in a semi-structured format with the same questions asked of each staff member. The interviews took place with the school staff and site administration, at each location, with a second follow-up interview for member

checking and furthering the conversation. Gathering in-depth information requires the flexibility *and* organisation of semi-structured interviews, as “semi-structured interviews do not assume that the researcher anticipates enough of the answers to be able to pre-format the questions” (Nicols & Griffith, 2009, p. 240). This allowed my questions to “move” with the participants’ responses (Hancock, 1998). Regardless of the possible impact of cultural scripting on the interviewees’ responses, the interview can provide unique and otherwise unattainable information (Diefenbach, 2008).

Research integrity was maintained by asking the same question several ways, asking different people the same question and triangulating with literature (Diefenbach, 2008) and focus group responses. Transcripts were shared with the respondents for clarification, to address omissions, gather further input, identify any errors and provide an opportunity to revise their responses if necessary. During the second interview cycle I discussed the original transcript with participants and checked my understanding and their understanding of the questions of and their responses to them. The first and second interview lasted no more than one hour and took place at the school. The interview was intended to learn about the respondents’ view of alternate education and the link to the behaviours of such schools. The questions consisted of essential, confirmation and secondary questions related to alternative education’s uniqueness, sameness, institutional behaviours, and the school’s construction of legitimacy.

The focus groups offered me an opportunity to interact with students and allow voice for the “student perspective”. Focus groups are a “collective process of negotiation and signification [and] is a dynamic, interpersonal process, entirely dependent on the particular social and cultural assumptions offered by the group’s participants” (Nicols & Griffith, 2009, p. 642). The focus groups consisted of six students at each school, and encouraged group interaction open to feelings, perceptions and opinions (Hancock, 1998). The focus groups lasted no more than one hour and also took place at the schools. They provided the opportunity for respondents to offer non-scripted, personal and group insights.

Sampling occurs on two levels in case studies, the specific case and the participants in the case itself (Merriam, 1998). The challenge of gathering a suitable case was based on access and availability (Diefenbach, 2008). The participants in the interviews and focus groups were not intended to be a representative sample, rather a human “sample that will provide appropriate and adequate insight into people’s experience of the world, using people who offer depth and richness to our explanations” (Nicols, 2009, p. 639). The criteria for sampling in case studies are usually purposeful with an emphasis on "those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn" (Stake, 1995, p. 447). With this in mind the focus group demographic consisted of a two voluntary, self-selected samples, one from each school. The focus group included only “school age” students (14-20 years old) who were currently registered at the school where the focus group was taking place. It was difficult to get an adequate group together due to problems with getting permissions back to the school and having the same students at school at the same time. This resulted in a simple convenience grouping of students fitting the age demographic. Both of the focus groups had male and female respondents who were regular students at their school. Focus Group 1(Greenhills) had one female and Focus Group 2 (Sunny View) had two females. Due to the previously mentioned issues with gathering students at the same place at the same time, I did not sample for gender balance although I had originally planned to do so. Each focus group took place during the school day over the lunch hour in the school. Two previous meeting cancellations took place, in one of the schools, as gathering the students to meet at the same time was problematic due to the nature of the Outreach attendance policies.

The staff data were the result of purposive sampling and were also gathered from the same Outreach schools. The schools were both led by the same administrator and had some overlap in staffing. As part of member checking four of the seven staff participants later redacted information from the data. Information removed was primarily related to organisational behaviours/interactions among Outreach, central office and other schools. Two of the redacted comments related to other schools not within the district. The reasons

for the removal of the comments were not explicitly stated but it could be inferred they related to job security and political-social reasons as the topics redacted were generally strongly worded and could be interpreted as critical.

Data Analysis

As mentioned, the four considerations for institutional educational case studies; purpose, role, tensions and challenge (Corcoran, Walker & Arjen, 2004) were used as ways to analyze and examine my data. I ensured the existence of a clear rationale for the inquiry (*purpose).* My questions explored power dynamics and the diverging interests of the players (*role)*. The understanding that "data analysis is largely inductive, allowing meaning to emerge from the data" (Kisely & Kendall, 2011, p. 364) helped to frame the way I gathered and reviewed data. The data were driven by observation, to patterning, to a tentative hypothesis and possible theory. The findings are based on my interpretation of the evidence and are not certain truth but are presented as probable. Data sources consisted of interviews, focus groups, and a review of current literature. The data were collected in three stages: the face-to-face interviews, the focus group from both schools and the literature review. Follow-up interviews gathered any additional information from the participants and transcripts of the interviews were shared with the respondents to ensure correctness. Data were analyzed and reviewed at each stage. The data were audio recorded, transcribed and coded to identify emergent themes.

The detail of the case study will be elaborated in Chapter 4. As a basic understanding of the data analysis it is helpful to understand the demographics and context of the schools. The data were collected from 2 Outreach schools in the same district. The schools had small student populations of less than 200 registered students each. The staff consisted of 4 teachers (1 male, 3 female), 2 female support staff and 1 male administrator. Each school had three staff with the principal moving from one school to the other. There were two interviews of each of the staff separated by 3 months. The interviews were staggered over 5 months.

No record was made of nonverbal communications during the focus group or interviews. By default the transcription and coding process also served to decontextualize some of the conversation by transferring the recording to print. Expressive social behaviours such as laughter and facial expressions were lost. Careful attention was paid to the consensus and dissent of members (Yin, 1993) of the focus groups with an awareness of those who did not respond. Silent members were encouraged to contribute by direct questioning, eye contact and pausing. I directed conversation but allowed the respondents to “move” as they responded to the questions. For those who did not contribute to specific questions, I did not assume consent. The process was iterative and I made use of specific steps to the coding and interpretation. Crabtree and Miller’s (1992) analytic approach of using quasi-statistical word and phrase frequencies was part of this process, however little attempt was made to use numerical footing of the responses in the findings and analysis, as the quantity of responses was not a primary means to identifying importance. I used a flexible review of the data to allow codes to be emergent.

The process of interpreting the data began with an initial read and a construction of open or naive coding (Nicols, 2009). Naive coding allows for an initial impression of the landscape of responses (Appendix M). The next stage consisted of thematic coding of data (Appendix N) where the data are reviewed line by line to identify initial categories, dimensions and range of the responses (Williams & Morrow, 2009). During the period of thematic coding, I looked for major and minor themes (Hancock, 1998). Axial analysis (Appendix O) used selective coding as the process of integrating and refining categories, which were “organized around central explanatory concepts that represent[ed] the main themes that emerge[d] during the research” (Williams & Morrow, 2009, p. 127).

The process of coding, sampling, finding themes, and building conceptual models (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) involved the use of a codebook to provide transparency and offer a natural audit trail (Appendix P). The construction of a conceptual model involved understanding the experiences and responses of the participants to make meaningful relationships with Organisational Theory and my

research questions. This was followed by reduction where the essential meanings were recompiled through analysis of the responses. During this stage the essential meanings of the responses were then rebuilt from themes to my understandings of what organisational behaviours were taking place in the two Outreach schools.

The data collection process ensured respect and dignity for all persons through ethical collection practices to minimize the risks associated with my research. I respected and protected the communities (*Qualitative Research Methods Field Guide*, 2000), through the university ethics review. I involved informed consent and guaranteed participants the right to withdraw until January 31, 2013. The collection ensured confidentiality through pseudonyms, data security via an encrypted laptop computer and a non-web based storage device and reduction of any identifying data. Finally audio-recorded data were deleted upon completion of transcription.

Unexpected Changes

I encountered some challenges with the research and data collection. I knew it would be difficult to find enough students willing to participate in the research. I did not sense the problem would be from mistrust or disinterest but rather more of a logistics problem. After several false starts I made arrangements to designate standby days where I would be ready to travel if the schools reached enough students at the same time. The principal of the school made arrangements to check in and contact me when the students were available. When I did gather the appropriate groups from both schools the students were eager to talk but may not have accurately represented all students at the Outreach schools. I encountered another unexpected challenge, as I did not fully appreciate the staff apprehension that would be involved when gathering data that might be contra to the district philosophy. This eventually lead up to a meeting with the principal and participating in a follow-up staff meeting to remind the participants of their rights, my responsibilities as a researcher, and confirming the means of ensuring anonymity. As a result the staff participated but some, understanding and exercising their rights, redacted various comments during the member checks. The research findings were interesting, though not what I had expected they

would be from personal experiences, discussed further in Chapter 5. Finally, some of the data were gathered during a holiday, which impacted the available time and created some logistics issues.

Trustworthiness

This research gathered data from the case study of this examination not only proposed to "see" what is happing in schools but was also filling an explanatory role. Explanatory case studies mean "(a) documenting (and interpreting) a set of outcomes, and then (b) trying *to explain how those outcomes came about"* (Yin, 2013, p.322). To do so the research must have trustworthiness, requiring investigator competence, training and experience (Guba, 1981). Qualitative research reconceptualises the quantitative measures of validity, reliability and generalizability as indicators of good research (Carcary, 2009) by focusing on the notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to establish trustworthiness. With this type of accountability, the researcher must be intentional; "flexible and contextual; …[be] accountable for its quality and claims; … engage in critical scrutiny or active reflexivity and produce convincing arguments" (Carcary, 2009, p. 13).

Credibility, the idea that the study examines what is intended (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), can be addressed through the use of a variety of strategies such as the use of well-established research methods and demonstrating a familiarity with the organisation being researched (Shenton, 2003). Credibility can be further maintained by the use of frequent debriefing with a critical friend, the presence of peer scrutiny, member checks, the use of thick and contextual description (Shenton, 2003; Kisely & Kendall, 2011), and an examination of previous findings (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

To maintain credibility of this research I met with my university supervisor throughout the process to confirm and challenge choice making in the research process. Member checks with the staff offered reliability. Member checking took place on two occasions, once in person after the transcript of the first interview was shared and a second time via email after the second transcript was created. The use of a well-known research method, case study, naturally

provided “numerous strategies that promote data credibility or ‘truth value’” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556) shown in the rich description, gathering of data directly from respondents and participation of focus groups.

Transferability, sometimes referred to as applicability, is the idea that findings can be applied beyond the specific context of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The understanding that the research is highly specific and contextualized does not reduce the ability “to expand and generalize theories” (Yin, 2003, p. 52) that can then be accessed by a wider group of researchers (Yin, 2009). The notion of transferability in qualitative research can pose problems for making broad and uniform predictions (Guba, 1981), especially when case studies of small contextualized groups cannot accurately represent all similar groups. In addition to the collected data, rich contextual information allows the reader to determine the extent to which the findings from the study can apply to other contexts and examples.

Dependability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the consistency and accuracy of the research. The use of “overlapping methods” such as interviews and focus groups (Shenton, 2003), and the use of an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allow the reader to understand the way in which data were collected and interpreted. The ability to clearly, and in detail, state the research design, the means of gathering data and the reflections of the research provide high dependability (Shenton, 2003).

To ensure my research was dependable, I documented all of my decision-making regarding the interpretation, coding and respondent selection in an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The creation of an audit trail through the use of recorded transcripts and codebooks, that make the tracking of the decision-making transparent and evidentiary (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006), provides an opportunity for others to track and follow my research process (Nicols, 2009). The data was not followed by another researcher and as such is a limitation of the research. However, the process of creating the trail is of value, as it required regular careful note taking, reflection and attention to detail in a very specific and systematic way.

Confirmability is the "detailed methodological description [that] enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted" (Shenton, 2003, p. 72). This is once again resolved through the construction of an audit trail. Confirmability ensures the data, not the predispositions of the researchers, are being reflected (Shenton, 2003). Further, reflexiveness offers confirmability by offering:

> the balance needed between what the participants say and the ways in which the researchers interpret the meaning of the words. This balance relies heavily on both subjectivity and reflexivity. In acknowledging subjectivity, we acknowledge that all research is subjective, whether qualitative or quantitative. Bias enters the picture as soon as a research question is asked in a particular way, in a particular setting, by a particular person, for a particular reason. (Williams & Morrow, 2009 p. 579)

I ensured I recognised and declared the bias I introduced to the research. Further, I posed opportunities for others such as the respondents to ask questions about my interpretations and applications of the data collected from them. In my research I have been clear about my predispositions and have created an audit trail to review the analytical process of understanding my organisation and interpretation of the data.

Finally, triangulation is a very accessible and practical means to address the questions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yin (2013) also noted at least four types of triangulation, data source, analyst, theory/perspective, and methods triangulation. The data of this study were triangulated through the literature review and data source triangulation through the interview data and focus group responses. The triangulation through literature review compares "the empirical findings with the initially stipulated theoretical relationships, and … adds to the support for explaining how an intervention [is] produced (or not)" (Yin 2013, p. 324).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Alberta will be shaped by a greater emphasis on education than on the school; on the learner than on the system; on competencies than on content; on inquiry, discovery and the application of knowledge than on the dissemination of information; and on technology to support the creation and sharing of knowledge than on technology to support teaching.

(The *School Act*, RSA 2000)

The study of organisational interactions, regulations and pressures on alternative schools was driven by questions about the nature of alternative education and the institutional impact (and response) of alternative high schools to mainstream high school pressures. This chapter provides a detailed review of the findings and is divided into three sections. Section one provides a context of the study, the second section reviews the questions while framing the research, and section three highlights the coding process and the resulting themes.

Context of Case Study

The first interaction with the school jurisdiction was through its district office. I found the staff courteous and supportive of my study. The superintendent was welcoming and seemed interested in the direction of my research. The school district consisted of fewer than twenty schools with a wide variety of unique and specialized programs. The population of the jurisdiction was well over 4000 students and covered a wide geographic area. The Outreach schools selected were both located within rural settings. Once I had approval to study the schools, I was introduced to the principal who was responsible for all of the Outreach schools in the district. He too was interested in learning what this case study might mean for the schools. Through several meetings, I learned the Outreach schools had a demonstrated a long, sometimes tenuous existence within the district. The schools researched both offered daytime and evening classes. They both also reflected "typical" Outreach model behaviours including self-directed learning, a wide variety of course availability and high levels of flexibility. Both schools also offered high levels of one-to-one support through instruction, counselling and career planning. Both school populations consisted of a core group of regular attenders and a wider group of convenience attenders who would show up more

randomly for help and/or materials. The schools had recently begun summer school programs that had seen regular growth. One school had access to a local high school while the other did not.

Schools' Physical Space

The first thing I noticed about the schools was the physical space. The physical space offered insight into the beliefs, customs and activities that took place in these schools. The first school, Greenhills Outreach, was located in a strip mall with six other businesses attached. The exterior was unremarkable and did not look like a school. The school consisted of two retail lease spaces that had been joined together. A district Outreach school sign presided over the entrances although only one entrance was utilised. The school was located on a relatively active road. The parking lot, located in the front of the strip mall, was adequate but busy. Upon entering the school, the space seemed very welcoming and carried a calm and relaxed atmosphere. The front entrance opened to a desk occupied by a staff member responsible for greeting, gathering assignments, attendance and other administrative work. The inside walls held brochures for a wide variety of learning and post secondary opportunities, while a small photocopier and various files and papers sat beside the front desk.

When walking into the school the experience was comparable to seeing a modern one-room schoolhouse. The room consisted of a large open space with round tables filling most of the area. The room has been divided into the "front" and "back" spaces serving as two separate teaching areas. A handful of students sat at tables and around desks, some engaged in quiet in conversation while others focused on work. Each time I visited most of the students recognised me with a smile and/or eye contact as I wandered around the school. Those with whom I interacted directly were pleasant and helpful. The front "classroom" had a teacher desk facing the wall. Behind the teacher desk was another collection of file trays filled with various papers. Private cubicles lined the walls along with a variety of posters along the exterior walls. The back of this room, the "other classroom", held another teacher desk facing out with similar educational materials and bins for marking and recording. At this side of the room a doorway opened to the other

side of the leased space. This space also held several tables and desks. Computers were scattered about both rooms but were mostly along the walls. A teacher had established a workspace at one of the round tables with various papers, marking and module work scattered across the surface. The furniture in both rooms was worn but serviceable. The school had little use/need for smart boards and the school's whiteboards and bulletin boards served for posters and pragmatic lists and dates. At the very back of this room was another small area and passageway. This space may have been intended for storage but served as a quiet place for test taking and was used as a private space for the interviews. A small bathroom was located down a hall and a space at the back was set up for coffee and food.

The second school, Sunny View Outreach, was very similar in layout to Greenhills Outreach. The primary difference was the existence of more closed spaces in the school. The reception was similar, opening into a large room with a series of tables throughout. The room had a closed off space at the back with a series of windows looking in. This closed space served as a private classroom with nine desks and teacher desk in the room. The back of the main room had office materials, a fridge and a food preparation area. The dividing wall between the leased spaces held decorations and posters reminiscent of Greenhills. The second room had a teacher workstation and a small office occupied by the principal when he was at the school. I used this small office when we met for interviews and for the focus group work. The furniture was also dated and mismatched suggesting the hand-me-downs or leftover items. The feel from the staff and students at both sites was of an appreciation of their school. They seemed proud to show and share their school with me during my time there.

Physical space impacts the way in which organisations see and value their schools. Being a leased space suggested impermanence and included financial and logistical complexities not seen in other schools. The relative isolation of the schools and lack of resources such as school grounds and other types of workspaces direct and control the types of behaviours and activities for student learning. The physical space also directs cultural behaviours, fostering sharing and collaboration and reducing independence and privacy. Physically the schools

are pragmatic, small, inexpensive, useful and different (similar to their position organisationally). The schools as I experienced them, were less a physical space and more of a cultural space where students and staff expressed satisfaction and acceptance. The physical space was in some ways a testament of the school's ability to innovate, adapt and make do with what was available.

Organisation of the Schools

Not surprisingly, the organisation of both schools was also quite similar. The schools were strictly informal will very little trappings of the traditions associated with high schools such as bells, schedules, homework and didactic instruction. The teachers were on a first name basis and I did not observe any expressions of teacher/student power relations within either building. As mentioned, power refers to the exertion of influence over others not as solely negative but also necessary and productive in organisations (Foucault, 1998). I did learn of coercion exerted upon members of the school from interviews with the staff and the perspectives expressed in the focus groups. The power relationship was experienced most through the organisational structure of the schools resulting coupling, decoupling and buffering behaviours.

The only real apparent power structure within the school was that of the office of the principal. The schools' principal spent a portion (0.2 FTE) of his administrative time working between both Outreach schools. The schools generally operated relatively autonomously making use of the principal for organisational decision-making and advocacy. The students also presented as decision makers and seemed to have a great deal of say in their education in terms of course choice, rate of completion and number of courses. Administratively course instruction and supervision were divided among the teachers to manage, mark and submit. At an organisational level the high levels of student and teacher autonomy played an important role in the way power was experienced and exerted.

Culture of the School

The culture of the schools felt welcoming and accepting, staff encouraged a philosophy of hope and opportunity. (This is feeling of acceptance was likely

personal bias, as the high level of respondent anxiety and redacted comments of staff suggests it is more likely a culture that is welcoming and accepting to cultural members or insiders that various pressures has in fact perpetuated a strong sense of cohesion amongst the insider group). Both of the schools valued autonomy for all members of the school[5]. Students were clear and forthright in their discussion about their school experience. The students' Greenhills location was a more rural setting with more of the student population working and commuting to get to class. At times, the staff and students appeared to be working to prove or redeem themselves to the district staff or other schools observed through nonverbal language, behaviours, comparison to other schools and the way in which they referred to "other" schools. This behaviour may have been due to response bias, where my presence could have resulted in less accurate or truthful answers.

Staff

The staff respondents consisted of five females and two males. The information about the respondents was gathered through two semi structured interviews, open discussion prior to and after recording the interviews, observation of interactions in the schools and reported by other members of the school. All of the staff members were willing participants and saw deep value of participating in this research. They were also as a whole, cautious about what their involvement could mean personally and for the school.

Respondent 1, Sarah (pseudonym), was a veteran teacher working within the jurisdiction. She presented a calm and confident demeanour and was passionate about her work in the school. Sarah explained that her breadth of experience in this type of educating fostered an equal opportunity philosophy with no judgment. Students reported she believed all students are worthy of her time. She felt this translated into her teaching practice through offering endless chances

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[5] Anecdotally, my perception of students at Greenhills was of a slightly "rougher" grouping, based on language, student stories of how they "ended up" at Outreach and appearance. This difference was noticeable in the way the students in this school conveyed their needs and experiences.

and continuous opportunities. She felt it was important to provide students who have been rejected by school a place to go. She was confident and resolved in her commitment as an advocate for alternative learning and clearly assumed an informal leadership role in the school. She represented herself as a strong supporter of alternative education through her active involvement and participation at many levels.

Mary (Respondent 2) was the least experienced with less than three years of teaching experience and was new to Outreach teaching. Mary informed me she took this position as her only option without knowing a great deal about the program. Mary had a quick smile and laughed often. She was soft spoken and her presence was nonintrusive. She felt that she was developing her basic teacher practices and was unsure of what teaching in an alternative site should or could be. She was committed to supporting learning shown through her ability and desire to connect with students in a meaningful way. She was interested and excited about working in an alternative environment but was uncertain of how to operate in the school. This impacted her teaching practice by encouraging her to operate in new and highly relational ways with her students.

Laura (Respondent 3) was a support staff member with over 20 years administrative experience in the jurisdiction. Laura described this school as an important place for learners who had difficulty fitting in. She defined herself as sympathetic to the experiences and needs of students attending this site. The other staff in the school spoke of her very respectfully and felt she was a supporter of this school. Laura had a wide variety of experience from many schools and gravitated to this school, as she believed in the importance of connections with students. This resulted in her engaging in long conversations with students about various aspects of their lives.

Matt (Respondent 4) was also a veteran teacher with skills in behaviour management and special education. He was reserved and quiet, and he had a natural feeling of calm. He listened carefully and took thoughtful pauses when conversing. His demeanour demonstrated a commitment to find a way for students to learn and, through my observations, he was slow to judge and open to

finding many ways to solve problems. He stated a belief in the value of alternative education. It was his first year working as a teacher in this program although he had worked closely with the Outreach school as a behaviour program teacher for over five years prior.

Anna (Respondent 5) was a teacher with 20 years experience and was vocal about the needs of Outreach education. During our conversations she was animated and enthusiastic about the school, her work and the students. She described herself, and I observed her act, as a strong advocate for the young people in her school. Anna felt these schools were marginalized at a fundamental level and was clear about describing her experiences that demonstrated this. She was a strong supporter for students' welfare beyond just schools. Anna felt it was important to work in an environment where she could advocate for marginalized populations.

Rita (Respondent 6) had 35 years of experience as a support staff member and was capable of discussing the progression of Outreach education with considerable knowledge. She was thorough and responsive to the students in the school. She presented as a very motherly role as described by other students and staff. This translated to a supportive and advisory role to some of the students. She was firm about rules and expectations of the school and Alberta Education. She was also very careful about sharing information and clearly demonstrated a great deal of knowledge about district events and personnel.

Finally, Dave (Respondent 7) was a new administrator and had been recently assigned 0.2 FTE to the position of Outreach principal. Dave was articulate and well versed in the district operations. He was visionary in his language and actions with the staff and students of both schools. He was keen to participate in this research and had an active vision regarding the future of Outreach's role in the district. Dave had a unique position of having seen the schools from the outside and then participating in the day-to-day operations of the schools.

Interestingly, Dave's only previous experience of Outreach staff was second hand descriptions from staff in the mainstream environment. He felt

fortunate to have an opportunity to see the schools from within to compare to his outside experience. The staff felt educators needed to be experienced, skilled master teachers and needed the ability “to find a way” (Sarah) to solve problems in unconventional ways. Teachers identified a wide berth of tasks including course work, Individual Program Planning (IPP) work, clerical work, administrative duties and student advocacy in the schools. Teachers reported that some of the duties included a wider range of expectation than mainstream teachers. Dave agreed with these claims during the follow-up interviews four months later. Several of the respondents reported working to do specialized tasks outside their areas of training or expertise and had to deal with difficult and serious issues with young people that may not fall within the scope of experience or ability for all teachers. Dave felt the drive from this sentiment might have been to hire specialized counselling staff. Staff responses also consisted of a widely reported job satisfaction with “laughter and the good stories” (Laura). Mary and Laura felt lucky to have the ability to offer chances and endless opportunities to their students. Dave believed they felt this was due to the teacher’s personal satisfaction of knowing they were making a difference. Finally, Dave felt it was important to establish a good working team to focus “on making people feel good about what they do and talking it up and doing everything that I can to contribute to that feeling of value”. This was very important for Dave to create a positive and productive environment for the staff and those around them.

Students

The students in the focus groups of this case study appeared to be a heterogeneous grouping with a wide variety of needs and backgrounds ranging from high academics to “the stereotypical outreach at-risk kid” (Anna). The learning environment from the students’ perspective consisted of a relaxed space where students could move at their own pace. Students generally referred the school as a refuge from their other school experiences. The students moved to this school for personal experiences such as learning issues, personal rejection, lack of autonomy and feeling they didn’t matter. The students perceived the learning environment as a place where they were accepted and valued by their peers and

staff. Students in the focus groups felt they were able to get the help they needed when they needed it and reported high levels of satisfaction with their teachers. The students were pleased with the teaching staff to a high degree and felt that the transition to Outreach was very helpful for them to grow and learn. In response, the students in the focus groups displayed regular and continuing attendance and a high level of loyalty to the school and staff. The students felt their schools' locations and hours were good but felt their schools were not fairly provided with resources. It is important to note the students who responded to the invitation of the focus group self selected and thus may not include students with a less than satisfactory experience of these schools.

Work Conditions

The work conditions were also of interest regarding the context of the schools. Staff referred to their workspace as having benefits and challenges. The work conditions tended to mirror their perceptions regarding the schools' organisationally marginalized position. Benefits of Outreach were identified as offering balance and flexibility in the type, time, duration of instruction as well as the flexibility for their personal lives. The staff generally reported enjoyment working with young people and experienced a great deal of success without the worry about the daily planning of the regular classroom. Teachers also reported high satisfaction with the conditions that provided the opportunity to develop strong relationships with statements like the following:

> I have an immense amount of respect for classroom teachers. I was a classroom teacher at one point in my career and I fully understand how difficult that role is as well. I know that for any teacher it is not just about getting through the content but also about meeting the needs of the individual student and I think that is where we have an advantage because we get to work with the students one-on-one and really get to know them. (Anna)

The teaching staff identified the workload as being misleading. That is, several teachers reported feeling frustrated that teachers in other schools felt Outreach teachers had less of a workload than the mainstream environments. The Outreach

teachers reported more marking and longer workdays with statements like, "I just work my butt off and sacrifice my own life" (Anna) as an example of perceived teacher overload. In addition, several staff members felt they performed a wide variety of non-teaching roles such as custodian, secretary, administrative assistant, librarian, and accountant. Anna also noted curriculum change and revision had been particularly difficult for the schools to keep up with, paired with the challenge of managing so many different programs for a wide variety of needs. In this way, work conditions may not have been more labour intensive but were more likely very different kinds of required work. This impacted the staff through experiences of being judged (Laura) and feeling "misunderstood".

School staff reported frustration with the lack of awareness of the impact jurisdictional decisions have on these schools. For example: "People making the decisions aren't aware of what has to happen" (Laura) when choices are made for mainstream schools that may impact the Outreach school in unexpected ways. Another historic frustration experienced by staff was the unpredictability of job security with the jurisdiction "trying to decide whether it [Outreach] was a viable school or not" (Laura). Anna was also frustrated with having difficulty meeting professional responsibilities. She felt overextended trying to support significant needs, expressing that is "the hardest part of the job for me, because I feel like there's some kids that we just have let down".

Reform in Alberta

At this point it is important to include the influence of the educational climate in Alberta on context of this case study. The Alberta government has been involved in a great deal of reform in the past ten years. In the literature review I referred to this reform in broad stokes. It is essential to now look at some of the specific changes taking place as it influences policy and the organisational behaviours of schools. The structural changes taking place involving the 2014/2015 *Funding Manual* (impacting private school and infrastructure funding), the *Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement* initiative (impacting the creation of new joint venture schools) and capital planning (influencing modernization and building projects) have large organisational effects. However,

my focus is on policy change specific to the operations of Outreach schooling. The first of these reforms consists of the large *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* initiative offering an encompassing review of educational behaviours required to "position our education system for success in 2030" (Alberta Education, 2014, p.3). Secondly, the new Ministerial Order on student learning focuses "on a learner-centred system to support students in developing competencies needed to be engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit" (*Education Act,* 2013, p.3). Further, *Curriculum Redesign* was established to review the curriculum, the backbone of schooling, for responsiveness and relevance. Finally, the Minister of Education's controversial *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* has been brought forward to make recommendations from the principles and policy shifts from *Inspiring Education* to create Alberta's new educational vision.

These reforms have focused on current schooling polices tabled in the *Inspiring Education* initiative in 2008 as a long-term vision for education. As the process unfolded, the first strategy was consultation through the *Speak Out; The Alberta Student Engagement Initiative* (2008) and *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* and *Literacy First: A Plan for* Action (2008). The consultation resulted in the *Alberta Education Action Agenda 2011-2014*. The *Inspiring Action on Education* (2010) document worked to embed the competencies (ethical, engaged, entrepreneurial behaviours) into the curriculum with the expectations that they would be delivered through an inclusive educational model. *Curriculum Redesign* (2011) then was developed to focus on the specific outcomes for wide variety of competencies beyond literacy and numeracy. In 2012, the *Education Act* (2012) received Royal Assent, shortly followed by the *Student Learning Assessment* (2013) that reviewed and changed some of the high stakes testing of the Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) and introduced Student Learning Assessments (SLAs) focusing on literacy and numeracy in place of the PATs. *The Learning and Technology Policy Framework* (2013) focused on student centered learning, innovative practice, professional learning, leadership and infrastructure. The *Alberta High School Completion*

Strategic Framework (2013) added to the framework and established specific ways to increase high school completion. Most recently the *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* (2014) suggested significant policy changes for teachers, leaders and to the education system.

The most relevant of the reforms relating to my area of interest and to the context of Outreach schooling was *High School Redesign*, the *Technology Policy* and *Curriculum Redesign* initiatives. These reform documents identify behaviours that align closely to regular behaviours of the Outreach schools studied. *Alberta's High School Completion Strategic Framework* (2013) focused on culture, leadership, structure and pedagogy. The framework introduced five "core strategies" in the areas of engagement, transitioning, partnerships, connections and progress tracking. Outreach schools, as do other schools, value and make use of these strategies. Through the case study it became apparent the schools observed were already actively engaged in these five areas seen as critical to high school completion. *Successful transitions* for the Outreach schools were focused on the workplace and post secondary practical learning. *Collaborative partnerships* focused on drug interventions, mental health supports, and connections with other support sectors. The *positive connections* strategy was shown through the schools' high value of relational behaviours. The encouragement of outside supports for *student engagement* such as the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) and Work Experience made school particularly relevant. *Tracking progress* was somewhat easier for the Outreach schools due to the high individual student monitoring and one-to-one supports. This close alignment to government mandate placed Outreach schools in natural compliance with new polices. Outreach schools also naturally established alignment with four specific outcomes of the *Learning and Technology Policy Framework's* (2013). In particular, policy direction 1 focused on student centered learning. Finally, the *From Knowledge to Action the Executive Summary* (Alberta Education, 2012) reviewed the *Curriculum Redesign* initiative and identified nine guiding questions. Five of the nine questions were very close to guiding

questions/behaviours for the Outreach schools consisting of: competencies**,** ways of knowing**,** flexible timing and pacing, student-centred/personalized learning and assessment (2012). As such, Outreach schools have been compliant with the policy framework before the framework existed and from a policy standpoint they are currently in close alignment with these provincial policy documents.

Characteristics of an Organisation

As noted previously, my findings do not to suggest these behaviours and experiences are unique to alternative education, in fact, many are key components of any good educational programming. The research was primarily inductive, looking to see what themes emerged from the data, examining specific responses to see patterns leading to tentative theories. Deductive reasoning was used to compare themes with the literature, offering the ability to move from one form of reasoning to the other during the analysis and synthesis process.

The coding scheme was developed from the data focused on relationship, condition, reflexive interaction and behaviour (Lewis, Taylor & Gibbs, 2005). Through the analysis and coding process of the focus groups and interviews a wide variety of topics began to emerge (Appendix M), which was eventually reduced (Appendix N) to six axioms. The six axioms were identified as the Last Stop, Learning/Knowing, Legitimacy, Responsiveness, Scarcity, and the Nature of Alternative Education (Appendix O). As my study reviews the overlapping interactions and processes, the constructs of legitimacy, reform and power are highlighted in all of the themes.

Power and Coercion

Power is a major source of social discipline and conformity that is experienced rather than wielded as “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1998 p. 63). A natural response to power in organisations is resistance (Foucault, 1998). This resistance has been expressed in Outreach schools through coupling behaviours. The importance of not focusing on who “has” the power but “rather the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of

their process" (Foucault, 1998 p. 99) is the way in which I approached my investigation of the schools' behaviours. This constant flux and negotiation of power relations was an interesting and important observation of the schools in this study.

The other interesting dynamic that became apparent was the discussion of what is meant by "academic students" as a growing "type" of student. It was as if "academic" was the code word for "normal" or "ideal" students. Both staff and students in the schools used this language to position students. Power is present through the valuing of "normal" or "abnormal" and in the application of these labels to themselves or other students. The question of how were students positioned as "normal" or "abnormal" in this setting was both interesting and troubling. As I had identified the use of these terms after the focus groups and interviews I was unable to gather what it means to be a "rough" student or an "abnormal" in an Outreach school and in what way if any, they were marginalized. The use of this language is discussed further in the Perceptions and Awareness section.

Organisational Identity and Last Stop

Power plays a role in the creation of culture and the value system of schools. Culture was an important indicator of how the schools identified themselves in the organisation. To some extent the schools and the members within rejected the currency of marks and the High School Diploma. This was seen through the behaviours of the staff responding to questions regarding the high school completion or graduation numbers each year. Students graduated throughout the year but the staff reported more value on creating a plan for student learning that *may* include a High School Diploma. Some of the staff comments suggested attitudes and behaviours were paramount with less emphasis on marks. Interestingly, students in the focus groups did not echo the devaluing of marks and diplomas. The schools created a space that was insular to some of the external pressures of assessment, performance and credentialing. This was created through several means: physical separation of the school, structure of the schools honouring staff and student autonomy and an established culture capable of

navigating external demands. For the areas in which the students and staff we unable to avoid pressures, such as diploma exams or staff interaction with other schools, the schools adopted behaviours as outlined in Chapter 2 such as avoidance, compliance and loose coupling.

Measures of success in Outreach schools.

Invariably the discussion of schools includes forms of measurement of effectiveness. In this discussion, the effectiveness of schools is understood to refer to how well the school "works" in real world conditions. That is, less abstractly, the areas of "personalized learning, successful transitions, collaborative partnerships, positive connections and tracking progress (Alberta's High School Completion Task Force Report, 2005) are considered. I have used the words efficacy and effectiveness interchangeably as ways these five goals were or were not met. These goals take into account leadership, visions, teacher passion, moral purpose and goals (Msila, 2013).

The staff and students in the case study were asked how they knew their school was being effective. Responses regarding effectiveness revolved around learning and knowing. In fact, learning and knowing involved over 65 separate responses from staff with comments such as "[we] are here for the same reason, and we all want to learn and graduate" (Focus Group 2) and "it is virtually impossible to plan for what you are going to have to deal with…it goes back to the whole thing of being able to focus on the individual and what that individual needs (Anna). Despite experienced marginalisation through limited access to resources, social isolation\dismissal and stigma, students and staff were positive about their experiences in Outreach schools. Efficacy responses strongly highlighted connections with others and the community. The focus group students spoke of predictability of their learning environment and learning supports. They also identified the role of a controlled, safe and highly responsive environment. The students also felt more confident in their learning, shown through examples of reported reduction of anxiety related to diploma exam and other evaluations. The students reported they could attain mastery of the subject area through one-to-one instruction and supports. Students in the focus groups liked school

coursework that was focused specifically on traditional learning (pen and paper and textbook driven), noted by one student who stated “one thing I definitely have liked is you don't have all that extra stuff, like, those other assignments or projects, and lots of stuff that would stress me out” (Focus Group 1). In general, both focus groups reported the importance of finding ways to “get through” the coursework and finish high school. This finding was significant in the way the students in the focus groups described the learning they wanted. Their needs were very clearly minimalist, stating their interest in getting only the essentials to complete coursework. Students reported the importance and effectiveness of focused pragmatic course completion and highly desired one-to-one interactions. Based on these responses, it was of interest to note the challenge of living in a credentialing world. Outreach schools, even though focused on learning in alternative ways may actually have perpetuated credentialing with students. The contradiction of credits and work, as reported by staff and students, is identified in the transition section in this chapter.

The staff responses tended to center on four concepts of efficacy: future referrals, thinking, satisfaction and graduation/future. Future referral was identified as the level of satisfaction of the organisation as reported by the members within the organisation. Measures looked to the importance of the community impression of the schools. Sarah noted with some pride, “we get a lot of students who come back. We get a lot of referrals from siblings” (Sarah, interview 2). Word of mouth as a means for referral was strongly considered as a measure of the successful operation of the school (Rita, Anna). Dave emphasized thinking as a process in itself, to encourage young people to “think critically on the material, as opposed to just providing an answer, to actually question it and provide some deeper understanding and asking deeper questions that lead to further understanding”. The staff felt they were doing an effective job in engaging learners in their own learning as shown by students becoming more active participants in their learning. In several comments relating to the evolution of the “type” of students attending these schools, the staff responses indicated an increase in “academic” students (Matt, Sarah, Rita), which may reflect the

efficacy of the schools and/or teaching practice. Part of the effectiveness was also related to the natural accommodations, such as natural class size and supports, ability to address behaviours and identification and support for learning issues.

Notions of success for the student respondents were identified as a change in ability. Some students were able to complete courses and accomplish tasks they didn't think they could before (Mary). Success was also relative to student behaviour, "success might mean I don't get drunk every single night of the week" (Anna). Success was also demonstrated traditionally "in terms of marks and getting things done" (Matt). The notion of success was shown by graduation and future (Sarah), high school completion (Anna), participating in graduation ceremonies, and the numbers of returning students (Rita). Respondents also indicated areas where the schools were unable to meet the needs of their learners. Anna's statement during the interview revealed the inability to meet all of the students' needs, "students that want to have direct instruction and regular daily classes are not served well by this school". Further, the school regularly uses course failure as a learning tool to modify behaviours (Laura), providing a natural/logical cause and effect approach to student behaviours and success. Future referral, thinking skills, satisfaction and graduation aligned with the *High School Completion* initiative. The schools' ability to refocus and define success from the schools' alternative perspective provides the schools the ability to mitigate some the outside economic, performance and legitimacy pressures which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. During the discussion of efficacy the notion of choice occurred and the following discussions regarding the *last stop* became one of the more memorable and telling parts of my research.

Last stop, new and old ways of seeing.

One of the unexpected themes that emerged from the data collection was the notion of "last chance" for students. The underlining elements of the notion of last chance centered on having no options where the student is offered no choices or is unable to take the choices offered. A "last stop" becomes the only option for this young person. The literature regarding the notion of last stop generally made very little comment regarding what the last remaining option was. Where it could

be found, responses to "last stop" were in fact often identified as "last chance" schools "where students are 'sentenced' as a last step before expulsion" (Raywid, 1994, p. 27). Staff recognized the reduction of options for students and the reality that this school may indeed be a last stop, "If they weren't here, we'd be paying for them in our -- they'd be living off the streets. It's a last chance" (Rita). The way the public perceived Matt's class "as almost a punishment for them, if you get sent there… that's pretty bad. There's no place to go from there. That's kind of the last stop". Laura also noted "Outreach is an alternative setting for those that they recognize within the high school cannot make it there or have done something so wrong that they don't want them there": in essence a last stop. The image of these schools as a last resort with no options also surfaced in the focus groups through personal experiences, such as "the only real reason I had to decide to come here was that I don't have a choice in whether I can go to school or not. I have no say" (Focus Group 1). Several of the students reported feeling obligated to attend Outreach either by being systemically moved or by personal choice. Interestingly, once the students attended they reported feeling autonomy with expressions, for example, that they are the "boss" and have choice about what happens at the school (Focus Groups, 1 & 2). This was of value as a contribution to the existing body of research and personally interesting due to the strong emotion related to this concept. The contrasting voices and the frequency with which the "last stop" idea emerged tended to be an emotional hot point in conversations, more so with staff than with students. Staff responses were polarized and were emotionally charged with strong advocates with very differing views. Sarah stated "I never, ever, think about this as a last resort. I know there's a perception in the community sometimes that [this is]… the last resort for kids. And I don't ever believe that". Mary further rejected the notion of a last stop stating that "a lot of kids that choose to come this way… there's a negative perception, and that's not necessarily the case they're not being forced to come here". Mary continued, "we're not just for upgrading, we're not just for the kids that can't go anywhere else. I think that [image] needs to change".

The contrasting ideas of last stop highlighted differing views of these schools. I list these views as *Old* and *New* in the next chapter but these viewpoints could have just as easily been called *Structured* and *Open* views. When combined with the values of community, future, past successes, learning and knowing and autonomy it becomes a partial indication of the cultural identity of the school and its change.

Learning and Knowing in Organisations

Learning and knowing was a large and important component of the responses from both groups. This section informed how I developed and understood my research questions and is related to the research through the impact of mainstream institutional processes, pressures and practices on alternative high school education. Learning was central because of the teachers' behaviours within this organisation. This theme has been broken down through the coding process to identify how learning and knowing organisationally impacts the importance of knowledge, legitimacy, regulative/normative behaviours, cultural-cognitive behaviours and power responses. Learning and knowing from an Outreach perspective have been divided into the sub categories of student-centered behaviours and transitioning behaviours.

Student centered.

The respondents from both schools considered learning a student directed process. Students most often illustrated high student-centered behaviours in comparison to their mainstream school experience. Students reported feeling they could get help whenever they needed it without taking away from someone else's learning (Focus Group 1). Positive student centered behaviours were shown by statements such as, "this is the best way, and I find that I get more help if I need it, I am able to ask questions without having to sit there and wait for the teacher" (Focus Group 1). Autonomy for learning was shown through comments like "I reach my goal and [school] made me feel good that I can actually do what I want… at my own pace and I don't feel rushed" (Focus Group 1). Students felt supported through a wide range of options, availability of teachers (Focus Group 1) and high flexibility to meet needs. One student stated, "This is where you have

a lot more flexibility, I hated being told where to go and when to go" (Focus Group 2). Students of both focus groups consistently highlighted the importance of a space that is responsive to individual needs, where learners can experience one to one interaction and learning. In the words of another student: "A lot of people don't know what it's about to come to places like this and the opportunities that you get from going here… if more people knew, then they probably would come here just for that" (Focus Group 1).

Staff reported similar experiences, consisting of the ability to spend time one-to-one in a meaningful and sustained way with students (Rita, Matt, Sarah). Student centered behaviours in the school were also exemplified by individual attention based on school population and individualized programming, ensuring "learners don't get lost" (Rita). A focus on the individual encouraged feelings of a *customized* education identified by the school staff as their "strength… to meet kids where they are and go from there… we don't have to have the same structure for every student that walks in" (Sarah). Anna commented on the difficulty of planning due to the high variation and unpredictability of their work causing her to "focus on the individual and what that individual needs" (Anna). The real benefit lies in the "development of a relationship that allows staff to create totally responsive programming (Dave). The desire and ability to accommodate the individual needs of students was very pronounced. The staff presented a capacity to address a wide variety of learning styles and learning needs not always found in the regular classroom (Mary) allowing students to go about learning in their own way.

The concept of whole education at these schools became readily apparent through the coding process. The typical way of learning and knowing at these schools consisted of a whole education model. The notion of whole education is a model "that knits together academic, practical and vocational learning calibrated to the potential of each individual" (RSA, 2014 para.2). Nasr (1994) reported the whole education model includes practices of self-fulfilling processes, is student centered, seeks balance and includes introspective behaviours. Whole education is shown when the behaviours of educators transcend curriculum and identify

important areas of wisdom and learning that they wish/need to impart on their learners. Sarah states “The students you see that come to Outreach fulltime learn far more life skills and social skills than they learn or care about the academic side of it” (Sarah). Not surprisingly, students’ primary interest was focused towards pragmatic learning for credentialing, work, careers and future (Focus Group 1). As mentioned previously, the apparent differences between staff’s belief in whole learning and the student’s desire for abridged learning did not seem to cause any observable tension between the two groups. From an organisational perspective, the school prepared to meet its mandate of educating young people through structural, behavioural and cultural alignment. The alignment with regulatory agencies and the public expectations (Deephouse, 1996) is necessary for the organisation to exist. The natural process to isomorph takes place, as schools “face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149) to exist. Keeping some aspects of sameness in these schools offered stability and sustainability for the organisations.

Transitioning.

Transitioning refers to movement to *and* from mainstream school *and* from school to future work. This is important to the study as it informed, through respondents’ experiences, what alternative education is and how pressures in the organisations were experienced. The Outreach schools desired freer movement between mainstream and Outreach schools (Sarah) and assumed responsibility for preparing students to transition from learning to work (Sarah, Dave, Matt). Transitioning, experienced through the staff and students in this research, felt as if students and staff were part of the one-way movement out from the main flow of learning. This is reminiscent of the last stop experience but also required teachers to move their learners from “student mode” (Anna) to work mode. Dave felt it was important to prepare students to return to mainstream schooling but felt he had to go through the process of “changing the programming altogether” (Dave) to make things align for learners. Dave felt that partnerships with other schools were missing and he struggled to understand “why we can't all work together” to

support the learning of the students. He went further to describe the situation with returning students as having a need to:

> put together a clear transition plan so that the … kid doesn't feel like they've just been dropped off at the dump because they smoke pot. To simply discard them and say, "Now they're someone else's problem, and maybe we'll welcome them back" is just ridiculous. Think about what a kid has to overcome if that's the situation [in response to a student expulsion]. (Dave)

Concern for students being poorly transitioned to and from other schools and to work typify the feeling of the staff where there is difficulty in partnering between several schools serving the needs of one student. This problem creates tensions between the schools and organisationally students become further marginalised. In the end, the Outreach students involved in this study reported not wanting to return to the regular school model, preferring to stay at Outreach, but that excluded them from other resources and supports potentially available only in mainstream schools.

In an effort to support transitioning between schools the administration was working to create a tighter alignment (coupling) with the district mainstream schools. Some of the isomorphic pressure Dave experienced originated from stakeholder pressure and access to resources. For example, the school was required to report marks and progress on a fixed schedule to governing authorities for funding (contradicting Alberta Education positioning of learning anywhere, any time). True transitioning environments offer continuous enrolment environments where semesters should be of no real relevance to student progress or reporting (Outreach schools). Yet, if the schools were to miss reporting periods students would not be awarded credits and the school would not be awarded their CEUs[6] fundamental to finance operations in these buildings. The need to be

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[6] The Alberta Funding manual determines the amount schools will be paid dependent upon the number of CEUs earned by the student. CEUs are tiered allowing range of payment from $187.48 – $222.95 (2014/2015 Funding Manual, 2014).

different for reasons of pedagogy and pragmatics was also a cultural response to historic and current power dynamics of mainstream pressures. That is, the Outreach schools traditionally have been a minority with reduced cultural capital. The students in the schools, due to personal circumstance and the environment, experienced difficulty accessing and capitalising on opportunities and were marginalised through resource allocation and social stigma. The process of transitioning to other schools and/or to work was an experience that created anxiety for the students in the schools. This finding highlights power relations and how these schools negotiated the power relationship.

Interestingly, the principal played a key role in negotiating and fostering behaviours of the school but also belonged to the power element of the structure of the school district. The schools were required to navigate a very coercive environment where structurally the schools are controlled by outside forces. This created an important need for the schools to create a space to manage, mitigate and create agency through organisational behaviours. The staff understood this difficulty of being outsiders to the mainstream system. As a response, staff constructed a knowing, aware and positive identity within the school culture to navigate the system and to meet the needs of the school and their students. This dynamic behaviour appears in other findings in this chapter.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness was a primary interest of my investigation. Staff and student behaviours provide insight into the way alternative educational settings experience and respond to mainstream institutional pressures. The observations have been divided into subcategories of Advocacy, Relational Behaviours and Flexibility.

Acceptance and advocacy.

During the case study, staff and students responded with language centered on notions of acceptance. Acceptance is a part of power relations. With the focus on the members within the school, the staff in both schools identified responsiveness as the ability to accept students and their situations to “address their needs specifically where they're at, when they're at there” (Dave). Staff

discussed the schools' roles in supporting working/independent/crisis students without question (Laura, Rita). Students in both focus groups reported feelings of acceptance, belonging and respect from the staff. A culture of acceptance of all students was seen throughout all interviews with quotes such as Sarah's "you accept it all. You don't have to like it all, but you can accept it" and "you're just enjoying your time with students and you're experiencing their lives at the same time they are… you hear the good, the bad, and the ugly" (Sarah). Laura felt acceptance was a key reason students "opted in" to Outreach learning, accepting students that "only wrote two sentences today, but they were here… They behaved. They were good. They laughed. And sometimes some of the students that we have, coming here to laugh is the best part of their day" (Laura). The staff responses highlighted the school's ability to gauge success with significantly different metrics.

Focus group responses alluded to the need for independence and expressiveness. Students attending the schools reported freedom from judgment "you don't have to worry about feeling self-conscious about yourself. You can just be whoever you want to be" (Focus Group 1). Students in both focus groups reported their schools as a space where there was less bullying than in the mainstream schools they had attended. As a result, students in these schools felt decreased conformity pressure and increased ability to focus on coursework. Both focus groups expressed feelings of being rejected from the mainstream: "I ended up here is because I got suspended so much in Grade 8, they wouldn't accept me to go into Sunny View" (Focus Group 2). Several of the students reported feeling their own locus of control and equality at Outreach. The students in both focus groups acknowledged a culture of acceptance with no social ordering or hierarchy. The words *dope* and *chill* (Focus Group 2) were repeatedly used to describe the school as a relaxing and a desirable place to be. Students highly valued the one-to-one interactions that these "dope" environments offered. Students felt they had a voice and venue to advocate for themselves. Dave identified the importance of this socialization and connection as tools to learn

perspective. That is, as a tool to learn about themselves and others and learn *how* to advocate for themselves and others.

Focus group students also felt supported when staff assisted in negotiating high school and post-secondary course selection, reducing anxiety and confusion. At an organisational level, the schools had an onsite principal for the first time, meaning the principal would spend regular dedicated time in each school. Teachers reported feelings of significance and legitimacy with this restructuring (Anna). They felt that they had an advocate onsite who could understand how to represent the school at an administrative and political level. Both of the school staffs found the idea of the site principal very popular as needs were being addressed in a much more meaningful way than in the past. I interpreted appreciation and high volume of response as an indicator of the organisational value of "earning" administrative supports, exhibiting normative isomorphism by conferring more significance to the schools. This behaviour was a normative response (having a principal in the schools) to coercive mechanisms that drove the organisations to survive. The concept of earning a principal referred to the comments of teachers feeling as if they were slowly moving from having to annually justify the schools to now being seen as purposeful, stable and capable. Having a principal in the schools for less than half of his assignment still highlighted scarcity issues and also still represented inequalities with other schools in the jurisdiction. Dave was able to manage some of these deficits though a highly developed interpersonal skill set and strong social awareness. The organisational skills and the impact of having a principal assigned to the school changed some of the operations of the school. The school felt conferred legitimacy. The tension of wanting a principal as a tool for advocacy but not as an agent of regulation and control was a complication in the role of the Outreach principal and also the way in which the schools managed the pressures imposed upon the school.

Relational experience.

Relational behaviours are essential to interactions in Outreach schools (Housego, 1999) and are a good indicator of the responsiveness of the school.

Relational behaviours are shown through connections and meaningful interactions with others. “Lots of the kids that we see in Outreach, they don't have enough personal contact focused on them… That's why they stay, because it's more personal, and it's individualized” (Sarah). School staff noted some students experienced real difficulty in establishing healthy relationships and worked to support and guide their students. Through this modelling and guidance staff identified the importance of their own example of how to engage and interact in a positive way with others.

Both schools highlighted their relationships with students as critical to their daily operations. The focus group students expressed feelings of belonging and rapport associated with acceptance, advocacy, relationships and respect, because “you don't have to worry about people being mean to you and judging you for who you are” (Focus Group, 1). Teachers and support staff identified the importance of the awareness of students who are working, independent or who are experiencing personal crisis, and made an effort to engage with all aspects of these young people’s lives. Relationships are clearly important to both staff and students where connections extend beyond the students and teachers’ workday. The staff at both schools were open to sharing details of their personal lives but identified the need for boundaries for determining the degree, duration and amount of disclosure.

Relationships at an organisational level are important for staff and students. When relationships are rejected, coercive control regulates the behaviours of schools. The staff experienced being systemically excluded from inter-school relationships (Laura, Mary). Staff reported feeling other schools did not connect and/or collaborate openly, creating feelings of isolation and marginalisation for both staff and focus groups. The staff perceived the disengagement of the members was related to competition and scarcity. Because Outreach schools have typically worked as outsiders, the experienced rejection could also have been reciprocated and as a result, the schools may have excluded themselves from the organisation.

Flexibility and autonomy.

The Outreach schools include flexibility as part of their organisational identity. The students and staff reported the relative ease and satisfaction in the way these schools were able to meet a wide variety of needs of students. The ability for the schools to be responsive is nested in the ability to cater to unique needs (Focus Group 1). Students in both groups reported a reduction in pressure for work completion, attendance, course selection and testing, indicated with comments like, “I have a due date, but if I want, I can just go up to the teacher and be like, I need an extra day on this because I got to work” (Focus Group 1). Students and staff reported ease in arranging school around work and being able to get the support they (students and staff) needed as they needed it. Autonomy for students in these schools was expressed as “there’re not telling you they’re asking, there’s a difference” (Focus Group 1). Students felt they had real say and were not subject to false choice that can occur in schools.

Both staff and students referred to “structural flexibility” at both sites (referring to the lack of bells, open organisation, one-on-one time with students, extended hours and diversity of programming). The staff reported the importance of being able to manage time and be flexible. Staff emphasised the significance of students attending by choice (Laura, Matt), suggesting students have actively chosen to be involved in their Outreach school. Flexibility of education and instruction was highlighted by the focus groups, noting the quantity of assignments, assessment and the fluidity of due dates. Flexibility has “acted as a way to reduce the stress related to the assignments and work for the teachers” (Dave). The students have experienced reduced anxiety and malleable time for attendance that can be “a pro and a con to the learning in these schools” (Dave). Continuous enrolment allows students entry and exit to learning at any point in the year, as “not everybody fits in that cookie cutter, and… not every kid is going to be successful in a classroom” (Anna).

Flexibility was identified as a critical component of staff behaviours with flexibility being referred to over 50 times by staff alone. The schools’ and in particular the staffs’ responsiveness and flexibility challenged normative and

regulatory boundaries by making or taking educational options, such as combined work/school days, half day classes, accelerated coursework and reduction of instructional minutes that were less available to mainstream schools. From an institutional perspective, this aspect of Outreach schools still did not align with embedded mainstream norms. The schools operated in different ways structurally (hours, bells, norms, attendance), organisationally (informal, less power relations, high flexibility) and relationally. These differences may have resulted in marginalization for the apparent differences. I had anticipated a high value of flexibility but underestimated the importance of its organisational impact, as flexibility really is synonymous with Outreach learning. The findings of this flexibility and autonomy may shed some light on the societal value of difference and sameness.

Legitimacy in the Wider Educational Field

Legitimacy is the essence of much of this study. A great deal of the discussion with students and staff described Outreach schools relative to mainstream schools. Through this dialogue, an important undercurrent identified the mainstream school as the "*actual*" or "*real*" school (Focus Group 1, Focus Group 2), that assigned legitimacy to the mainstream. This subconscious use of language identified a depth of embedded legitimacy issues with alternative education. Structuration uses legitimacy to produce the social norms that control human and organisational behaviour (Giddens, 1986). To gather legitimacy is to acquire power and agency (Suchman, 1995). To attain legitimacy the Outreach schools operated with divergent *and* convergent responses to resource dependence and institutional pressures. The schools' use of mimetic and normative responses (acceptance, compromise, avoidance and manipulation (Oliver, 1991)) were important. The behaviours of the school once again showed a fluid ability to simultaneously be coupled in one area and be decoupled in another (reporting and curricular alignment vs. instructional practice and flexibility). This theme is divided into the sub topics of awareness, conformity, marginalisation and efficacy.

Perceptions and awareness.

Social value and alignment behaviours were seen as conformity behaviour for social legitimacy. Social legitimacy related to the how the schools identified themselves. An awareness issue as reported by staff and students challenged part of the school's identity. Awareness refers to the reported lack of information about Outreach education, what Outreach schools do and the resulting public image. There was much less public information about these two schools than I had imagined. Staff reported feeling not being well understood by the community even those within the jurisdiction such as teachers, parents and staff from other schools. Sarah characterized it as others not knowing the difference "between having kids sitting in a classroom working independently versus what Outreach is". Her response typified staff feelings of judgment about the learning in Outreach schools. The lack of consciousness where "decisions are being made about students where the adults don't really understand the decisions they're making or where they're sending kids… sends a message" (Rita). Respondents felt school jurisdictions maintained Outreach schools to house expelled students. Staff reported an estrangement from their central office. This feeling of alienation encouraged further cultural isolationist attitudes and behaviours. Almost every respondent expressed feeling different from the mainstream, (which in and of itself is what Outreach is attempting to be). Not all of the feelings expressed were negative, and students often felt they were different as they were also decision makers. A recent change the staff experienced was the participation of the superintendent in a school celebration. The students and staff felt valued and respected. Laura felt the schools were being recognised at an organisational level with her statement "for a while they considered shutting us down and I'm really happy, though, to hear that that's not where their focus is now. They've come to appreciate that we are a viable service and that we need to be here" as a legitimate organisation.

Image was a large part of the social value associated with legitimating behaviours of these schools. Outreach schools struggled to provide more awareness of how they operate and depended on parents and students to provide

explanations of what their schools do. Staff and students felt the public perception of the overall image of the schools as a place for misfits, where “regular school didn't work for them, they were the kids who got into trouble” (Matt) painted an image that teachers also experienced. Through the case study, the schools were captured with words such as punishment and expulsion. Staff expressed a general feeling of operating with an unfairly attached stigma. The stigma of these schools appeared to be deeply embedded, particularly by adults, feeling that the community at large was less engaged in supporting the operation of these schools.

The staff used the expression of being “misunderstood” as a common feeling, “the concept of what the Outreaches were all about probably wasn't properly understood by a lot of people” (Matt). The use of “misunderstandings” to refer to district behaviours such as omissions or perceived marginalisation was a deliberate way to identify organisational issues while respecting power dynamics. The staff struggled with perceived isolation and reduced value of Outreach teachers seen as “module markers”. Teachers felt this reduced the value of the school as a legitimate place of learning. Dave noted, others seem to think “You're not busy. You must have lots of time. This must be easier work, et cetera. All sorts of conclusions are drawn”. As a new member to the school Dave was interested in the teacher perceived self-value. He noted:

> They’ve just become so entrenched in feeling no self-worth and that I didn't realize that it would be this much work to work through that piece and that they wouldn't see that they wouldn't be able to stand more proudly and say, You know what? We do really important work. (Dave)

Even with the feeling of being devalued/delegitimized generally shared by the staff, Sarah felt the situation was in a state of change with the image of the schools evolving in a more positive way. Several of the staff had also expressed a feeling of cultural change mindset. This awareness of their situation and an informed acceptance highlighted an awareness of the staff to operate and navigate in this organisational model.

At an organisational level, staff members were very pleased to have a specifically designated administrator. The principal’s presence is one of the

factors of the staff mindset change regarding the image of Outreach schools. The principal was “very much interested in making us very visible” (Laura). Dave actively engaged with school image and has demonstrated to the staff and students a desire to support their learning and teaching needs. Dave had begun to work with other schools “to be a legitimate choice for the grade nine students coming out of junior high school”. Dave wanted other students and staff to see Outreach as a valid high school choice.

The students in both focus groups reported a specifically negative image of the school as presented by their peers. The language consisted of “it's where all the retards went” (Focus Group 1) and “the screw ups…. These were the people who couldn’t make it in the *actual* school” (Focus Group 2). Members of both groups had been told, Outreach “was not a good place to go” (Focus Group 1). Students made references to drug addicts and gangs citing “you're not just going to go get beat up because you go to Sunny View Outreach, but [that is] just what people say” (Focus Group 1). The image also was experienced through perceived “looks” from others and questions that challenged their reasons for attending the school. Student responses to others perceptions of the school were generally very positive, with comments like “when I got here, I enjoyed the people here, and I like it a lot better than *normal* school” (Focus Group 1) and “I should of came here years ago” (Focus Group 2).

Part of the growth and change of the Outreach schools is locating their organisational niche. The schools’ ability to change and evolve has made them subject to whim and instability but has also fostered significant adaptability, creating a highly fluid way to meet current educational mandates. The contradiction of decoupling for independence and close alignment for legitimacy has placed these schools in an interesting place.

Conformity for validation.

Through the research it became very clear that no binary exists between alternative and mainstream education’s organisational practices. Alberta schools tend to exist in a culture of public comparison, resource competition, clear hierarchy, authoritative regulation and culturally embedded membership.

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Campbell (1994), organisational structures drive specific conforming behaviours for all schools. The behaviours are natural, enduring, survivalist and often tacit, even to the members within the organisation.

Legitimacy can be attained through isomorphic behaviours of organisations. Conformity and compliance ensure these schools are in social alignment with the district and society at large. Some of the sameness behaviours are also simply culturally embedded beliefs of “what high school learning should look like [with] the serious challenges of striving to be different” (Dave). Conformity is driven by high levels of uncertainty (Rowan, 1982) is a response to power imbalance (Foucault, 1975) with normative, regulatory and cultural cognitive pressures (Scott, 2004) all working to provide organisational stability. The desired and planned uniqueness of these schools requires a different approach to the operation of the school. The staff spoke of deliberate *educational* planning centered on life skills, social skills, decision-making and problem solving skills for students. The *structural* planning involved with attendance, hours of operation, continuous enrolment and forms of assessment makes these schools different. Anna described her work as “a lot of out-of-the-box thinking, we have to, to survive… that's also what a lot of where the stigma comes from too, because people don't understand alternate”. Staff felt the uniqueness of the school created a space where “it's easier for some people when they're unfamiliar with something just to jump to their own conclusions and not take the time to really understand” (Anna) highlighting feelings of dismissal at several levels. Mary commented on the idea that educators “have probably the hardest time understanding it [alternative education]”. The pressures of image, value and power regulate the way staff and students respond to mainstream schools. The behaviours of coupling and buffering in particular were the tools used to manage the pressure and offered “safe” resistance opportunities.

To understand the resistance taking place in the schools, it is helpful to review how educational organisations operate. No longer viewing organisations as the Weberian rational bureaucracy model but rather, loosely coupled systems with

"logical separateness" (Weick, 1976, p.18) offers sensitivity, encourages adaptation of the schools and supports flexibility (Weick, 1976). Each of these advantages offer places for schools to provide varying levels of resistance to external pressures. Resistance behaviours are driven through actions to protect the school and/or allow the school to remain loosely coupled (Weick, 1976). For example, schools with high levels of flexibility can operate out of the bounds of regular operations and in this way operate with less scrutiny or examination (Weick, 1976). This type of resistance can become decoupling where the behaviours are organised to buffer undesirable policy and focus on quality rather than appearance. At this point the decoupling behaviours can in fact, assist in preserving legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan 1983) through serving the purpose of the school rather than the pressures experienced by the school. Legitimacy in decoupling challenges the previous notion of tight alignment with authority recognising *who* determines legitimacy is also important. Finally, tight coupling that schools have also demonstrated offer the ritual and structure for the schools to buffer any uncertainty (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and provide the appearance of efficiency. The movement from tight to loose coupling in a continuous way is one of the important findings of this research. The evidence of this behaviour in the Outreach schools was noted through the connection to the district the school in the past was able to be tightly aligned or to move to be loosely coupled with district mandates such as hours of instruction, the use of technology in schools or dress code expectations. The rejection of the power structure in the schools suggests a decoupled behaviour. The principal offered to buffer with other members of the district where he was able to redefine what mandates looked like in his schools. The school carried the ability to decouple instructional hours and curriculum focusing on other outcomes for the student. The schools also we capable of chameleon behaviours in loose coupling where they appeared to be compliant to third party observers but we operating with different parameters.

Legitimacy offers the schools the prestige, worth and desirability (Suchman, 1995). The case study schools were challenged to meet a high diversity of need through a wide variety of means. Resource dependence required

the schools to use flexibility as a coupling agent with governing bodies (coupling of organisations shows alignment with values of the governing body conferring legitimacy). Thus, with educational reform, the differences are no longer a deficit but rather in alignment with educational mandates. The ability to customize learning through techniques that have the "flexibility to take a more individualized approach" (Anna) became the school's ability to address educational transformation. Teachers in both schools have recreated their roles through "re-culturing" the roles of teachers as facilitators, tutors, advisors and parents (Sarah, Mary, Matt), which represents a significant change in the power dynamic between the student and teacher. Student based learning also includes normative behaviours (Sarah) where "in a classroom, everything is structured around the clock, around the bells, around the curriculum, and here it's structured first around the student and then around the curriculum and seldom around the clock" (Laura).

Marginalization perceived or real.

While a significant theme presented by the staff and students regarding marginalization were represented in the research, it was less than I had expected or suggested by the literature. The staff in particular, were able to understand their organisational difficulty and manage the precarious power dynamic that often existed. The marginalization that was experienced related directly to the organisational power imbalance of these schools. Organisations with less perceived legitimacy, as in the two Outreaches in this case study, were influenced by other organisations with more power and capital. The experiences of the respondents were very clear and emotional. Staff reported isolation, low levels of peer interaction and lack of voice (Anna, Rita, Sarah, Mary). The perceived lack of awareness of what these schools do challenged parents and students to make informed choices about their educational options. This impacted the staff as they felt they spent instructional time justifying the value and purpose of their schools to others. Respondents noted student achievement, as "the bottom line… our goals are the same, and that is the success of the student" (Anna). The staff also accepted responsibility for promoting the school persona and felt a continued

responsibility to work towards developing their public image in the organisation. Sarah hoped there would become a time when the notion of “alternative” no longer needed quotation marks to define it. Students from both focus groups felt security offered by school size and one-to-one interactions with the staff. Several expulsion students chose to stay at Outreach after their required time expired, feeling “people just don't understand about these schools” (Focus Group 1). These students suggested that Outreach schools were a good choice for their learning. Students felt previously marginalized through bullying, exclusion, reduction of liberty and/or perceived teacher persecution in the mainstream. Once they moved to the Outreach school, students felt accepted and supported. Both focus groups also reported educational supports that helped them feel like they could be successful and offered them more locus of control.

From an organisational perspective, legitimacy for unique organisations is difficult. With no standard of comparison readily available, measures are less clear. The high levels of commitment towards students resulted in personal and systemic marginalization of the schools. The organisational response was to actively seek further innovative behaviours and in other areas seek conformity behaviours. The schools buffered differences through the preservation of a non-comparable unique identity of the schools. The administration worked to create a new image within the school district and encouraged staff to review their own image of learning. The power dynamic of other schools “owning” more legitimacy was contrasted by the Outreach schools focusing internally on the students and community. The power/control was experienced through regulative, (Outreach regulations within and outside the district), normative (the expectation and embedded behaviours of insiders and outsiders) and cultural-cognitive (the image and stigma of the school) pressures. The staff and students were able to continually operate under the pressures of marginalization, conformity and preconceived notions of what Outreach schools are, as they fundamentally believed this type of learning was effective and successful.

Power and Scarcity

Scarcity was a theme that was apparent in the data through examples of competition, disparity, pressure and resource dependence. Scarcity speaks directly to the questions of isomorphic pressures for conformity. The sub themes of scarcity identified through the coding process consist of Competition/Disparity, and Pressure/Resource Dependence.

Competition/coercive engagement.

Resource competition drives perceived scarcity; staff at these schools experienced competition economically through the allocated CEU funding for students. Schools reported often requiring significantly more time to complete courses than their mainstream partners. Teachers implicitly and explicitly experienced substantial pressure to ensure students completed credits (Mary, Sarah, Dave, Anna). This pressure was reflected in working conditions and experiences of power and marginalisation. The Carnegie unit was a very troubling concept for Mary as she was unaware of the depth of the “pressure to perform” until she started working at one of the Outreach sites: “Am I supposed to have this many credits done? I don’t know I have no idea about any of that kind of stuff. Yet, that’s funny I don’t know what a CEU is” (Mary). Her unawareness of the CEUs credit and funding model from the mainstream school is a stark contrast to what she experienced now working in an Outreach school. Several of the staff were frustrated that funding for students, who had been sent to Outreach, had historically been awarded to their sister high schools. Several of the staff respondents understood the “big picture” seeing the district as a whole and student need in a broader way. However, all staff experienced competition in a wide variety forms, ranging from perceived job security and value to funding. Competition was also experienced though understanding education as a transactional process where dividends and products counted more than students. Anna states: “I am totally cognizant of the fact that we have to generate CEUs but because that’s always been drilled into my head since day one coming in this door that’s what keeps the door open” (Anna). Not all competition is destructive but Marx’s Coercive Law of Competition outlines from an economic perspective the

way organisations drive to adopt behaviours of their competitors to remain in "the game". This organisational behaviour becomes yet another isomorphic factor in schools.

Disparity, in this case study, was seen as part of competition to gather resources for the school. Scarcity driven competition results in inequity and disparity, shown with comments like "we want our kids to have access to equal services. They're students in this division the same as everybody else" (Sarah). Staff experienced inequality in staffing changes (job security), work expectations, counselling time, numbers of teaching staff and access to services. This was seen as a result from the perspective of the staff as other schools competing to get what they needed and having the resource to get it. What "I would like to see is that they're [students] afforded the same supports as they would get if they were in a *regular* school" (Sarah). The perceived disparity was a point of frustration for several staff members as they felt that at times the school's needs had not been heard, impacting the access to support for their students. The feelings of inequity resulted in the development of a subculture where the members outside the school are seen as "other". The drive for self-perseveration led to loose coupling with power agencies. Staff reported feeling that administration, teachers and the school were not treated on a level playing field. Staff felt undervalued, mirrored by staff spending time working to justify their existence and proving the program is valuable to students. Several of the staff felt they were treated as if their school was a branch of the mainstream high school, suggesting Outreach schools having a lesser value. Mary felt the perception that some identified her school as a place for students who have "no options". In the past, both schools had experienced the pressures of potential closure. Laura felt it was a value-based decision that "tells you how important we must have seemed".

The power dynamic drove an internal scrutiny of what the schools were doing to meet educational outcomes. This added pressure paired with the scarcity experience resulted in symbolic isomorphism. Schools were negotiating boundaries to address the power dynamic of the "have" and "have not" schools. Not all of the respondents articulated a competitive relationship with other

schools, yet the overwhelming response of staff and students was one of feeling measured by the mainstream. Competition was also highlighted by feelings of inequality of power and resourcing of schools.

Pressure.

Pressure surfaced as a symptom of competition and resource dependence. Teachers were primarily happy and reported high levels of job satisfaction but noted the importance of needing administrative and counselling staff. Some of the pressures experienced by staff in the study were common to the teaching profession, such as Matt's experience of the pressures of diploma exams, reporting and school deadlines. At a school level, uniqueness related to diverse learning needs, school identity, high flexibility and mainstream support directly increased the pressures experienced. The uncertainty of course completion and funding added pressure on the staff and students. The perceived pressures of scarcity also directly related to job security. The constant awareness of deficit in the schools was never fully addressed, as according to the staff, they were unclear of exactly what their funding targets were. This resource dependence driven by the shared feeling of not having "enough" was also experienced through financial need. Rita had been told constantly "we don't generate enough CEUs" mirrored by Anna stating "I don't know anybody that works in Outreach that doesn't get told that every single year. You don't make enough money. You don't make enough money. You don't generate enough credits. You don't generate enough credits" (Anna). The staff also identified a generalized anxiety regarding the lack of clarity and transparency about the CEU benchmarks that were needed to operate the school fiscally. It was perceived that the access to earned CEUs was somehow not fairly allocated perhaps due to the staff not having access to budget information. Anna felt schools could "really thrive based on how high school credits are currently funded". Dave felt pressure to *fix* the funding model to reduce and redirect the anxious energy generated.

Students in the focus groups experienced scarcity at the school level seeing the school as "needing funding" (Focus Group 2). The students felt they had everything they needed to be successful but made statements that they wanted

to support the school by giving it more money, indicating they also experienced the school's feeling of need in some form. The idea that the schools were limited by size and money was reported many times by both groups in this study. The students saw schools as "limited from what a *normal* high school could do" (Focus Group 1). Students felt if there were more resources the schools would be able to offer more learning experiences to the students. Students expressed a desire for better facilities but were very happy with their experiences in the schools. Some of the students noted they sometimes felt they were missing "the little extras that we'd like that we miss about the *actual* schools" (Focus Group 2). The desire to belong and be part of mainstream schools was expressed by some and rejected by others.

The organisational competition for recognition, resource, stability and security impact all of the members within the organisation. Scarcity drives competitive and survival behaviours that create a form of "organizational Darwinism" pressuring organisational sameness for resource stability. The process of addressing the needs of scarcity fundamentally becomes a comparison of schools, educational models or jurisdictions. A higher than anticipated redaction of staff statements due to respondents feeling uncomfortable stating their positions on the record, indicated a highly politicized and power laden process.

Staff in both schools felt pressure from students to keep supports ongoing, driving alignment with resource generating organisations. Dave, referring to apparent Outreach cutback and closures, felt organisational pressure to create sustainable partnerships with the administration of the junior high schools, to create connections with central office and to find ways to profile and reimage the school for the jurisdiction and the public. The students spoke of missed opportunities from mainstream schools but particularly wanted similar resources found in the mainstream schools in the Outreach setting. Students recognised the normative structures of schools and wanted the same to be present in the Outreach schools highlighting the deeply embedded (and isomorphic) understanding of what we think schools are or should be. The power dynamic resulted in a space

where the power differential was too big for small schools to compete with. Behaviours of acceptance, and avoidance and in this case, compliance, have resulted in a realignment of Outreach educational behaviours with governing bodies.

The Nature of Alternative Education

Transformational change in Alberta has and will encourage overlapping "alternative behaviours" in almost all areas of learning. The "real" alternative behaviours of these schools that I was expecting to find do not exist in the way I had visualised them in my question five years ago. The Alberta Action Initiatives 2010-2014 has modeled and incorporated some of the fundamental premises found in the *Outreach Handbook* (2009) showing the continued blurring of the spaces between traditional and alternative education in Alberta. Staff interviews revealed beliefs about alterative education with comments such as: "what's traditional anymore?" (Laura). Laura saw Outreaches as "seeing a number of families choosing to withdraw their children" to find a place for students to feel connected. The participants spoke of changes in the nature of alterative education, feeling the schools and the school community has "become more mainstream" (Sarah) exerting more pressure on the schools and staff to be different while being told to "go do all this out-of-the-box stuff, but within this box" (Anna). The nature of alternative education is much more related to mainstream education than I had anticipated

My inquiry was driven to find what Alternative Education is, how mainstream high schools impact alternative high school education, and in what way members in alternative educational settings experience mainstream institutional pressures. The case study data highlighted six areas: learning and knowing, responsiveness, scarcity, legitimacy, nature of alternative and the "last stop" that surfaced from gathering the research. The data tended to be overlapping and the sorting of data was based on my own positionality regarding the research questions. Some of the findings were unexpected such as the "last stop" and the natural aligning of the schools with governing bodies. I also had expected more experiences of marginalization and did not recognize the high value of learning

and knowing in the creation of my research questions. As identified throughout this chapter, these concepts are overlapping and related in many ways. These findings developed understanding of the relationship and interaction of small schools in large systems.

Synthesis

The findings of this study discussed notions of coupling, legitimacy, power, embeddedness and social order to understand power and legitimacy in alternative education. The pressures of scarcity, educational reform and need for cultural identity fashioned the responses of the schools. From an organisational perspective Outreach schools showed movement from tight coupling/alignment to loose coupling with government and other schools as the occasion needed. At times the schools in the case study wanted a tighter coupling with the schools in their proximity for pragmatic and legitimacy needs and expressed a need to be decoupled at other times. The responses at the school level highlighted the deep values of relationship, self-value (Housego, 1999) and belonging (Kim & Taylor, 2008). The schools worked for and attained high levels of autonomy at a high cost to the schools. The responses to pressure are summarised in the list below.

1. Cultural Change - Outreach education is experiencing cultural identity change as evidenced by the *New* and *Old* views of what Outreach is and does. Change is also evidenced through notions of “last stop” transitioning from dependence to autonomy.
2. New meaning of learning and knowing - Learning and knowing are critical parts of Outreach, however the metrics of measuring and determining what learning and knowing are, have been disrupted and have different values to different members.
3. The blurring of boundaries – The division between what mainstream and alternative behaviours actually are, is becoming less clear. The highly responsive nature of Outreach schooling has also created boundary and demand issues for staff and students in the ways in which they interact with each other.

4. Redefining Legitimacy - Informal legitimacy measures are being redefined through things such as the Flexibility Framework and High School Redesign. Coupling and decoupling behaviours have also highlighted the importance of recognising "legitimacy for whom" when observing Outreach behaviours. Once the initial innovations are mimicked the legitimacy structures will be re-established.
5. Conflict/coercive pressure as a response to scarcity - Coercive power is present, the power differential of organisations due to size, significance and cultural embeddedness are too big for small schools to engage with directly. Teachers understand this difficulty and create a positive identity through the process of Dynamic Coupling.
6. Dynamic Coupling - Coercion and reform create the response of dynamic coupling. This process shows a knowledgeable and capable staff connecting and disconnecting to the organisation in a fluid manner, capable of managing pressures through renegotiation, developing identity and changing practices.
7. Transformative educational reform in Alberta – this reform has resulted in a realignment of Outreach educational behaviours with governing bodies resulting in unintended tight curricular coupling. Tension is shifting as culture and identity are changing.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

As schools conform to the standardized curriculum and attempt to provide "good education" so defined, children are deprived of opportunities to develop talents in other areas. In addition, those children who do not perform well on the required tests at the required time are discriminated against because they are considered less able and "at risk." Theoretically, different schools can teach more than what is mandated. In reality schools must ensure that they do well in areas that affect their reputation and standing, which means the subjects that are counted in standardized testing.

(Zhao, 2009, p. x)

The questions posed in Chapter 1 looked to understand Alternative Education, to see the impact of mainstream high schools on alternative high school education and to understand how Outreach schools respond to these pressures. In Chapter 4, the findings highlighted the importance of cultural change and the significance of learning and knowing in Outreach schools. An additional area was the reported was the experience of the "blurring" of traditional educational boundaries driven by technology and reform. These discoveries are general in nature and have likely been experienced in other schools also. The finding that drew my interest was the organisational behaviours used in the (re)establishment of legitimacy in the presence of coercive pressure and external demands. The ability to negotiate these pressures originated from a dynamic coupling with organisations with which the schools interacted. I have divided this chapter into a discussion of alternative behaviours and change and the organisational behaviours of dynamic coupling.

Understanding Alternative Education

To understand what alterative education is, this section reviews how organisational interactions have influenced Outreach education. The components of Outreach education that are important in this discussion consist of norms, values and culture, knowledge, personalisation of the learning experience and the spectrum of uniqueness. The relationship of alternative education and mainstream education also play an important role, as does coupling behaviours that will be discussed in the dynamic coupling section.

Norms and Organisational Culture

The literature was clear regarding the organisational norms and culture. Alternative schools normally tend to be caring and responsive cultures (Powell, 2003; Manning, 1993; Housego, 1999) that extend into the community. The school structures itself exist through a recognised set of rules, norms, values, and systems of cultural meaning (Garson, 2008). The construction of a *unique* culture plays a key role in alternative schools (Sprague & Tobin, 2000) even though it is difficult to control culture in a meaningful way (Waite, 2010). The Outreach school structure was, at the time of this research, experiencing a cultural change. This is significant since the cultural impact of change influences the way the school and its members see themselves. The change in these schools encompassed a kind of tension with ideas about what Outreach schools do. The discussion of "last stop" highlighted these pressures. The one school of thought saw Outreach education as a last respite for the soon to be lost (Old view) contrasted by the other seeing the schools as a place for different types of learning and future creation (New view). The title of old and new suggests one view that appears to be in the process of replacing the other. The views of participants were not dependent on age or educational position, nor did participants hold only one position of newness or oldness, and some participants varied on their views from topic to topic.

The *old* role of the Outreach school model in terms of policy and practice was about the belief that these schools were safety nets for the education system's largest failures. The *old* differences identified the last stop as a position of no choice and no power, where the learner remained dependent. The *old* Outreach was easy to navigate and offered a predictable environment for mainstream and alternative schools alike. On the one hand, the small one-to-one environment prepared students for the future, provided a wide variety of non-curricular supports, and focused on many of the challenges young people experience. The mainstream, on the other hand, offered a legitimate, recognized place for learning, offering resources, credentialing and status. Boundaries and roles were clear and predictable. The *old* Outreach model encouraged cultural self-perpetuation

through “rules, scripts, patterns, and arrangements, which reinforce core values and structures” (Garson, 2008, p. 5). As changes occurred in specific areas, patterned problem solving (Zucker, 1983) paired with systemically filtered personnel (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) drove predicable solutions. The case study schools demonstrated this and participated in chameleon-like self-preservation strategies of loose coupling to buffer and seek legitimation through other associations (Garson, 2008). These associations of the Outreach schools consisted of connections with community organisations, clubs and outside agencies such as the Rotary Club. Interestingly, mainstream desire to provide additional supports has aided in reforming the notion of *Last Stop*.

The *new* notion of last stop identifies the student as “the boss” (Focus Group, 1) and is an environment with a wide variety of possibility. The *new* view identifies Outreach schools as a place for students who were failed the most by the system; it takes the blame from the student and returns it to the system. This notion of blame is problematic as it has the tendency to villainize rather than build potential links between mainstream and alternative schools, between students and systems. It also has the potential to be a market model with the “client” directing, through a market of possibilities. This transfer of power and blame in the new model, just as in the old, must still hold a reciprocal sense of responsibility in the relationships between the systems. Newness was also seen in the schools, as they directly challenged the organisations’ tendency to seek legitimation through isomorphism. This was seen within the schools by the split in staff and the emotion and energy involved in the responses and we seen externally by the resistance of the school will the jurisdiction. The schools made choices that preserved legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) such as offering standard curricular choices and the presentation of the school in brochures and website. Due to governance encouraging reform, cultural persistence was partially challenged (some of the reform behaviours were already in effect). The push for change through educational mandates helped to create the patterns of thought regarding the old (pre Action Initiatives) and new (post Action Initiatives).

With specific mandates for organisational behaviours of Outreach schools, paired with new legislated reform, Alberta has redefined the notion of alternative learning. The "learning any time, any place and at any pace" (Alberta Education, 2010d) has in reality created the "old" alternative education as the new mainstream norm. The process of change and reform encouraged by a wide variety of factors such as emergent technology, desire for responsiveness, globalization, competition and governance (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2011c) has hastened a change to blend the learning from both models. The boundaries in the *new* Outreach schools are fluid, with relationships and personalization remaining the hub of school interaction. Mainstream schooling is encouraged to emulate behaviours of alternative schools. The Flexibility Enhancement Pilot project is just such an example where the reduction of the focus on instructional minutes, increased flexibility of learning approaches and structural and organisational changes (Alberta Education, 2011b) mirror Outreach schooling. The new thinking expressed in the schools consisted of the staff and students as seeing the school as a place that inherently valued diversity. The staff that supported the notion of *new* felt the school reform was the process of other agencies "catching up" to the behaviours of Outreach schooling.

Knowledge

Knowledge, as discussed in Chapter 4, is a central activity to the schools, yet notions of knowledge have changed. The *purpose* of knowledge is changing; the economic state and globalization have changed the need for educated people in the work force (Alberta Education, 2012). The roles and occupations are changing in an unpredictable way. The "ubiquitous" access to knowledge has changed the value of information and focused more on the means of gathering, interpreting and making sense of information. Innate information is less sacred, creating "engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial sprit" (*School Act*, RSA 2000) as the new direction of education.

Members of Outreach schools valued learning in district ways. Teachers did not describe their workplace as classrooms, and they valued holistic, wide spectrum learning, defining themselves as teaching beyond the curriculum.

Students appreciated the ability to expedite and control their own learning. The reduction of the importance of facts to process, the increased expectation for personalised meaning making and the institutional demands of measuring and centralized curriculum were the pressures exerted on both staff and students. The two groups experienced the same pressures but approached it from two different viewpoints. Each student in these schools was able to break episodic curriculum and create an individualized curriculum (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 207; Guerin & Denti, 1999). Knowledge in these schools was developed in a different way where almost all interactions between staff and students took place in a common space shared by all, highlighting socialization and community. This "open environment" encouraged a different flow of information and discussion. The "realness" of the schools, that is practical learning with little filling, allows both staff and students to construct new learning without reducing the value of other ways of knowing and learning. The impact on the Outreach schools in the study was to affirm and consolidate student centered behaviours. The importance of knowledge in the schools shown through the time taken to create a student-centered environment redefines the concept of universal knowing. The idea that knowledge is not a product or commodity, rather a process, is by no means new, but is an important philosophical space for these schools. It is also important to note that in the end, the staff were worried about completing credits and helping students transition to work. Although the articulation about learning may have been about holistic learning, the evidence in some of the quotations illustrates that there is some understanding that knowledge is product and commodity. Acceptance of many ways of knowing, individualised curriculum and individualised transitioning for students' future serves to personalise learning in a very definite way.

Personalization of Learning

Student centered behaviours were essential to the responsiveness of the studied Outreach schools. The schools' capacity to respond to a wide variety of need with reduced resource was significant to the research. The drive for a responsive educational model desired provincially (Alberta Education, 2010d) is implicitly understood as essential to these schools. The active choice to create

personalization required change in organisational behaviours. To develop responsiveness the schools had, at times, to be unresponsive to other demands. This selective decoupling and loose coupling permitted the schools to construct the valued behaviours of flexibility and autonomy. An example includes how the schools worked to gain access to the mainstream supports such as counselling or teaching materials, whereas at other times the schools would act to shelter the students from the mainstream schools. The schools also focused on their ability to provide coupling with other sectors and reduced association with governance such as high stakes testing and reporting. The organisations were capable of loose coupling to buffer demands that did not serve the school. The image of student centered learning was important to the schools, but at times the image may have been more important than the actual effectiveness of student centered behaviours. An example includes partnerships with other schools and the central office. If the schools had found a way to foster stronger partnerships they will have more resource for student success.

The nature of alternative education and, indeed, all education is highly relational, seen in the focus groups where students want capable staff to help them learn, but were less focused on what they were actually learning. It was taken for granted that students were working towards school completion for their own purposes. It is possible that students at these schools were seeking connectedness and personal relevance. This was shown though student attendance and comments from students in both focus groups that found value in attending Outreach beyond curricular instruction. These comments may also suggest that some of the focus group members desired holistic learning (offered by teachers) although never actually stated it. These types of networks with staff and other students are important as they act to preserve the deeply relational experience of schooling for these students.

The Legitimate Place of Isomorphism

I found the idea of Outreach educational practices *acting on* mainstream behaviours leading a new unanticipated direction of my research. The literature clearly identified the impact of those who have been granted legitimacy on those

who are seeking it. Through discussion these schools may also have had an impact on mainstream education in the jurisdiction, evidenced by policy change and experiences of the principal looking to normalize Outreach as a regular option for students. The case study identified alternative and mainstream schools acting as change agents upon each other. The *Action Initiatives* and "transformative" practices in education have resulted in highlighting and increasing the influence of alternative behaviours. The re-envisioning of what learning means has impacted measures of learning, the curriculum, teaching and learning that will continue to evolve mainstream and alternative behaviours. Increasing flexibility and customization impact the traditional boundaries of teachers, community and citizenship. The policy statements and the energy devoted to reform in education may not translate into practice but will at least start conversations regarding best practices. It is understood this reform, as with others in the past, may abruptly stop with a change in government, yet it is still of value for alternative and mainstream programming to learn and possibly adopt successful behaviours from each other, encouraging a different kind of sameness.

Curricular isomorphism did not come from the Outreach schools; rather it was being reorganized as a consequence of reform by Alberta Education. The fact that alternative practices have become the new governed direction has, in turn, made alternative schools align closely with government mandate. With this in mind, the coupling and decoupling behaviours exhibited by Outreach schools challenged the impact of mainstream high schools on alternative high school education. I had assumed more legitimacy was granted to mainstream schools than Outreach schools. The schools perceived being unsupported more as omissions and/or oversights rather than deliberate exclusion from collaboration or support. Power holds a real place in the interactions and behaviours and operations of the Outreach schools. From an organisational perspective this is true based on the resource allocation. From an educational position my legitimacy question is better asked as, legitimacy for and to whom? That is, the question of legitimacy as perceived by what audience and for what purpose.

Institutional Dynamics

The pressures and demand for resources determined the organisational behaviours of the schools. Early observation further identified identity, culture, learning and power structures as also regulating behaviours in some way. The schools' responses to pressure included a blending of various organisational responses. This section is divided into Dynamic Coupling, Alignment, Power Visibility and Institutional Position, and Shifting Organisational Interactions.

Dynamic Coupling

When I started the case study I was looking for the default position the schools used to locate themselves within the organisation. I had expected the schools would have been coupled to organisations due to resource dependence. What became apparent, at least with the schools studied, was a continuous situational flow of connecting and disconnecting to other mainstream schools. This dynamic movement is a deliberate and responsive behaviour in which the schools meet needs and buffer pressures exerted upon the school. Dynamic coupling is the ability for the organisation to move from tight to decoupled behaviours fluidly and repeatedly. The organisation can be simultaneously tightly coupled in one area and loosely coupled in another area. This observation of the coupling behaviours of this organisation offers a contribution to the body of knowledge regarding the way in which small organisations are aware and capable of negotiating external pressures. The behaviours of the members of this organisation are also important, as they understood movement back and forth where there is no default alignment position. The staff were aware of the need to be flexible, and accepting and prepared to handle inconsistency. This perceived attitude changes the assumed fear and dependence of staff working in these schools, and positions staff as more knowing agents in the system.

Alignment

The coupling movement taking place served many purposes for the school as noted by Scott (2004) and Powel and DiMggio (1983) throughout the writing. The Outreach schools found ways to be compliant to governing bodies through curricular alignment, reform parity and meeting district expectations. The

schools' abilities and desire to provide personal and flexible learning have encouraged the schools to be loosely coupled and to create their own way of assisting learning. Alberta's focus on engagement and transformation had changed the fringe location of alternative education and Outreach schooling to a more legitimate and acceptable form, also reducing the *need* to align as closely.

Current transformational reforms, for example, such as the high school completion and inspiring education initiatives in education, are primarily responsible for a realignment of Outreach education with mainstream practices. Outreach schools identify themselves as a unique learning environment encouraging the membership of the marginalized in both the teaching and learning populations. The more natural alignment with Alberta Education has encouraged the schools to bridge the gap between the mainstream and Outreach environments. The pressure to return to the focus on the student without reducing the pressure of the economics of education (CEUs) has created a common ground for schools. The educational reform has unintentionally acted to make the Outreach behaviours in alignment with the government policy, as a consequence brokering legitimacy and alignment with power organisations. The loose coupling used to preserve identity when addressing innovation, regulation, or policy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) seemed to require less effort and the staff and Focus Groups seemed to be looking for tighter alignment with mainstream education in some areas, such as student record sharing, collaboration of teaching practice and school fieldtrips. The schools' natural process of change to and from alignment act in two ways: the schools are capable of casting off feelings of rejection and avoidance, and staff/students can also begin to negotiate new boundaries in their field to "fit different models together" (Dave).

The high level of affiliation with other organisations from a variety of sectors has resulted a high level of organisational formalization (Clerkin, 2006). A culture of embeddedness was present but not in the capacity I had envisioned it to be. I had assumed cultural persistence would exist in the schools as a form of resistance to change. In fact, the inertia of embeddedness was more likely a call

for change (Kim, 2005) as members within the organisation acted to preserve the vision and values system of the school.

Power, Visibility and Precarious Institutional Position

The literature offered findings that supported the observations of power within and amongst the schools. Power as a behaviour or action worked as a component of legitimacy behaviours and resulted in an environment of pressure and competition. As the power of scripted behaviours of personnel driven by internalized organisational values and culture (Zucker, 1983) begins to change, the embedded behaviours may begin to shift, resulting in new power symbols and new norms of behaviour. Cultural persistence was present in in both schools and was apparent when discussing interactions of power organisations including mainstream schools, Government and the jurisdiction. Power and coercive pressure was also linked to the ability to generate funds and complete CEUs.

The studied schools felt less important based on size, wide comparisons, image and lack of overall public awareness. These schools focused on autonomy, flexibility and uniqueness. All schools experience pressure to be responsive to some degree, yet, Outreach schools, through necessity, needed alternative ways to address the pressures of comparison and competition. Scarcity and resource dependence are important concepts in school operations and historically, economics drove a great deal of the schools' logistic, political and pragmatic behaviours. As no surprise, Outreach schools, due to their small populations, reduced ability to generate CEUs and low status, often experienced this pressure acutely and managed these pressures through dynamic coupling. The reported economic anxiety has real impact on staffing, access to resources, marketization of learning and a need to parallel educating with revenue generating. The motivation for these schools to exist is a primary focus of strategic planning, and these schools are constantly engaged in finding and supporting ways to maintain the current finances of the school. The introduction of projects such as the Flex Framework (which significantly mirrors Outreach behaviours and encourages diversity) if successful, will fundamentally change the CEU funding model, as schools will no longer have the finite restraints to generate CEUs according to

hours of instruction and marks. This change would also likely impact the per-pupil funding model as well that may generate new ways to fund education. Economic pressure, in the end, will not likely be resolved, but this type of thinking may result in new ways for schools to fund themselves that will be less of a distraction from supporting learning. This distraction remains a challenge to all schools, as public education remains the Constitutional responsibility of the province yet energy around money as described by the schools are reminiscent to the market model of entrepreneurial education.

Power relations and order making exerts control over the schools (Mukherji, 2009), however with transformation as the current educational space (personalisation and flexibility) the power dynamic is changing. Legitimate power can be experienced in places of diversity. Coupling behaviours are working to create new norms of legitimacy and values that shape the type of schooling taking place. It is of interest to note the staff was immensely supportive and reported high levels of satisfaction with the introduction of Dave, the site principal. The office of principal has a responsibility to the organisation and reports to the superintendent of schools. The principal was able to negotiate the requirement to manage and follow district mandate as well as demonstrate responsiveness through negotiation and competition for power and legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) within the organisation (Kanter, 1972).

The conflict experienced in the Outreach schools was carefully presented as miscommunications and oversights of the district or governing bodies. Through my time in the building, it became clear the miscommunications represented a politicised response to the needs of the school not being met. Further, after member checking, staff redacted large sections of the text that may have been interpreted as conflict statements, signifying compliance behaviours in the presence of power. This also fits in the process of dynamic coupling; for dynamic coupling to work, organisations must stay “under the radar” as a way to avoid engagement with the mainstream. The compliance behaviours preserved the schools’ autonomy but also surfaced respect and understanding of the power relations. Power was not experienced within the school as I had expected, but was

driven from the behaviours of other schools, central office and government organisations. The schools created a cohesive strong internal organisation that was capable of buffering and resisting a powerful external environment. The responses of the schools were conciliatory, involving loose coupling and avoidance, (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2004). These behaviours were isomorphic organisationally; that is, they followed the organisational shaping to function within the model on the outside and resisted internally. The schools experienced a wide variety of pressures, maintained a low profile, and appeared to "stay in line" without disruption, which may in fact impair the ability to become more legitimate in the long term. This public alignment (dynamic coupling) demonstrated the schools' effective response to the power dynamic.

Shifting Boundaries and Life in Organisations

The boundary discussion was an unanticipated finding of this case study. The literature is relatively silent regarding the impact of reform on boundaries of the marginalised members. Some discussion exists in the area of technological change and growth and the impact on practices. Boundaries in literature regarding cultural change seemed to center on specific innovations such as Facebook and other communication innovations. There was also some interesting discussion from Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) regarding institutional cycles and the impact of boundaries. They highlight this process as three phases: stability, conflict and redesign. The stability cycle is typically described as "institutional isomorphism and diffusion, with its focus on strong boundaries and mechanisms of social control that lead to stability and similarity within organizational fields" (p. 215). The conflict cycle is "focus[ed] on battles over practices and authority" (p. 215) and the innovation cycle is focused on institutional entrepreneurship or institutional design, which is "the creation of new institutions by interested actors, and their promotion to diverse constituencies" (p. 215). This evolution of practice and boundaries also mirrored in the schools revolves around the notion of change and disruption. The movement from stability, to instability and to re-stabilization underpins the current experience of reform currently taking place in education in Alberta. Organisational embeddedness provides stability and predictability for

organisations. The change in embeddedness has been brought about by many factors in schools including the evolution of the learner, new notions of efficacy, technological capacity, high connectivity and societal changes. As a result, boundaries have not just been disrupted but are becoming less identifiable as boundaries in any traditional sense. The blurring of boundaries has taken place as learners are redefining their workspaces physically, geographically and technologically. Teachers' means of integration, methods of engagement, work hours and school interactions have changed in a relatively short period of time. What this looked like to the Outreach Schools was a very different connection to teachers and students where hours and schedules meant less and the focus was on belonging and acceptance.

Building Community for Organisational Strength

Community is important and impacts relational and cultural boundaries. Community may become a place where people interact in more ways as technologies continue to develop means for connectivity. This connectivity may change the breadth of influence of the culture of schools. Boundary challenges were reported by staff and were observed through staff discussion of their work pressures, student reported means of connecting, and teachers feeling they were constantly "on". Historically, the staffs' mandate was to connect with and educate students who operate outside of the bounds of regular schools. The changing nature of what "work" is for both students and staff was experienced differently as current boundaries of operations, such as hours of work and type of work, continue to change. The issues of disconnect, redefinition of educator and learner roles, impact of business, community and other agencies has further blurred the lines of learning.

Staff and students in the school reported feeling marginalized when compared to the district. Staff felt they were perceived with less esteem than their mainstream colleagues. Students in the research were also very clear about their experiences of marginalization in mainstream settings. The students reported experiences of isolation, stigma, omission, rejection, dismissal and judgment. The perceived marginalization took place on both public and subtle levels through

deliberate and unintended means. An example of unintended, covert marginalization was the way the school was represented both by itself and the jurisdiction to which it belongs. The school's website, at the time of writing, list three different administrators with little evidence of attention to the accuracy of the "school fact" publications and the school descriptions. At a district level the *District Information Booklet* for 2013, provided a one-page mention regarding the programming and supports for learning for each of the schools in the district with the exception of the Outreach schools. The Outreach schools were described in two sentences. This may, of course, be due to the difference of the types of schooling and learning given the schools' flexibility of instruction and delivery and different structure. The district may have felt less obligation to report due to the reduced programming evident in these schools (for example, there is no need provide a sports team schedules, or include a student timetable). There was mention of a review of the outreach schools in the Three Year Education plan overview page but I was unable to locate the details of the review on the website, or in district manuals or minutes.

The experience of the learners in these schools is highly contrasted with their experience in the mainstream schools. In their previous schools, students reported issues with bullying, learning needs not being met and not fitting in. Students in turn felt less marginalized in their new schools and reported high satisfaction levels in their new spaces. Outreach schools generally operate as failsafe to support the marginalized. Ironically, Outreach was reported as being seen by others as a place that marginalizes its learners simply by belonging to an Outreach school. The schools offered the supports of trust, respect, belonging, opportunity and autonomy (Kim & Taylor, 2008). This autonomy paired with a responsive, relevant space with emotional and educational support resulted in mitigating the impact of previous marginalization. Further, the importance of community and cooperative partnerships in education (Alberta Learning, 2001) identifies community support as a significant factor for success and sustainability of Outreach schools *(Outreach Program Handbook*, 2009). The community connections reduce drop out rates (Sprague & Tobin, 2000), foster self-concept

(Manning), create resiliency (Alberta Education, 2009) and act as a safety net for marginalized learners (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Institutional Dynamics and Organisational Change

Understanding how change happens in Alberta can be aided by focusing on teachers in human, social and decisional domains (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The skills and professional capacity of teachers systemically supported by professional communities with the autonomy to make specific educational decisions transforms education into an "authentic collaborative professional community" (*Transforming Education in Alberta*, 2012/2013, p.12). High performing school districts have three common features: respect for the profession of teachers, construction of a social context that fosters learning and professional growth, and learning for teachers to focus on learning (Sahlberg, 2011). As participants in this research highlighted, finding and creating deliberate ways to connect, transition and overlap mainstream and alternative learning creates a more "seamless" environment. Involving mainstream schools and adopting mainstream connections and events into Outreach would also encourage collaboration. Respondents also noted the importance of creating fewer but larger, more resourced centres with the same Outreach behaviours to address some of the scarcity issues (understanding that increasing the size of the school also changes the nature of these schools in a fundamental way).

The Future of Teaching in Alberta (2011) research paper identified the importance of individuals, relationships and community to guide learning, and articulated the important difference between preparing for lifelong learning, not lifelong work. Transforming Education in Alberta (2012/2013) identified changes in; assessing and reporting student learning, curriculum development and implementation, digital technologies and learning. The value-laden view of alternative education may be changing to an appreciation of autonomy, connections (to others and community) and relations through these reforms. The uncertainties of the new and changing educational climate through initiatives such as the Action Initiatives, as highlighted in Chapter 4, has destabilized some of the embedded behaviours and offers an opportunity to change. Change has been

enabled through emergent transformative technologies, behaviours of other schools at a global level and pressure from economic, political and social levels. The future of significant meaningful change will contain trust and responsibility for local community involvement and space where teachers and administrators are encouraged and expected to use professional judgment for learning and reporting (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

A key part of the transformational model consists of the notion of personalization. Alberta Education (2010b) uses the term personalized learning in setting out its vision for educational transformation in Alberta: “Part of addressing… diverse learning needs means that we need to find ways to personalize learning and provide learning opportunities with flexible timing and pacing in a range of learning environments, while maintaining high student expectations” (Alberta Education, 2010a, p. 7). This individualization may be part of a neoliberal shift in educational models in schools, where legitimacy and authenticity can come from outside agency organisations. Regardless, it is clear the early innovations and changes will be the one fraught with most of the performance-based invention; later adopting will result in legitimacy behaviours due to uncertainty and scarcity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Outreach schools have the opportunity to be (and are) the innovators and early adaptors with the new institutional dynamics taking place.

Reform Within and Outside Outreach Schools.

The literature did support the notions of the natural process of reform in culture, policy and structure. However, the problems the schools experienced were related to voice and resource. The challenge for schools that have been silenced to manage resource demands for their existence result in the development of cultures of secrecy. Schools used decoupling and loose coupling behaviours to manage scarcity. At times the schools preferred to experience some forms of scarcity in order to preserve the benefits of uniqueness. The schools used the passive resistance of loose coupling and actively fostered their own culture and reform within their schools. This was seen by the schools creation of their own graduation process and other ceremonies that did not include the district as well as

establishing a strong connection with other Outreach schools from other districts. The schools did not need to agree with all the Alberta Education documents and as such were selectively aligned (tight curriculum, loose-assessment). The five core strategies of engagement, transitioning, partnerships, connections and tracking progress present as universals, and were already happening in schools. This would make the alignment potentially coincidental and less of a deliberate legitimating behaviour.

Conclusion

The findings of this case study suggest that the literature may be less accurate in predicting the behaviors of organisations like Outreach schools that seek legitimacy and stability. The contradictions of stability, reform and change have challenged the organisational rules for legitimacy within Outreach Schools. The importance of organisational learning and building knowledge of the community with schools will continue to form what boundaries look like. The change of the old to new behaviours, the strong influence of cultural norms and the high levels of personalisation of learning have begun to change what Outreach education will be.

CHAPTER 6: EXPERINCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Respect is also fostered when students take ownership of their education. Students in Outreach Programs should be encouraged to take responsibility for learning. They should be involved in planning, the delivery and the evaluation of their education program.

(Outreach Programs Handbook, 2009, p. 27)

My research offers a contemporary review of the institutional pressures on Outreach schools in Alberta. The research identifies how Outreach schools create and provide educational legitimacy and autonomy in a mainstream environment and how mainstream institutional behaviours, policies and practices impact alternative schools through isomorphism, legitimacy and power. In this chapter I reflect on my learning through the analysis and synthesis of the data and literature reviewed. The learning provided specific findings for my research questions. I have included observations and recommendations about what ought to be done to address the shortcomings identified and reinforce the strengths noted. Finally, I included an additional writers note based on my own experience, intuition and hope.

Specific Conclusions

The specific findings of the research offered some confirmations about the changing nature and role of Outreach schooling. Outreach schools have developed high level of responsiveness to student need. The nature of knowing is changing due to current educational reform, the blurring of boundaries and the evolution from old to new alternative behaviours. The summary of my learning from this case study is listed below.

1. *Coercion was present in a substantive way*. The coercion taking place in alternative schools is dynamic and seductive. That is, it is easy for other organisations to exert power on smaller less resourced organisations. The data clearly indicated experiences of pressure reported by all members within the schools. The research has offered a wide variety of occurrences of marginalization and exclusion within and outside the schools. Coercion, power and control created an environment where a negotiation of power had

to take place. The school conceded, readily complied, loosely coupled or decoupled depending upon what the area of negotiation was. The institutional relations still resulted in experienced marginalization of the respondents but offered the organisation some agency. It is difficult to determine to what degree the experiences of marginalization are perceived or actual, but without question, power and coercion was experienced in the case study schools.

2. *Oversimplification of the coupling process*. The balance of tight and loose coupling through buffering behaviours can be applied to many specific organisational behaviours of the school. The school can be both loosely and tightly coupled at the same time in different areas as seen in the curricular (tight) and structural (loose) behaviours of the school. The cause and effect of these behaviours is also more difficult to predict than suggested in the literature. The staff at the schools have figured out how to use this coupling process in a reflexive and responsive way. This use of dynamic coupling is a positive and hopeful situation for the staff in schools where they have found a way to work around the power.
3. *Power experienced has created an "us and them" mentality*. Teachers were frustrated with other schools' lack of understanding of what Outreaches are attempting to do. The schools actively worked to avoid conflict as shown through redacted statements, explaining contradictory behaviours and minimizing feelings of exclusion and marginalization. The schools continuously presented a space of hope and deep purpose as shown through teacher statements and student experiences. The experiences of power (regulation and control) have been paired or connected with the "other" and has limited the capacity to build and maintain important partnerships.
4. *Importance of culture in the strength of the school.* Culture and community played an important role in the stability of the school and was used as a measure of efficacy by the students and staff. The cultural disruption in Outreach taking place has been shown through discussions highlighting feelings of discord and disconnect with other schools and governing bodies. Cultural agency also created organisational power through the construction of

identity and purpose of the schools. Culture also played a significant role in mitigating the impact of marginalization experienced by the members of the school.

5. *The school is very capable of meeting needs and demands*. The dependence upon the jurisdiction and governing agencies is real; notwithstanding, the students and staff presented a tenacity to make the school "exist". The determination for the school to serve students was shown through organisational behaviours of dynamic coupling, through an established value system and offering differences. The notion of "last stop" has shifted from an understanding that Outreach schools are the last place for students to being a location for students to revise and reestablish cultural behaviour to develop independence. The survival of these two schools demonstrates the strength of schools to change and adapt to meet the environmental pressures and remain autonomous.
6. *The administration is a key part of Outreach schools*. In the eyes of the staff, the principal was a key component of the schools' ability to navigate organisational behaviours. Staff felt validated, confident and respected by the district with the presence of the principal. The alignment with the order/power structure of other schools offers the Outreach schools structural legitimacy. This response to power is mimetic and perhaps symbolic, but teachers felt the presence of a principal was an essential component of developing autonomy and legitimacy. The staff did not at any point identify the principal as a potential tool of subjugation; nevertheless, this is clearly a possibility in these schools. Positioning a principal on site in the schools as an arm of the superintendent is risky to the independent operation of schools but is currently outweighed by the opportunity for these schools to have a larger voice than in the past.
7. *Assumptions of organisational conformity as the goal.* The research highlighted the role of legitimacy in creating power and accessing resources. The literature identified alignment as a means to be seen as worthy of accessing resources in order to manage issues of scarcity. Staff expressed

independence and willingness to operate as partners with other schools while desiring to maintain their independence and autonomy. The value of conformity can be lost when the school loses its identity and is subject to the volatility and change in governing bodies.

8. *Learning is a critical part of what happens in Outreach schools*. The literature referred to Outreach schooling as a place to find alternate supports, such as mental health supports, funding, parenting counselling and similar provisions. This was evident in both schools in the case study. It was of interest to me to see that learning and knowing remained a critical and central behaviour as identified by all members. Both groups (teachers and students) spoke of learning and knowing often and with great depth. Teachers understood teaching differently (holistic) than the students and the students experienced learning differently (pragmatic) than anticipated by the teachers.
9. *Responsiveness and flexibility are natural personalization behaviours*. Personalization naturally includes a highly relational environment with the ability to respond in a wide variety of ways to a wide variety of need. The schools' learning focus is in alignment with new educational mandates but the responsiveness of schools is somewhat limited. The schools are providing highly customized learning. The schools are also working to develop transitioning with other schools and the work force. The schools must also take into account educational mandates that may require other conformity behaviours that may reduce responsiveness to student need.

Educational models must provide public assurance that support exists for all students and Outreach schools have demonstrated the capacity to support a wide variety of demands. Due to the high flexibility of Outreach schools, they lose some of their identifiable characteristics of what a school is, and with it, a loss of legitimacy. These schools have experienced clear marginalization and have been subjugated by coercive power. To address these pressures, the school has made use of dynamic coupling to connect and disconnect when needed. The schools have found a way to mange pressures and embrace and develop autonomy in the educational field.

Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations and further research this work has also resulted in the development of an anecdotal section in which my engagement with the research provided insights but not evidence. One of the insights that became readily apparent was the value of Organisational and Institutional theory as the lens to view this research. Institutional theory was instrumental in providing the language (legitimacy, isomorphism, coupling) and means to explain the behaviours taking place in schools. Organisational theory offered a way to understand bureaucratic machinations. The potential weakness of using this theoretical positioning to explain the events post hoc can explain the events but not necessarily the causes of the events. Even with this weakness, the use of these theories as a tool to explore the pressures in schools was the right choice.

Organizing Alternative Education

The issues with the interaction of the Outreach schools with its partner mainstream schools have been caused by the seeming lack of alignment with each of the schools' practices. The creation of a new currency for difference has given Outreach schools legitimacy and credibility, and a space to spend less time attempting to justify difference to attain status. Based on the behaviours of the schools' administration and the desire of teachers, schools may consider engaging and partnering with the mainstream schools in a meaningful way. It is important to encourage the continued responsibility of Outreach schools to engage with new partners to further their support network, to develop awareness and to address image issues. Outreach schools working must address the unconscious assumptions of the community regarding mainstream and alternative education. Finally, Outreach schools must consider the degree to which the schools and the actors within are responsible for their own withdrawal from their jurisdiction.

It is important to remind Alberta teachers, and specifically alternative teachers or those who wish to teach through alternative means, about the challenges of consensus in education. The informal marginalising of Outreach schools based on size and difference will continue. To address this, it is important to highlight the behaviours of these schools as aligned with policy and mandate.

The ability for mainstream and alternative schools to partner and to work together in a more aligned way will support student learning, transitioning, high school completion expectations, and provide a place to pilot new and innovative practices that support change and learning. It is also essential in a formal way, to recognise the value of the schools as educational partners in the district. Many of the changes suggested have been considered and may be employed with both schools in this case study already.

Further Research

Questions that could have added more information for my research became apparent during writing process. I gathered data from only one perspective, the Outreach view of what the experience of staff and students has been. Questions that would help elucidate my research questions further are listed below:

1. *What is the Outreach impact on mainstream schools from a mainstream perspective*? This question could shed light onto the relationships of the schools and students, the exposure of Outreach schools to mainstream, actual marginalising behaviours if any, and the effectiveness of the partnership on student learning and supports. The questions of what Outreach education has taught mainstream education as well as understanding administrative views of Outreach education could be addressed by this question. The view from other administrators and central office staff could offer a more organisational perspective of the "fit" of the schools and the members within. Seeing how the Outreach schools engaged from this lens would have been immensely informative.
2. W*hat does Outreach schooling look like in other locations that have different socioeconomic status, school resources and reduced student populations?* The question gives some insight in a broader way to what impact a reduced resource base would have on the organisational and legitimacy behaviours of the school. This inquiry could look at international perspective on this type of schooling as well as understanding how the pressures are experienced from different resource distribution models.

3. *A personal narrative inquiry of the educational experience of students moving in and out of Outreach schools.* This inquiry could shed more light onto the lived experience of students as they transition back and forth from mainstream to alternative. The narrative inquiry could also offer insights into the interactions of teachers and how students' needs are met (or not met) by both schools.

Anecdotal Thoughts

As a final note, during the research of this topic, certain anecdotal thoughts and observations occurred. As there were no data to support these unsubstantiated claims I did not include them in the research. However, after all was done, the thoughts remained. I have included these waypoints to my learning as an anecdotal personal comment on my own research.

Regarding what "should" be happening to support Outreach schools: Staff in the mainstream schools should have some engagement with the activities taking place in Outreach schools on more than an academic level. Professional development together with all teachers in both models may be of value to creating a more common language and experience. Taking more time to highlight the available choices for a wide variety learning styles could be a great asset to the school district, providing high alignment and creating possibilities for engagement with their specialist schools.

The blurring of the boundaries may require the school district to reconsider what expected and what unhealthy beliefs and practices regarding teacher/student engagement are. What seems to be emerging is the notion of a blended space (combining the value of mainstream and the benefits autonomy) letting students define their own definitions for and of success. Blended behaviours may offer opportunities for increased levels of school efficacy. The blurring of boundaries between schools may also be a space to consider a restructuring of the leadership in high schools with the possibility of including the Outreach teachers in a leadership capacity within mainstream schools. Notions such as one department head for all high schools or having Outreach teachers as specialists for support in mainstream may help connect the schools and encourage

collaboration to share wisdom. This time of change in Outreach education may also be a good time for the jurisdiction to redefine the school's role.

In the end, alternative schools will need to establish connection and significance with the understanding that their work has, in some ways, become less specialized. Outreach schools need to expand partnerships with other Outreach schools and sites to foster best practices and establish the schools' changing roles in a more established and deliberate way. In particular, the staff need to be aware and be present regarding the practices of both mainstream and alternative schools. It is the responsibility of Outreach schools to speak out, release old wrongs and engage with new partners to address image issues. Offering the "alternative mainstream" (Mary) as the example where "our high schools… become more like the Outreaches"(Dave) and create a space where policy makers listen the voices of those who have yet to have been heard.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Question planning Matrix

In what ways do staff and students in alternative educational settings experience pressure from mainstream education?

Questions

Nature	Isomorphism	Practice/Behaviour
What is the nature of Alternative Education?	How do institutional processes, policies, practices and expectations in mainstream high schools impact alternative high school education?	How do educators respond to the perceived and real tensions and pressures experienced by Outreach schools?

Interview Session 1 (one Hour)

Interview Session 2 (one Hour)

Interview Questions (Staff)

- What do you consider the "alternative component" of non-traditional education to consist of?
- What is your understanding of the type teaching (learning) that takes place in Outreach schools?
- What do you think the benefits are for students and teachers working and learning in Outreach schools?
- How do you think the structure of this school is different than the mainstream schools and what problems and benefits do you feel that offers?

- What experiences have you had relating to the legitimacy of your school with other interest holders or schools?
- What are the similarities and differences between Outreach schools and mainstream models, in your opinion?
- What are the pressures you have experienced in this position and from whom?
- How do you think the school manages to balance the needs for Alberta Education, i.e. reporting and earning CEUs and the immediate needs of the students?

- What are the current and ongoing issues with school practices and how are they addressed?
- What are the main sources of conflict if any that occur within and outside the school and how are they addressed?
- How do you know the school is being effective in educating and supporting students? What are any
- What are other things you would like to do differently in your school that you are currently unable to do? Why?

Appendix A: Question Composition (continued)

Focus Group (one Hour)

Focus Group (students)

- Why do you attend an Outreach School? In what way does it help you?
- How is this different that your other school experiences?
- What do you need as a learner to be successful?
- What is Outreach school to you?

- Have you experienced any issues with students or staff from other high schools?
- What are the similarities and differences between Outreach schools and mainstream models, in your opinion?
- What are the pressures you have experienced specific to Outreach schools?

- What are other things you would like to do differently in your school that you are currently unable to do? Why?
- What are the main sources of conflict if any that occur within and outside the school and how are they addressed?
- How do you feel Outreach students are perceived?

Appendix B: Staff Interview - Session 1

Question

My research question examines the extent to which Outreach schools are required to adopt mainstream institutional behaviours to preserve legitimacy and the effect on school practices.

- What is your understanding of the type teaching (learning) that takes place in Outreach schools?
- What do you think the benefits are for students and teachers working and learning in Outreach schools?
- What do you consider the "alternative component" of non-traditional education to consist of?
- What experiences have you had relating to the legitimacy of your school with other interest holders or schools?
- How are between Outreach schools and mainstream models the similar and different, in your opinion?
- What are the current and ongoing issues with school practices and how are they addressed?
- What are the main sources of conflict if any that occur within and outside the school and how are they addressed?

Summary

Review statements of the interview to ensure the information is a true reflection. Thank and arrange follow-up meeting.

Appendix C: Staff Interview - Session 2

Review the purpose, process, timeline and ethics policy.

Provide a summary of the responses and my understanding of the response in my own words for Questions in Interview Session 1.

Question

My research question examines the extent to which Outreach schools are required to adopt mainstream institutional behaviours to preserve legitimacy and the effect on school practices.

1. Last time we met, we discussed several questions (provide copy). Is there anything you would like to add or change to your responses?

2. Are there any questions you would like to further clarify having had more time to think about the question?

- How do you think the structure of this school is different than the mainstream schools and what problems and benefits do you feel that offers?

- What are the pressures you have experienced in this position and how have you addressed them?

- How do you think the school manages to balance the needs for Alberta Education, i.e. reporting and earning CEUs and the immediate needs of the students?

- How do you know the school is being effective in educating and supporting students? What are any

- How would you like to do things differently in your school that you are currently unable to do? Why?

Appendix D: Focus Group - Session 1

Question

My research question examines the extent to which Outreach schools are required to adopt mainstream institutional behaviours to preserve legitimacy and the effect on school practices.

- What are other things you would like to do differently in your school that you are currently unable to do? Why?
- What are the main sources of conflict if any that occur within and outside the school and how are they addressed?
- Have you experienced any issues with students or staff from other high schools, how did you deal with them?
- What are the similarities and differences between Outreach schools and mainstream models, in your opinion?
- What are the pressures you have experienced?
- Why do you attend an Outreach School? In what way does it help you?
- How is this different that your other school experiences?
- What do you need as a learner to be successful?

Summary

Review statements of the interview to ensure the information is accurate

Appendix E: Research Request

Research request

Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education

My name is Graham Jackson, and I am a Doctor of Education student at the University of Alberta. I am conducting research on Outreach education under the supervision of Dr. Lynette Shultz. I have met the University of Alberta ethics review requirements for my research. A copy of their approval is contained with this letter. I invite you to consider taking part in this research.

Purpose of research is to in examine if Outreach schools are pressured to adopt mainstream school behaviours and if so, its effect on the practices in Outreach schools. The information can benefit other Outreach schools, provide opportunities for staff and students to share their voice about Outreach education and inform government and other jurisdictions in Alberta. The results of this study will be used in support of my dissertation for the Doctor of Education program in the Faculty of Educational Policy Studies. The research will consist of interviews with no more than 10 school staff and administration and a one-time focus group with 5-10 students in two schools in your jurisdiction. The study will occur from May to November 2012. For the sake of confidentiality you will not be informed which schools, staff or students have volunteered to participate in this study. You may have a copy of the final study by contacting me.

Attached for your information are copies of the Information and Consent Forms.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Research Investigator:
Mr. Graham Jackson
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

Supervisor:
Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
(780) 492.4441

Thank you for you generous consideration,
Sincerely,

Graham Jackson

Appendix F: Information Letter Students

INFORMATION LETTER STUDENTS

Study Title: *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education*

Research Investigator:
Mr. Graham Jackson
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

Supervisor:
Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
(780) 492.4441

Background
You are being invited to participate in this study for my Doctor of Education degree in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta to provide front-line feedback from staff and students about Outreach education. Your experiences and opinions are valuable in offering insights into alternative education models. I am using this research to inform schools and government about Outreach schools and as part of my graduation requirements.

Purpose
Purpose of research is to in examine if Outreach schools are pressured to adopt mainstream school behaviours and if so, its effect on the practices in Outreach schools. The information can benefit other Outreach schools and provide opportunities for staff and students to share their voice about Outreach education.

Study Procedures
The research will consist of a focus group for students at two different Outreach schools in the jurisdiction. The focus group will take place at your school. Further data will be collected through publicly available documents from the school, the school jurisdiction and the Alberta Education. The study will occur from September 2012 to January 31st 2013.

- Focus group – will consist of a one time, one hour discussion with students. The group size will range from 5 to no larger than 10 students depending upon student interest. Participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. The interview will be recorded (audio only) and transcribed. In the focus group you may choose not to answer any questions I ask, and you are free to end your participation in the focus group at any time. Due to the nature of focus groups, where individual contributions are not always distinguishable, I will not be able to modify or withdraw any contributions that you have made to the discussion.

Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education

Benefits

There is no cost to be involved in this study. As a participant you will be able to voice your experiences and opinions about Outreach education. This information allows for important feedback to other schools and jurisdictions and to the Alberta government about what you feel is taking place. Your feedback allows for others to better understand alternative education and make more informed decisions.

Risk
There may be the risk of stress and discomfort when sharing personal feelings, experiences and opinions. If at any time you are experience stress you have the right not to answer the question and the right to withdraw. Arrangements will be made beforehand to have supports from the school available if needed.

Voluntary Participation
The participation is completely voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if you choose to participate in the study. If you agree to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. Due to the nature of focus groups, where individual contributions are not always distinguishable, I will not be able to modify or withdraw any contributions that you have made to the discussion.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
Any data personally identifying you will be kept confidential, including the name of the school, with access only for my advisor Dr. Shultz, a critical research partner and myself. I will ensure no personally identifying material will be presented in my research findings. For the focus group though participants will be asked to keep anything shared with the group confidential, this cannot be guaranteed, as the research does not have control over what others say outside of the group. The research will be used as a graduation requirement as part of my doctoral dissertation and will be shared with Alberta Outreach schools and Alberta Education through articles and presentations. As a participant, if you would like a copy of the findings please indicate on the consent form.

The data as it is collected will be recorded onto a recording device that will be transferred to a secure password protected laptop. When the transcription takes place the data will be transcribed with pseudonyms, as direct quotes will be used. These files will also be stored on a protected laptop. The consent forms will be securely retained for the minimum five years and then will be destroyed. Any other data or information that identifies you will be removed or altered to provide anonymity.

Further Information
Researchers will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants, details of these standards can be found at http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html .The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix G: Information Letter Staff

INFORMATION LETTER STAFF

Study Title: *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education*

Research Investigator:
Mr. Graham Jackson
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

Supervisor:
Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
(780) 492.4441

Background
You are being invited to participate in this study for my Doctor of Education degree in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta to provide front-line feedback from staff and students about Outreach education. Your experiences and opinions are valuable in offering insights into alternative education models. I am using this research to inform schools and government about Outreach schools and as part of my graduation requirements.

Purpose
Purpose of research is to in examine if Outreach schools are pressured to adopt mainstream school behaviours and if so, its effect on the practices in Outreach schools. The information can benefit other Outreach schools and provide opportunities for staff and students to share their voice about Outreach education.

Study Procedures
The research will consist of interviews for school staff and administrators and a focus group for students at two different Outreach schools in the jurisdiction. The interviews/focus group will take place at your school. Further data will be collected through publicly available documents from the school, the school jurisdiction and the Alberta Education. The study will occur from September 2012 to January 31st 2013.

- Interviews for up to 10 school staff and administrators will consist of 2 separate semi-structured interviews of no more than one hour duration each. Participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any questions that I ask, and you are free to end the interview at any time. The interviews will be recorded (audio only) and transcribed. Transcripts from the first interview will be provided 2 weeks prior to the second interview for verification. At this time you will have the opportunity to modify or withdraw any comments that you made. Shortly after the second interview, I will provide you with a copy of the second transcript to review. Withdrawal from the study will no longer be possible after January 31st 2013.

Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education

Benefits

There is no cost to be involved in this study. As a participant you will be able to voice your experiences and opinions about Outreach education. This information allows for important feedback to other schools and jurisdictions and to the Alberta government about what you feel is taking place. Your feedback allows for others to better understand alternative education and make more informed decisions.

Risk

There may be the risk of stress and discomfort when sharing personal feelings, experiences and opinions. If at any time you are experience stress you have the right not to answer the question and the right to withdraw. Arrangements will be made beforehand to have supports from the school available if needed.

Voluntary Participation

The participation is completely voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if you choose to participate in the study. If you agree to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. In the event of opting out, I will remove all of your data collected up to and including the 31st of January 2013 after that point the data will be used in the research.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Any data personally identifying you will be kept confidential, including the name of the school, with access only for my advisor Dr. Shultz, a critical research partner and myself. I will ensure no personally identifying material will be presented in my research findings. The research will be used as a graduation requirement as part of my doctoral dissertation and will be shared with Alberta Outreach schools and Alberta Education through articles and presentations. As a participant, if you would like a copy of the findings please indicate on the consent form.

The data as it is collected will be recorded onto a recording device that will be transferred to a secure password protected laptop. When the transcription takes place the data will be transcribed with pseudonyms, as direct quotes will be used. These files will also be stored on a protected laptop. The consent forms will be securely retained for the minimum five years and then will be destroyed. Any other data or information that identifies you will be removed or altered to provide anonymity.

Further Information

Researchers will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants, details of these standards can be found at http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html .The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix H: Information Letter Parents

INFORMATION LETTER PARENTS

Study Title: *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education*

Research Investigator:
Mr. Graham Jackson
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

Supervisor:
Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
(780) 492.4441

Dear Parents,

Your son/daughter has been invited to participate in this study for my Doctor of Education degree in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta to provide front-line feedback from staff and students about Outreach education. You child's experiences and opinions are valuable in offering insights into alternative education models. I am using this research to inform schools and government about Outreach schools and as part of my graduation requirements.

Purpose

Purpose of research is to in examine if Outreach schools are pressured to adopt mainstream school behaviours and if so, its effect on the practices in Outreach schools. The information can benefit other Outreach schools and provide opportunities for staff and students to share their voice about Outreach education.

Study Procedures

The research will consist of a focus group for students at two different Outreach schools in the jurisdiction. The focus group will take place at your son/daughter's school. Further data will be collected through publicly available documents from the school, the school jurisdiction and the Alberta Education. The study will occur from September 2012 to January 31st 2013.

- Focus group – will consist of a one time, one hour discussion with students. The group size will range from 5 to no larger than 10 students depending upon student interest. Participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. The interview will be recorded (audio only) and transcribed. In the focus group participants may choose not to answer any questions I ask, and they are free to end their participation in the focus group at any time. Due to the nature of focus groups, where individual contributions are not always distinguishable, I will not be able to modify or withdraw any contributions that your son/daughter has made to the discussion.

Benefits
There is no cost to be involved in this study. As a participant your child will be able to voice their experiences and opinions about Outreach education. This information allows for important feedback to other schools and jurisdictions and to the Alberta government about what they feel is taking place. Their feedback allows for others to better understand alternative education and make more informed decisions.

Risk
There may be the risk of stress and discomfort when sharing personal feelings, experiences and opinions. If at any time your son/daughter experiences stress they have the right not to answer the question and the right to withdraw. Arrangements will be made beforehand to have supports from the school available if needed.

Voluntary Participation
The participation is completely voluntary and your son/daughter are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if you choose to participate in the study. If they agree to be in the study, you or your child can change their mind and withdraw at any time. Due to the nature of focus groups, where individual contributions are not always distinguishable, I will not be able to modify or withdraw any contributions that you have made to the discussion.

Confidentiality & Anonymity
Any data personally identifying you will be kept confidential, including the name of the school, with access only for my advisor Dr. Shultz and myself. I will ensure no personally identifying material will be presented in my research findings. For the focus group though participants will be asked to keep anything shared with the group confidential, this cannot be guaranteed, as the research does not have control over what others say outside of the group. The research will be used as a graduation requirement as part of my doctoral dissertation and will be shared with Alberta Outreach schools and Alberta Education through articles and presentations. As a participant, if you would like a copy of the findings please indicate on the consent form.

The data as it is collected will be recorded onto a recording device that will be transferred to a secure password protected laptop. When the transcription takes place the data will be transcribed with pseudonyms, as direct quotes will be used. These files will also be stored on a protected laptop. The consent forms will be securely retained for the minimum five years and then will be destroyed. Any other data or information that identifies you will be removed or altered to provide anonymity.

Further Information
Researchers will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants, details of these standards can be found at http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html .The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix I: Participant Consent (Parent)

Participant Consent (Parent)

I, ____, have read and understand the information letter for the Doctoral research project entitled *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education* for Graham Jackson as identified in the participant information letter.

I give permission for ____, my child, to participate in the study.
I understand that:

My son or daughter has the right to withdraw from the project at any time up to the 31st of January 2013.

1. If she/he agrees she/he will participate in one focus group discussion of not more than 60 minutes, which will be audio recorded and transcribed.

2. My son or daughter's identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in the research dissemination. Due to the nature of a focus group I understand that while all the participants will be asked to keep the information shared confidential, this cannot be guaranteed by the researcher.

3. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm will come to my son or daughter through participation in this project.

4. The data gathered will be used in the researcher's doctoral dissertation and for scholarly publications and presentations.

5. The data gathered during the interview will be held by the researcher in a secure location for a period of at least five years (as required by the University of Alberta).

6. I would like a copy of the findings of this research. Yes / No (circle Choice)

I agree to these conditions.

Parent Signature ____

Date _______________________

Researcher

Signed ____

Date _______________________

Research Investigator:
Mr. Graham Jackson
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

Supervisor:
Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
(780) 492.4441

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix J: Participant Assent (Minor)

Participant Assent (Minor)

I, ____, have read and understand the information letter for the Doctoral research project entitled *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education* for Graham Jackson as identified in the participant information letter.

I understand that:

My I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time up to the 31st of January 2013.

7. If I agree I will participate in one focus group discussion of not more than 60 minutes, which will be audio recorded and transcribed.

8. My identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in the research dissemination. Due to the nature of a focus group I understand that while all the participants will be asked to keep the information shared confidential, this cannot be guaranteed by the researcher.

9. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm will come to me through participation in this project.

10. The data gathered will be used in the researcher's doctoral dissertation and for scholarly publications and presentations.

11. The data gathered during the interview will be held by the researcher in a secure location for a period of at least five years (as required by the University of Alberta).

12. I would like a copy of the findings of this research. Yes / No (circle Choice)

I agree to these conditions.

Student Signature ____

Date _______________________

Researcher

Signed ____

Date ______________________

Research Investigator:
Mr. Graham Jackson
7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

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Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
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The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix K: Participant Consent (Adult Student)

Participant Consent (Adult Student)

I, ____, I have read and understand the information letter for the Doctoral research project entitled *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education* for Graham Jackson as identified in the participant information letter.

I ____, agree to participate in the study.
I understand that:

I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time up to the 31st of January 2013.

1. I agree to participate in one focus group discussion of not more than 60 minutes, which will be audio recorded and transcribed.
2. My identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used in the research dissemination. Due to the nature of a focus group I understand that while all the participants will be asked to keep the information shared confidential, this cannot be guaranteed by the researcher.
3. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm will come to me through participation in this project.
4. The data gathered will be used in the researcher's doctoral dissertation and for scholarly publications and presentations.
5. The data gathered during the interview will be held by the researcher in a secure location for a period of at least five years (as required by the University of Alberta).
6. I would like a copy of the findings of this research. Yes / No (circle Choice)

I agree to these conditions.

Signature ____

Date ______________________

Researcher

Signed ____

Date ______________________

Research Investigator:
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7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

Supervisor:
Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
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The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix L: Participant Consent

Participant Consent

I, ____, have read and understand the information letter for the Doctoral research project entitled *Perceptions and Pressures: Legitimacy in Outreach Education* for Graham Jackson as identified in the participant information letter and agree to participate in this study.

I agree to be interviewed by Graham Jackson under the following conditions:

1. I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time up to the 31st of January 2013. If I choose to do so, the information I provide will be returned to me or destroyed and not used in the project.

2. I agree to two interviews of not more than 60 minutes, which will be audio recorded and transcribed.

3. My identity will be kept confidential and a pseudonym used. The identity of my school will also be kept confidential.

4. The researcher will endeavour to ensure that no harm will come to me through my participation in this project.

5. The data gathered will be used in the researcher's doctoral dissertation and for scholarly publications and presentations.

6. The data gathered during the interview will be held by the researcher in a secure location for a period of at least five years (as required by the University of Alberta).

7. I would like a copy of the findings of this research. Yes / No (circle Choice)

I agree to these conditions.

Signed ____

Date _______________________

Researcher

Signed ____

Date _______________________

Research Investigator:
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7-104 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
graham.jackson@spschools.org
(780) 446.2504

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Dr. Lynette Shultz
7-133M Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
shultz@ualberta.ca
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The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Appendix M: Open Coding

Reflective and reflexive process of the pros and cons of each of the themes as a facet of the school, student positioning, teacher positioning, school/organisational positioning

Autonomy
- Independence
- Opportunity
- Responsibility
- Voice

Learning/Knowing
- Active learning
- Curriculum
- Facilitator
- Modeling
- One-one
- Student centered
- **Support**
- Whole education
- Collaboration

Flexibility
- **Choice**
- Control
- Options
- Speed
- **Structure**

Future
- HS Completion
- Life outside school
- Solutions
- Transitioning

Responsiveness
- **Acceptance**
- Advocacy
- Connection
- Culture
- Egalitarianism
- Relational
- Representation
- Service

Scarcity
- Competition
- Disparity
- Money
- Pressure
- Resource dependence

Legitimacy
- Access
- Awareness
- Community
- **Comparison**
- **Image**
- Interactions
- Uniqueness

Grey Spaces
- Mainstream pros
- Outreach Pros
- Sameness of purpose
- School size

Dissatisfaction
- Disconnect
- High school nemesis
- Ignorance
- Judgment
- Lack of choice
- Marginalized populations
- Rejection

Bureaucracy
- Efficacy
- Results
- Rule bound
- Vision

Staff
- Experience
- Skilled practitioner
- Type of student
- Work conditions

** Last stop

** Last stop is not specific theme but the contrasting ideas of the “last stop” came up in the research several times and tended to be an emotional hot point in conversations. It is valuable to recognize this concept in relation to the operation of Outreach schools.

Appendix N: Thematic Coding

Reflective and reflexive process of the pros and cons of each of the themes as a facet of the school, student positioning, teacher positioning, school/organisational positioning

Learning/Knowing
- Curriculum
- Facilitator
- Modeling
- One-one
- Student centered
- **Support**
- Whole education
- Efficacy
- Transitioning

Responsiveness
- **Acceptance**
- Advocacy
- Culture
- Egalitarianism
- Relational
- Representation
- Service Collaboration

Flexibility
- **Choice**
- Control
- Speed
- **Autonomy**

Scarcity
- Competition
- Disparity
- Money
- Pressure
- Resource dependence

Legitimacy
- Access
- Awareness
- Community
- **Comparison**
- **Image**
- Interactions
- Uniqueness

Marginalization
- Disconnect
- Ignorance
- Judgment
- Lack of choice
- Marginalized populations
- Rejection

Clientele
- Experience
- Skilled practitioner
- Type of student
- Work conditions
- Voice

** Last stop
**Grey spaces

** Last stop is not specific theme but the contrasting ideas of the "last stop" came up in the research several times and tended to be an emotional hot point in conversations. It is valuable to recognize this concept in relation to the operation of Outreach schools.

Appendix O: Axial Analysis

Categoric Coding

School, student positioning, teacher positioning, school/organisational position

Learning/Knowing

- Student centered
- Whole education
- Efficacy
- Transitioning

Responsiveness

- Acceptance/Advocacy
- Relational
- Flexibility/Autonomy
- Support

Scarcity

- Competition
- Disparity
- Pressure
- Resource dependence

Legitimacy

- Awareness
- Comparison
- Image
- Uniqueness
- Marginalization

Staff and Students

- Type of Educator
- Type of student
- Work conditions

Nature of Alternative Education

- Overlap of traditional nature of schools
- What is alternative

*** Last stop**

Last stop is not specific theme but the contrasting ideas of the "last stop" came up in the research several times and tended to be an emotional hot point in conversations. It is valuable to recognize this concept in relation to the operation of Outreach schools.

Appendix P: Codebook

Coding Scheme Development Chart

Developmental Phases of Analytic framework	Explanation and description of resulting changes to coding scheme
(1) Coding Scheme Version 1 March 7, 2013	Coding scheme developed as part of my initial ideas about the research questions was based on Lewis, Tayor and Gibbs (2005) descriptions of phenomena. The results consisted of two coding categories one for the focus groups (students) and one for the interviews (teachers). At the outset the coding consists of 107 total codes.
(2) Coding Scheme Version 2 March 19, 2013	The preliminary coding scheme is developed from the literature review and personal experience. As a result 11 broad categories have been created in relation to the research questions and responses. The categories are; *Autonomy, Learning/Knowing, Flexibility, Future, Responsiveness, Scarcity, Legitimacy, Grey Spaces, Dissatisfaction, Bureaucracy, Staff*. This scheme consists of 63 codes.
(3) Coding Scheme Version 3: March 30, 2013	There are too many themes and the subcategories are too broad and overlapping. Second round of categoric coding drives the reduction and consolidation of the subcategories, reducing the number to 31. The consolidation of the categories resulted in the removal of *Autonomy* and *Bureaucracy*. The overlap in several of the categories was consolidated into the categories of *Learning/Knowing, Responsiveness, Scarcity, Legitimacy, Marginalization and Staff and Students*. I have left the notions of "*last stop*" and "*grey spaces"* as important specific and unique concepts.
(4) Coding Scheme Version 4: April 4, 2013	The coding scheme is still too big to work with. I have kept the categories of *Learning/Knowing, Responsiveness, Scarcity, Legitimacy, Marginalization and Staff and Students*. I have reframed the important notions of *grey spaces* to the *nature of alternative education* and maintained the idea of the *last stop* for learning interesting concepts. I have further reduced the number of subcategories to 24.

(5) Coding Scheme Version 5: April 9, 2013	The Axial Coding now consists of *Learning/Knowing, Responsiveness, Scarcity, Legitimacy, Staff and Students* and has included the category *Nature of Alternative Education*. I have still kept the notion of *last stop* as an interesting response to the research bit not as a category. There are now 22 subcategories.
(6) Coding Scheme Version 6: April 24, 2013	The sub code *Support* is dropped.
(7) Coding Scheme Version 7: April 26, 2013	The sub code *Overlap of traditional schools* is dropped.
(8) Coding Scheme Version 8: May 2, 2013	Change sub code *Acceptance/Advocacy* to *Acceptance* and create new subtheme *Advocacy*. Add descriptor *Support* to the sub code *Awareness* and descriptor *Value* to *Comparison*. I have removed the notion of *Last Stop*.
(9) Coding Scheme Version 9: May 4, 2013	I have replaced the notion of *Last Stop* as a code/theme.
(10) Coding Scheme Version 10: May 9, 2013	Final coding inserted into dissertation.