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Organizational and Individual Responses to Educational Reforms in Alberta

by .

Judith Ellen Evans ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of Master of Business Administration

Faculty of Business

Edmonton, Alberta

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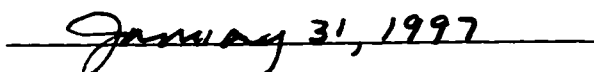**Degree:** Master of Business Administration

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Organizational and Individual Responses to Educational Reforms in Alberta submitted by Judith Ellen Evans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

_____
Raymond V. Rasmussen

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Bernard J. Skrypnek

_____
Kay Stratton-Devine

Jan 28 1997

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Charles G. McClintock, who died on July 24, 1996. Chuck had a long and distinguished career as Professor of Psychology at the University of California at Santa Barbara. From 1975 to 1980, I had the good fortune of being one of his graduate students.

Chuck's research examined how individuals respond to available incentives and to each other's behaviour, as well as how developmental factors affect our propensity to behave in self-interested and prosocial ways. These experiments demonstrated how easy it is to structure social situations that elicit self-interested behaviour, even when self interest is contrary to the common interest.

Chuck was one of the most unselfish individuals and patient teachers I have known. I recall the respect and kindness that he showed me, right from the very beginning of my graduate program. I also recall his high standards, and how he challenged me to improve the quality of my research while convincing me that there was no doubt I would do it.

Chuck measured his own performance according to his ability to attract and keep good colleagues and students, not by his publication count and the dollar value of his research grants. He received as much pleasure from the triumphs of those he worked with as his own successes. Chuck built a supportive work environment one relationship at a time, until cooperation among people became the dominant orientation and a defining value of the organizational culture.

Chuck is remembered with fondness by his many colleagues and students around the world.

ABSTRACT

Recent educational reforms in Alberta exhibit the characteristic elements of new public management (NPM), a government reform trend that has emerged and grown over the past two decades. In this thesis I summarize the limitations of NPM and available evidence regarding its impacts. I discuss the components of the Alberta government's educational reforms in the context of the government's overall reform strategy. I also describe a qualitative study I undertook to explore the perceived impacts of the educational reforms on the operation of schools and the individual behaviour of school staff and parent 'customers'. The study findings suggest the existence of potential negative impacts of educational reforms relating to increasing inequities in educational opportunities for students, and principal and teacher stress and job dissatisfaction. I present a theoretical model of the impacts of reform that emerged from interviews with principals and teachers, along with supportive evidence from secondary sources.

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CHAPTER 1:

Government Reforms and the 'New Public Management'

Introduction

Since the May 1993 re-election of the Conservative Party under the leadership of Premier Ralph Klein, the Alberta government has become the acknowledged leader among provinces in deficit and debt fighting. The government's approach has involved parallel thrusts, spending cuts averaging 20% and major restructuring of public service delivery affecting every department and government-funded organization in the province (Hughes, Lowe & McKinnon, 1996; Lisac, 1995). Speeches by Premier Klein and members of his cabinet have emphasized these dual themes of fiscal accountability and the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government services (e.g., Cardinal, 1995; Klein, 1995).

Hughes, Lowe, and McKinnon (1996) describe the reactions of Albertans to the government's reform program. These researchers analyzed the responses of the 1240 participants in the University of Alberta Population Research Laboratory's 1995 Alberta Survey and found that public attitudes were seemingly contradictory. Although survey participants expressed concern over the impact of cutbacks on public services they overwhelmingly supported the government's strategy of deficit and debt elimination. Those who were directly affected by service cuts or whose own employment had been adversely affected had significantly more negative reactions than average, as indicated by their decreased willingness to vote Conservative in the next election. However, the degree of participants' concern over the negative impacts of the cutbacks proved to be a more significant factor influencing their reported voting intentions

than their personal experiences. Concern about service impacts did not translate into support for the increased use of revenue generation strategies.

Hughes, Lowe, and McKinnon (1996) argue that the high level of public support for the government's deficit and debt crusade was crucial in enabling the government to introduce its massive public sector reform program at unprecedented speed. Lisac (1995) also remarks on the speed of reform implementation and laments the absence of public debate about fundamental changes to social policy. He believes the government was deliberately 'draping a velvet cloak over dissent.' According to Lisac (1995, p. 142):

> "They were setting up a system in which Albertans were presumed to speak with one voice and anyone who said 'I protest' was dismissed as a special pleader. People who liked the government complained about 'whiners' and said it was time for everyone to join the team or get out of the way."

Unionized public sector workers, whether direct employees of government or workers in the 'MASH' sector (municipalities, advanced education, schools and heath care) were particularly vulnerable to being labelled whiners and special pleaders. Few Albertans who work in the private sector are unionized, and many government supporters see public sector unions as standing in the way of change (Lisac, 1995). Certainly, budget cuts and government restructuring directly threaten the livelihoods of public sector workers but, so far, most Alberta public sector workers have not vigorously protested.[1]   Exceptions to this general trend were Calgary hospital laundry workers, who went on strike over the proposed contracting out of laundry services by the regional health authority, and government social workers, who demonstrated against caseloads and other problems in the child welfare

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[1] Public servants who are direct employees of the government are prohibited from striking in Alberta.

system. In response to the latter incident, Family and Social Services Minister Mike Cardinal threatened to fire any social worker who publicly criticized the government (Jeffs, 1996).

As Hughes, Lowe, and McKinnon (1995) and Lisac (1995) observe, neither the public at large nor public sector workers were given significant opportunities to participate directly in shaping the directions of the Alberta government's reform agenda. Furthermore, outside of official government business plans and performance reports, which focus on government-specified performance measures (e.g., Alberta Education, 1995b; 1996; Alberta Health, 1996; Alberta Labour, 1996; Government of Alberta, 1995), there is little information about how well the reforms are working, or whether they are having unanticipated impacts (Scriven, 1991; Worthen & Sanders, 1987).

Focus of This Thesis

This lack of pre-implementation debate and post-implementation dialogue with service providers and recipients, the 'business values' driving the government reform agenda, and the apparent lack of critical evaluation of the reforms' impacts led to my interest in the topic of this MBA thesis. Understanding how the reforms are experienced by different stakeholders, and their implications for organizational and individual behaviour, is a critical first step in assessing their strengths and weaknesses, as well as in identifying potential areas for future policy adjustments.

The research that I conducted for the thesis focused on the government's educational reforms. As the primary data source, I decided to go directly to the service delivery point, the school, to find out what principals and teachers had to say. In response to my questions, these education professionals reflected on

their use of information and decision making at the school level, and shared their perceptions of their schools' environmental contexts, the behaviour of other stakeholders and some of the educational reform components. I expected that there would be a range of reactions and responses to the reforms -- some positive and some negative. I derived a theoretical model, or 'theory-in-use' (Argyris, 1985, 1991) of the impacts of the educational reforms from comparing and contrasting the comments of my research participants. Validating the theory-in-use went beyond the scope of this thesis. However, subsequent policy research could elaborate the theory-in-use's propositions through additional qualitative explorations, or test them using rigorous quantitative methods (Creswell, 1994).

It should be emphasized that educational reform is but one component of a broader reform program that has affected every aspect of provincial government service delivery in Alberta, including the environment, advanced education, transportation, health, labour standards and social welfare. Furthermore, what is happening in Alberta is but one manifestation of an international government and public sector reform trend. The trend is known as 'the new public management' (NPM), and it represents a major break from the traditional approach to managing public sector operations, or 'the old public administration' (Borins, 1995a, 1995b; Mawhood, 1995; Pollitt, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Savoie, 1995a, 1995b).

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the origins of NPM. I also describe the basic NPM policy measures or elements and NPM's underlying assumptions about public sector worker motivation. I conclude by discussing the limitations of NPM and summarizing available evidence regarding its impacts. In Chapter 2, I present an overview Alberta's 'Klein Revolution' and

describe the main features of the government's educational reforms. This

chapter and Chapter 2 provide the background context for my thesis study,

which I introduce in Chapter 3.

New Public Management: Genesis

During the late 1970s and 1980s, international lenders, business

leaders, the media and taxpayers began to pressure governments in Western

industrial democracies to reduce their debts. Public skepticism regarding the

value of government services and cynicism regarding the motives of politicians

grew.   Public managers found themselves being asked to do more with less

and to produce hard evidence that programs delivered their intended results in

a cost-effective way (Wholey, Abramson & Bellavita, 1986). Increasingly, they

were told to 'run government like a business' (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

At the same time, many nations experienced stagnant economic growth

(Pollitt, 1993). Economists, politicians and the media linked economic

competitiveness problems to countries' debt problems, but also to an

assortment of government ills, including bureaucratic mismanagement, over-

taxation, and over-regulation of private enterprise. Beginning with the United

Kingdom (the Thatcher Conservatives) and the United States (the Reagan

Republicans), political parties and candidates promising a new style of

government based on a blend of fiscal conservatism and market liberalism were

increasingly rewarded with election victories.

Enthusiasm for government reform in the United Kingdom and America

seems to have continued unabated, despite changes in their political

leadership. Comparable packages of government reforms have been adopted

in other countries in a manner reminiscent of the spread of a successful

franchise restaurant. For example, Douglas, (1993), Mackay (1994), Massey (1995) and Savoie (1995b) describe reform programs in Australia, New Zealand, and on the Canadian federal scene which bear many similarities to programs in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Western Europe (Pollitt, 1993, 1995a, 1995b). Everywhere, it seems, the themes of deficit reduction, greater government accountability, importing private sector management practices into government, and greater direct private sector involvement in public service delivery are on the public policy menu.

NPM government reforms may simply reflect a democratic course correction. Indeed, voters in different countries, concerned about escalating government deficits, have expressed their frustration at the polls. However, the nearly simultaneous ascent of NPM in several countries suggests the rising popularity of NPM may have as much to do with the declining ability of governments to control their domestic social policies as a grassroots movement to improve public services.

There are a number of reasons why such a decline in governments' ability to govern might be occurring. Countries are becoming increasingly interdependent economically. Changes in information technology have produced fundamental changes in the nature of products being marketed. Increasingly, trade involves services, particularly services related to information and entertainment. Financial and information transactions now occur instantaneously and easily across international borders. Capital has become highly mobile, and so have jobs. These factors in combination with high levels of government indebtedness, have given transnational businesses leverage over governments. Governments are intimidated by threats of private investment losses, and there is reason to believe their power to regulate

businesses has been permanently impaired (Barber, 1995; Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

Barber (1995) calls the integration of global economic, social and technological forces 'McWorld.' McWorld encourages us to define ourselves as consumers, seeking instant gratification of our wants, regardless of the social circumstances (i.e., life is a shopping experience). Another set of forces shaping the world is 'Jihad', the increasing mistrust, intolerance, and strife between ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. While Jihad and McWorld are diametrically opposed -- McWorld integrates us and Jihad disintegrates us -- they both appeal to our selfish motives. Together, Jihad and McWorld undermine the ability of pluralistic societies to enact policies in the collective interest. Thus, 'inescapable forces' more powerful than democracy may be setting the stage for government reforms (Borins, 1995b). Given that some businesses now account for larger Gross Domestic Products than many nations, the resemblance between NPM and business management should not surprise us. There can be little doubt governments are increasingly accommodating business, and assimilating business practices.

The gospel of NPM in North America is a book entitled *Reinventing Government*. (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992), which Corbeil (1994, p. 163 and 165) has described as "the most significant book in public administration of this decade" and "the public sector's *In Search of Excellence*"[2]. The central theme of *Reinventing Government* is the importance of creating a new, entrepreneurial public sector culture. Implicit in the theme is the belief that government and public sector organizational cultures are dysfunctional and should be replaced by functional ones -- the cultures of business organizations.

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2 Peters and Waterman (1982)

According to Osborne and Gaebler (1992), governments should focus on their policy development and monitoring roles and get out of the business of delivering services -- they should 'steer' but not 'row.' They should become smaller and less hierarchical, and foster greater participation and service delivery control at the local level -- they should be 'catalytic' and 'prevention-oriented'. Increasingly, they should contract out non-policy services to the private sector. They should strive for greater 'customer responsiveness' through the use of market mechanisms that encourage competition in service delivery. They should collect an increasing proportion of the cost of public services formerly funded through taxes in the form of user fees -- they should 'earn as well as spend.' As an integral part of the process, they should empower their employees and contractors. Finally, they should establish performance measurement systems that link rewards to results -- they should be 'outcome-focused.' According to David Osborne, "public leaders have to create budgeting and other systems that reward success and force weak performers to improve" (Posner & Rothstein, 1994).

The US federal government's National Performance Review is firmly rooted in the new public management philosophy. Indeed, *Reinventing Government* coauthor David Osborne has been appointed by President Clinton to guide the National Performance Review effort. A complementary initiative, the Government Performance and Review Act, mandates all US federal agencies to develop performance measurement systems and performance-based budgets by the year 2000. The Government Performance and Review Act reporting requirements are currently being piloted in a number of demonstration projects. The idea is to learn from the results before the provisions of the Government Performance and Review Act are fully

implemented. However, in regard to the National Performance Review and Government Performance and Review Act Newcomer (1995, p. 13) cautions:

> "Performance measurement has been tied to demonstrating that more can be accomplished with less when processes are improved. However, it should be noted that cutting (red tape, staff, etc.) is clearly the message, rather than measuring."

Other jurisdictions, including the province of Alberta, have not waited for the results of the Government Performance and Review Act demonstration projects before proceeding with their own reinvention programs and accountability legislation (e.g., Government Accountability Act, 1995).

Elements of the New Public Management

The NPM approach assumes that public sector bureaucracy needs fixing and the answer is better management. 'Better' in the case of NPM means a private sector managerialist approach (Pollitt, 1993; Savoie, 1995b). Pollitt (1995a) outlines the major policy measures, or elements, that constitute NPM. They include:

- Cost cutting, budget capping, accrual accounting and formula based funding (e.g., population-based, needs adjusted funding in health care and per capita funding in education).

- Devolving responsibility to new, separate quasi-government agencies (e.g., executive agencies, regional health authorities) and use of contracts and quasi-contracts (e.g., framework agreements, business plans) to monitor performance.

- Decentralizing authority within public agencies (e.g., flatter hierarchies, self-managed teams).

- Implementing a purchaser-provider split (i.e., separating the

function of providing services from purchasing them, sometimes within the same organization).

- Introducing competition into the delivery of public services through market and quasi-market mechanisms.

- Establishing performance indicators or measures and requiring staff to work to specific output or outcome targets.

- Shifting the basis of the employment relationship from permanent appointment and seniority to temporary contract and performance related pay.

- Increasing emphasis on customer responsiveness, service standards, and service quality.

According to Pollitt (1995a) each element is not present in every case. Certain countries emphasize certain elements above others. However, governments tend to implement groups of elements simultaneously. For example, measuring performance is typically promoted in conjunction with specifying goals and objectives, setting service standards, monitoring contracts and quasi-contracts, allocating organizational resources and performance-based pay. Governments use formula funding, market mechanisms, contractual agreements and performance measures as levers to enhance central control over service delivery at the same time that responsibility for service delivery is privatized or devolved. In most jurisdictions, NPM implementation has been combined with deep, centrally imposed, across-the-board budget cuts.

New Public Management's Philosophy of Motivation

There are many different private sector models of management that could

be adopted by government. The NPM model is rational, quantitative, and control-oriented. NPM is similar in its basic motivational assumptions to Taylor's (1911) scientific management. Indeed, Pollitt (1993) refers to it as neo-Taylorism.

Like Taylorism, NPM assumes organizations consist of the sum of their parts. Activities such as public policy development (creative work) and service provision (assumed to be routine work) should be defined, and split. Previously unmeasured aspects of organizational activities should be measured. Control should be achieved through a system of contracts or quasi-contracts (e.g., business plans) specifying desired results. Desired change (the shaping up the government and public sectors) should be externally driven by linking rewards to measured performance, introducing market mechanisms, or both.

Under NPM, application of technology (e.g., performance measurement and performance-linked rewards) substitutes for traditional, but presumably inefficient, bureaucratic control mechanisms such as loyalty, apprenticeship periods, promotion from within, supervisory or peer control and job security. By specifying performance, removing bureaucratic rules and restrictions, and decreasing the amount of political interference in day-to-day operations, managers are purportedly given increased freedom to manage. Pollitt (1993) observes that NPM writings are full of references about the need to develop entrepreneurial and empowered government and public sector organizational cultures. However, the prescriptions for shaping the desired cultures are vague.

Limitations of the New Public Management

Motivational Assumptions

NPM assumes that the elimination of hierarchy and the substitution of

measures and contracts results in increased worker motivation. Townley's

(1994, p. 139) metaphor of the panopticon, or prison central observation tower,

suggests why these effects may not be obtained:

> "Panopticism operates through hierarchical observation and
> normalizing judgment. Visibility from the center captures activities
> of the periphery in reports and registers, which then form the basis
> of comparative, evaluative judgments. Panopticism entails a
> dissociation between seeing and being seen. Hierarchical
> observation provides axial visibility, but lateral invisibility. The
> crowd is replaced by a collection of separated individuals or units,
> a multiplicity of which may be numbered and supervised, with the
> individual or unit never sure that it is being observed, only that this
> might be the case."

The panopticon illustrates a potential contradiction between the use of

externally imposed performance measurement, and worker empowerment:

Managers and other workers could as easily feel imprisoned by the measures

and the reward contingencies as empowered by them. Depending on how the

information is used and by whom, contractualization and measures have the

potential either to infuse relations with confidence and trust, or fear and mistrust.

When performance measurement systems are panopticons, replacing

opportunities for meaningful dialogue between the government service

purchaser and the devolved service providers, we should not be surprised to

find 'irrational' resistance to them.

Deming (1986) argued that such a performance measurement approach

is fundamentally flawed because it encourages the attribution of responsibility

for poor performance to workers, when it can be demonstrated using statistical

techniques that most variation in worker performance is caused by the

limitations of the organization's production system. Deming (1986, p. 54)

considered the underuse, abuse, and misuse of worker skills, not worker

laziness or inefficiency, as the primary reasons for productivity problems:

> "The job of management is not supervision, but leadership.
> Management must work on sources of improvement, the intent of
> the quality of the product, and on the translation of the intent into
> design and actual product . . . Focus on outcome (management by
> numbers, MBO, work standards, meet specifications, zero defects,
> appraisal of performance) must be abolished, leadership put in its
> place."

In Deming's (1986) view, measuring in order to control workers motivates

people through fear of punishment for failure, and the end result is not

empowerment but impaired performance and worker reluctance to admit

mistakes. His prescription for improving organizational effectiveness and

worker motivation is to give organizational staff at all levels the authority,

encouragement, and training to work together to improve production processes.

If quality is a priority, the best approach is to let workers control the measuring

(and the resulting production decisions), rather than using the measuring to

control the workers.

Although NPM claims to release worker potential to find new and

innovative ways to deliver public services, it fails to provide a coherent

motivational account of how this will occur. Measurement activity that is

primarily driven by the organization's desire to find better ways to deliver

services, along the lines of what Deming (1986) proposes, would appear to be

more consistent with worker empowerment. It seems unlikely that NPM's neo-

Taylorian assumptions could motivate anything more than modest

improvements in measured areas of performance.

Cost and Quality Trade-offs

NPM assumes a whole variety of valued outcomes including economy,

efficiency, effectiveness (i.e., producer-defined quality), responsiveness (i.e., customer-defined quality), improved accountability, worker empowerment, and so forth, can be achieved. Although NPM purports to be rational, it is based on a premise that is mathematically false, the notion that two or more variables can be simultaneously maximized in a world with finite or shrinking resources (Hardin, 1968). Thus, NPM promises more than it can possibly deliver. Trade-offs are inevitable.

For example, Deming's (1986) writings suggest that the efficiency improvements that result from externally imposed performance measurement requirements will most likely come at the expense of service quality, particularly aspects of quality that are not measured. Furthermore, performance measures have a built-in conservative bias. It is easier and less expensive to measure inputs and completed processes than outcomes. Because they emphasize the concrete and immediate, performance measures are more likely to prove useful for highlighting opportunities to cut costs than opportunities to improve service (Mintzberg, 1994). Indeed, they may actually inhibit the discovery of breakthrough improvements by encouraging simplistic causal thinking or 'tunnel vision' (Leeuw, 1996) rather than broader systems thinking (Senge, 1990, Owen & Lambert, 1995).

Political Constraints

NPM has been sold as the 'Big Answer' to all shortcomings (real and imagined) in government and public sector organizations (Savoie, 1995a, 1995b). Some of the problems, however, relate as much to political as managerial arrangements.

Consider the principle of ministerial accountability in Westminster-style

parliamentary democracies (Gagne, 1996). Bureaucrats are 'anonymous' --
only the minister in charge and a few senior officials (e.g., the deputy and
assistant deputy ministers) are allowed to make statements about government
policy. The minister is responsible for the actions of all workers in his
department, and he can be forced to resign over any high profile error. This is a
major reason why bureaucratic controls exist in government departments.
Government workers are subject to public scrutiny from a variety of sources,
including opposition politicians, the media, special interest groups, and
legislative auditors.[3] These groups are constantly watching for mistakes which
they can call to the public's attention or use to embarass the government.

Government ministers tend to have low tolerance for risk taking by
employees, and they are prone to interfere in administrative operations when
mistakes occur (e.g., demanding explanations and suitable punishments for the
perpetrators). Even where so-called autonomous executive agencies have
been created, as in the UK, politicians seem to have had a hard time resisting
the temptation to intervene. The executive in charge of the British prisons
agency was recently fired by his minister because he refused to dismiss a
warden following a highly publicized prison break (Mintzberg, 1996).[4] Savoie
(1995b, p. 115) sums it up the paradox as follows:

> "The point is that in business it does not much matter if you get it
> wrong 10 per cent of the time as long as you turn a profit at the
> end of the year. In government, it does not much matter if you get
> it right 90 per cent of the time because the focus will be on the 10
> per cent of the time you get it wrong."

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[3] This is why the analogy often drawn between the Cabinet and the board of directors of a
corporation's shareholders is inappropriate (e.g., Auditor General, 1994). Few corporate boards
ever find their actions under as intense media and public scrutiny.

[4] According to Carolyn Mawhood of the UK National Audit Office, the executive's contract did not
have a performance measure specifying a target for escapes.

Public managers get their operating authority from, and are expected to conform their behaviour to, laws, regulations and ministerial orders. Despite NPM's claim that it 'lets the managers manage' (Mintzberg, 1996), it appears there will continue to be limits to managerial freedom under NPM until political institutions (or politicians) are reinvented.

Complexities of the Policy Process

NPM seems to assume a degree of stability and clarity exists in the policy environment that is seldom true in practice (Savoie, 1995b). Deputy ministers or heads of government agencies are typically not free to make stand-alone business decisions like the heads of corporate strategic business units can. Rather, they are expected to coordinate the efforts of their departments in order to reduce policy gaps and overlaps.[5] Implications of one set of reforms for other government departments and agencies' mandates are usually analyzed and taken into account in developing a new policy.

When a policy is implemented, problems may be encountered in operationalizing it that were not anticipated by its originators. These are usually handled later by ad hoc program adjustments. Consequently, NPM's prescription to separate steering from rowing can be difficult in practice. At the very minimum, cooperative relations and dialogue between 'steerers' and 'rowers', and some flexibility in the terms of contracts and performance

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[5] Note that in business duplication (many alternative sources for the same good or service) is good for the consumer because it promotes competition and lower prices. However, the public often considers duplication between government departments to be bad because it is interpreted to mean inefficiency and waste. In the past, duplication between levels of government in certain areas (e.g., environment and health ministries at both the Canadian federal and the provincial levels) used to be considered good, because one level acted as a check on the other (e.g., the federal government would make sure that the provincial government's actions were consistent with national standards). Increasingly, however, federal and provincial duplication is regarded as bad and it is being reduced.

measures are required.

Differences Among Public Sector Organizations

NPM assumes all public sector organizations are alike; however public sector organizations, like businesses, may have different structures, strategies and cultures (Mintzberg, 1996, Pollitt, 1995b). Mintzberg (1983, 1996) believes that NPM-style performance measures and contracts or quasi-contracts have the potential to upset the balance of existing organizational controls in ways that are culture-damaging, not culture-enhancing. Performance measurement systems are most easily implemented in hierarchical, machine-type bureaucracies or divisionalized organizations that can be split into separate businesses, each with its own performance targets.

There are many examples of government-funded organizations, particularly in the MASH sector, that do not fit the machine form, including professional service, research and development, and creative organizations. Impacts of introducing externally-imposed performance measures and targets on these different forms of devolved service delivery organizations have not been adequately studied. However, Leeuw (1996), citing experiences from his work with the Netherlands Court of Audit, observes that commitment of employees often seems to decline when the performance reports are published, and that performance audits which are primarily fault-finding missions can be counterproductive from the perspective of improving organizational performance. Given that no management approach yet invented has proven to be the 'one best way' for every organization, there are reasons to be cautious about the blanket application of NPM to all government and public sector organizations.

Business Values vs. Public Values

Even where the public sector machine form of organization exists, it is normative or value-based organizational controls that seem to keep the machine oiled. The normative control model relies heavily on selection, socialization, supervisors' knowledge of the current political context, and organizational memory. It also relies more on guiding principles or visions than on plans, measures, and targets. Historically, these guiding principles have reflected public values or collective societal concerns which are quite distinct from, and sometimes opposed to, the values of business. Examples of these values include justice, equity, health, public safety, and environmental protection. Thus, we would expect some of the measures that are important for judging the performance of government and public sector organizations should differ from the measures that are important for judging the performance of businesses.

Jacobs (1992) asserts that private and public work invoke distinct moral syndromes which have evolved from the two methods civilized humans have for meeting their needs: *trading* (the commerical moral syndrome) and *taking* (the guardian moral syndrome). Examples of commercial moral syndrome values include: *compete, invest for productive purposes, and be efficient.* Examples of guardian moral syndrome values include: *shun trading, dispense largesse, and respect hierarchy* (Jacobs,1992, p. 215)[6] Each moral syndrome has its own integrity and internal coherence yet the two syndromes are mutually contradictory. In contrast to NPM, which assumes that commercial values are better than guardian values, Jacobs (1992) argues that neither moral syndrome

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[6] There are some qualities universally esteemed in both walks of life (Jacobs, 1992, p. 25), which include: *cooperation, courage, moderation, mercy, common sense, foresight, judgment, competence, faith, energy, patience, and wisdom.*

can be regarded as superior without reference to the type of work activity. Indiscriminate mixes of commercial and guardian values, which Jacobs (1992) terms 'monstrous moral hybrids', can have disastrous impacts. Governments run like -- or by -- business risk corruption, just as businesses run like -- or by -- governments risk inefficiency. This suggests a potential limitation of pushing the idea of an entrepreneurial culture too far. It is unlikely the public would be pleased if enterprising public servants expanded their businesses by deliberately creating demand for certain services (e.g., social assistance, speeding tickets).

Goal Displacement

When rewards are tightly linked to performance measures in an effort to control or shape the behaviour of service providers there is always a risk of goal displacement. Goal displacement occurs when organizations and individuals who are judged according to their measurable results engage in strategic maximization behaviour to 'get the numbers' required to obtain rewards and/or avoid punishments (Blau, 1955; Kerr, 1975). No quantitative productivity formula can successfully capture all the relevant dimensions of a manager's or worker's performance. An overemphasis on measured performance above all else can cause the measure to displace or become the goal.

Goal displacement has been documented for at least forty years, yet most NPM proponents seem largely oblivious to it.[7] Blau (1955) found that using performance measures to judge the productivity of workers in a state employment agency (e.g., the number of job seekers placed) did induce

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[7] An exception is Meredith Edwards, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Government of Australia. See Edwards (1995).

workers to improve their performance. However, the use of these measures for performance appraisal purposes also lead to rivalry among the workers. For example, workers were reluctant to share notices of job openings with fellow workers, even though the practice of hoarding them had a detrimental effect on client service. Furthermore, Blau (1995) observed that the workers avoided other tasks that would clearly benefit the clients because performing them would interfere with statistically recordable activities. Compared to another unit in the same agency where the supervisor emphasized professionalism (i.e., normative controls) over statistics, the unit which relied on performance measurement had the most productive individual worker. However, overall unit performance was better in the 'professional' than the 'measured' unit. Competition engendered by linking the measurement and reward system had a negative effect on group productivity. Simons (1995) presents additional examples that illustrate how encouraging workers to maximize their individual performance on measured dimensions can result in poorer customer service and increased long term costs, including lawsuits.

Several variations on the theme of goal displacement have been observed and documented (e.g., Mintzberg, 1994; Perrin, 1994, 1996; Pollitt, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Winston, 1993; Winston & Rogers, 1995). Some of the most common ones include:

- *Fudging* -- Sloppy recording, trying to sell the numbers that look good, or outright misrepresentation. The risk of fudging increases when staff collect and analyze the data which are then used by someone outside the organization to judge and reward their performance. A lack of internal and external quality control checks on data collection and analysis tends to encourage fudging.

Mawhood (1995), for example, finds that many UK government agencies' performance claims cannot be substantiated by the National Audit Office.

- *Creaming* -- Preferentially selecting or seeking to serve program participants who are likely to have good outcomes rather than seeking to serve those potential participants in the greatest need. This strategy is attractive because the needier the program participants, the more difficult it is for the service provider to meet their needs, and the harder it is for the service provider to achieve the performance targets. A naturally occurring form of creaming, participant self-selection bias, is also very common. Creaming and self-selection mean that a program or service 'treatment' and the characteristics of participants who receive it are often highly correlated, making it difficult to determine the extent to which participant outcomes are attributable to the program and the extent to which they are attributable to participant characteristics.

- *Cost shifting* -- Directly or indirectly shifting program costs to the participants, other programs, or society at large. This can be accomplished in several ways, including 'load shedding', or backing out of funding the service altogether, establishing or raising user fees, and tightening program eligibility rules. Although it may produce immediate benefits for the organizational bottom line through increased revenues or decreased costs, cost-shifting may do nothing to lower total societal costs. Indeed, it may increase them if unmet needs surface later in a more expensive form. Unfortunately, the organization that is responsible for

shifting the costs seldom documents these impacts or conducts a proper cost-benefit analysis.

- *Performing down to standard* -- Exceeding a new minimum service standard by allowing the average service level to fall or setting a standard in order to lower public expectations regarding the service. For example, the maximum 18 month wait for hip or knee replacement surgery and cataract operations 'customer guarantee' of the UK National Health Service (NHS) (1995) could allow the NHS to perform down to standard, and to use the 'slack' to improve performance in other, more politically sensitive service areas (e.g., reducing the waiting lists for cardiac surgery).

- *Selective attention/selective neglect* -- Attending only to those dimensions of performance that are systematically measured and ignoring nonmeasured dimensions, particularly the intangible aspects of quality. Mawhood (1995) notes that public sector performance is often difficult to define because different stakeholders value different aspects of performance. Performance measurement is often based on a rather narrow, quantitative definition of performance. Performance measures always present an incomplete picture of the dimensions of performance. Selective attention can occur for this reason.

When organizational or individual rewards are tightly linked to measurable performance, there is an increased hazard of rewarding people for inappropriate behaviour. The many ingenious ways that people have found to cope with performance targets and productivity formulas underscore the 'folly of

rewarding A while hoping for B' (Kerr, 1975). To the extent that introducing performance measurement causes the organization to maintain a focus on discovering and testing strategies for organizational improvement, performance measurement can be a positive force for change. However, to the extent that performance measurement simultaneously undermines values like loyalty, honesty, cooperation, trust, or the motivation and professional pride of staff members, the results can be just the opposite.

New Public Management: Does It Work?

The above discussion of limitations reflected on logical, philosophical, and political issues, as well as common practical problems with some of the NPM elements (e.g., goal displacement). In this section, I consider the available evidence from program and policy evaluation studies.

NPM has brought widespread changes to government operations. Fewer people are employed by government and many services formerly delivered by the public sector workers have been privatized or contracted out. In some jurisdictions, the basis for funding direct service delivery organizations such as schools and hospitals has been changed. Many direct service providers must now compete for customers. New local governance arrangements have been created. Plans and contracts have been written specifying performance measures and targets. Service standards and performance results for individual service providers have been published.

The limitations identified in the previous section suggest that there is reason to be skeptical that these NPM-style reforms have been the unqualified success that their proponents claim. However, the fact that it is possible to raise criticisms of NPM does not directly answer the question: Does it work? In this

section I will consider what we know about the impacts of NPM, both intended and unintended, drawing upon the meta-evaluation[8] findings of Pollitt (1993, 1995a, 1995b). His reviews include broad-scope policy evaluations, focusing on entire sectors, large national studies, and international comparisons. They included evaluations conducted by academics, consultants to state agencies, intergovernmental bodies, individual government organizations, state audit organizations, and reviews by politicians and senior public officials.

According to Pollitt (1995a, p. 36), considering the breadth and scope of NPM reforms, there has been remarkably little direct evaluation of their impacts:

> "Faith and commitment, rather than clinical evaluation, have been dominant. On a number of occasions reformers have explicitly rejected evaluation of the broad outline of their reforms, so sure were they that their private sector-inspired, market-oriented solutions were along the right lines. Thus we are sometimes confronted with a paradox: managerial reforms that incorporate a powerful imperative to evaluate yet that have not themselves been much evaluated."[9]

NPM evaluation studies suffer from common weaknesses, for example:

- They are often narrow in scope (e.g., case histories of organizations that may rely exclusively on these organizations' own performance measures, or the opinions of their senior managers);

- They are often produced by governments for the apparent purpose of 'selling' their own accomplishments; and

- They suffer from a lack of methodological rigor (e.g., they lack baseline data).

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8 A meta-evaluation is an evaluation of the merit or worth of one or more evaluation studies.
9 This problem is not unique to NPM. During previous historical periods where public programs were expanded, expansion was also justified on the basis of political faith and commitment, rather than solid evaluation evidence.

Furthermore, Pollitt suggests the manner in which NPM has been introduced to public sector organizations has made it difficult to perform systematic evaluations. Because elements of NPM are usually implemented as a 'bundle' along with large budget cuts, it is difficult to make confident attributions regarding the causes of observed effects (i.e., the budget cuts alone, NPM in general, certain elements of NPM, interactions among cuts and elements of NPM, etc.)

Borins (1995b, p. 122), an NPM proponent, asserts that NPM is resulting in "better service, produced at lower cost by public servants whose morale has improved." This statement provides a concise summary of the general benefits that NPM claims to produce and provides a useful framework for summarizing the evaluation evidence reviewed by Pollitt (1993, 1995a, 1995b).

Improved Service Delivery

Of the three major NPM claims, the evidence for improved service delivery is the most equivocal. Available data focus on what organizations put out, not the quality of what they produce. Official government reviews tend to be considerably more positive about service gains than independent evaluations. Generally speaking, it is not clear to what extent reported productivity gains have been caused by fundamental changes in management or simply reflect organizational trade-offs made to accommodate arbitrary budget reductions. In some cases, it appears organizational productivity was improving prior to the introduction of NPM reforms (e.g., the average length of patient stays was decreasing in hospitals prior to health reforms). Subsequent improvements may simply reflect the continuation of the previous trend, not an acceleration of it. Public sector organizations tend to offer data suggesting that their service

delivery has improved without providing supplementary information on the appropriateness of the measures and targets, and the quality of the data gathering procedures employed.

A crucial issue, given the customer focus of NPM, is whether service recipients notice any improvement in the public services they receive. The 1992 Australian Task Force on Management Improvement, one of the few evaluations to conduct a population survey, found the majority of Australians had *not* noticed a difference (Pollitt, 1995a). A single survey, however, does not provide a sense of how public opinion varies over time and it sheds little light on how the reforms are changing the public's behaviours. For example, public expectations regarding service levels may be decreasing, and members of the public may or may not be actively choosing service providers.

In addition, evaluations have generally not examined the distribution of the benefits of reforms -- who is, and who is not, better off after the reforms than before. Inequities may result from a greater reliance on user fees as a method of funding public services or through the introduction of markets. The issue of whether the reforms are narrowing or widening the gap between rich and poor is particularly important from a public policy standpoint, because a widening gap signals increasing health and social costs (Alberta Health, 1993).

Lower Cost

The evidence for reduced costs is generally positive if we consider governments' current balance sheets only, but the attribution of causality is ambiguous. There is no doubt that governments which have adopted NPM are spending less. However, most of the budget cuts have been forced from the top by elected officials and do not appear to be savings generated through

continuous quality improvements. It appears that some cost reductions might have occurred anyway (e.g., as a result of the introduction of new information technologies or the ongoing efforts by different levels of government, government departments, and public sector organizations to coordinate their efforts).

NPM promises that breaking up monolithic government and public sector bureaucracies, involving the private sector in service delivery, introducing competition, and managing through contracts and performance measures will lower the cost of government. However, evaluations of the long term benefits of competition are surprisingly rare. One Swedish study (Pollitt, 1995a) found that there was an intial cost advantage for privatized services but this tended to decline after time. Certainly, there are many problems that can arise from contracting (e.g., conflict of interest, difficulties associated with ensuring that requirements for contractor performance are adequately specified, etc.). There is a need to obtain better information about the costs and benefits of contracts and quasi-contracts. Continuing as well as one time costs need to be considered. Among the continuing costs of NPM that may prove to be significant are the transaction costs associated with the accounting and reporting requirements of a fully contractualized public sector, requirements that did not exist under the old public administration. Costs which have been shifted to members of the public, nonprofit organizations, other agencies of government, and future generations also need to be identified and if possible, quantified.

Improved Morale

Here, the evaluation information that exists does not support the claim: It does not appear, overall, that the morale of public sector workers has improved as a result of NPM. Indeed, the impact appears to be negative. An NPM element which stands out as particularly damaging is performance related pay, which has sometimes been centrally imposed against the wishes of public sector unions and often been poorly implemented (e.g., by cutting the base rate of pay and using appraisal systems that are widely viewed as unfair and discriminatory). Workers who do not receive merit bonuses (the majority) are demotivated. Workers who receive merit bonuses (the minority) often find the size of the bonus is trivial given centrally-imposed expenditure controls, and they, too, are demotivated.

Instead of creating new, positive public service cultures, the existing evaluation evidence suggests that NPM has produced cultures of cynicism and disbelief.[10] Interview studies of cross-sections of public sector workers within public organizations find that the workers below the senior levels do not experience NPM as particularly empowering. Even managers do not always feel empowered. Indeed, some managers report experiencing more political interference in operational decisions after the reforms than before. Pollitt's (1993, 1995a, 1995b) meta-evaluations do not report findings from studies of turnover, absenteeism, and disability (i.e., stress) leaves; however, these are additional areas where the human resource implications and costs or benefits

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10 It might be argued that these are early days, and morale problems always accompany change. However, NPM initiatives such as the Canadian federal government's Public Service 2000 have been in place for almost eight years, and there is no evidence that federal government workers' morale has improved. Indeed, the federal government has recently launched a special task force that is looking into the serious leadership vacuum that has developed as a result of senior and middle managers departing for the private sector at an apparently unexpected rate.

of NPM could be investigated where reliable baseline data exist.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the genesis of NPM, its major policy components, and the similarity between its motivational assumptions and those of Taylorism. I also described some potential limitations of NPM and summarized the existing evidence for its intended benefits. These limitations and the lack of evidence that NPM actually works are reasons to be skeptical that NPM will be the promised cure-all for government and public sector organizational ills. There is a need for further study of the dynamics of NPM -- how reforms affect stakeholders; what their full costs and benefits are; and how these costs and benefits are distributed across groups and over time. To the extent that government and public sector managers find they must live with NPM, the results of additional research could assist them in devising strategies for adapting the NPM recipe to suit their own organizational contexts.

In the the first half of the next chapter, I present a general overview of NPM in Alberta. Most of the policy elements of NPM are present in the Alberta government's broad public sector reform program. The second half of the chapter describes how the Alberta government has reformed the province's education system.

CHAPTER 2:

The New Public Management in Alberta

Overview of Government Reforms

Context for Change: The Government's Credibility Problems

Lisac (1995) identifies several conditions and events that lead to public calls for greater government accountability in Alberta. They included:

- High levels of unemployment, first experienced when world oil prices declined in the early 1980s, which remained high;

- Flat economic performance for a decade, in a province that had experienced an economic boom in the previous decade;

- Repeated provincial budget deficits in a province that posted budget surpluses in the boom times, despite repeated government promises of a balanced budget;

- A regulatory decision that led to the collapse of the Edmonton-based Principal Group, a costly and embarassing public review (the Code Inquiry), and a payout of $100 million to investors when the Code Inquiry found the government had been negligent in not forcing the Principal Group to close down sooner;

- Large losses (later estimated at around $2 bilion) arising from government loan guarantees and equity investments in failed business ventures including NovAtel, Gainers, and the Magnesium Company of Canada;

- A 30% pay raise MLAs granted to themselves in 1989;

- A 1992 scandal over the size and propriety of living and travel allowance claims for members of the legislative assembly; and

- Resentment over public sector workers' wage demands (e.g., teachers who went on strike in the spring of 1992 for 6% to 8% pay increases) and their relatively secure employment situation during a time when many in the private sector were experiencing job losses and wage rollbacks.

Transforming the Government's Reputation

By 1992, it was clear the public was angry with the performance of the ruling Conservative government. Premier Don Getty decided to resign, opening the door for a new Conservative party leader to perform the miracle that would be needed to regain the voters' confidence. In December 1992, the party chose Ralph Klein to succeed Getty. Klein was a relative newcomer to provincial politics, having been first elected to the provincial legislature in 1989. Prior to his entry on the provincial scene, he had been the mayor of Calgary. He was not a university educated business executive like Getty but a high school drop out who had been a Calgary television news reporter before becoming the mayor of that city. During his time as the province's Environment Minister, he gained the respect of party members for the way he guided a two year process to re-write the province's environmental legislation. Yet Klein was not anti-business, as evidenced by the environmental approval that the controversial Alberta Pacific pulp mill project received while he was Environment Minister. Klein seemed to relate easily to the concerns of ordinary Albertans.

After receiving the endorsement of Conservative Party members, Premier Klein immediately faced the difficult challenge of improving the party's image with the rest of Albertans. The party was nearing the end of its mandate and an

election would have to be called in the coming year.

Beginning the Process of Change

Premier Klein had to convince Albertans that the Conservatives would be more fiscally prudent in the future than their past record indicated. It was obvious that the deficit situation could not be improved unless revenues were increased or the province's expenditures on education, advanced education, health and social welfare, which accounted for two thirds of the province's annual budget, were reduced. Klein believed that raising taxes was "the easy way out, the cowardly way out, the brainless way out" (Klein, 1995, p. 7). His position was firm: Alberta did not have a revenue problem; it had a spending problem (Klein, 1995). Klein realized that he would have a hard time selling the public on the necessity of social program cuts unless his government demonstrated some concrete leadership, including making the first symbolic sacrifices. Consequently, Klein and his cabinet took some immediate steps, which included:

- Appointing an independent financial review commission;
- Inviting participants to a two-day roundtable consultation process on the budget;
- Cutting the ministerial portion of cabinet ministers' salaries by 5% and the salaries of deputy ministers by 2%;
- Reducing the number of government ministers and combining departmental operations;
- Announcing the elimination a thousand government jobs; and
- Rolling back pensions for members of the legislative assembly.

Implementation of NPM: The Klein Revolution

In May 1993, the Premier called an election after introducing a budget in the legislature that proposed to eliminate the deficit in four years by cutting overall government spending by 20%. The voters returned the Conservative Party to office with a large majority. Lisac (1995) feels that the turning point in the election campaign may have been the announcement by Klein and his caucus that they would voluntarily roll back their pensions. The Conservatives kept their word, enshrining their election promises in a Deficit Elimination Act (1993). They also entirely eliminated the pension plan for members of the legislative assembly who have served since 1989.

After the election, the reinvention of the Alberta government rapidly gained momentum (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Cardinal, 1995; Klein, 1995; Hughes, Lowe & McKinnon, 1995; Lisac, 1995; Philippon & Wasylyshyn, 1996). Liquor stores and registry services (e.g., motor vehicle licenses) were privatized. Departmental support services were contracted out. The government promised to introduce performance and productivity measures for managers as part of a new program called 'Productivity Plus'. Government and MASH sector workers were required to take a 5% compensation reduction. Position reduction targets for government workers were revised upward to 25%.

The government announced cuts to spending of up to 30% outside the 'core' program areas of education, advanced education, health and social services. Spending cuts in the core areas ranged from 12.4% in education to 19.3% in social services. In the case of social services, the cuts were implemented by central policy decisions, which included reductions in the level of welfare benefits and tighter welfare eligibility rules. Employable social assistance recipients were transferred to student loans. In health, the focus was

on disestablishing some 200 hospital and public health boards and establishing new local governance structures called regional health authorities (RHAs). After an initial round of government funding cuts to acute care with some additional money provided for community care, RHAs were directed to implement the majority of the cuts. However, the government retained the authority to define health services, set standards, and require reporting on specific performance measures. The government also began to work towards funding RHAs based on a population-based formula. There were also governance changes in education, which are described in the second part of this chapter.

Beginning in 1994-95, all government departments were required to develop annual three-year business plans outlining goals and objectives, and indicating how fiscal targets would be achieved. The government's business planning process was modelled after one developed by the Department of Labour during a departmental restructuring earlier in the 1990s. Later, a Government Accountability Act (1995) was passed, which mandated performance measurement and annual reporting by the government, individual departments, and organizations receiving provincial funds, including universities, RHAs, and school boards.

Service Cost and Quality Trade-offs

Prior to the 1993 election, the Alberta government was encouraging departments to introduce a Total Quality Management (TQM) approach to their operations. The TQM effort was spearheaded by the Personnel Administration Office (PAO). PAO hired a TQM consultant, identified quality management coordinators in each department, established a Quality Management

Coordinators' Forum, and was holding an annual TQM symposium when the Klein Conservatives took office.

When the Premier announced his cabinet after the 1993 election, he assigned the PAO portfolio to himself and began directly communicating with employees about government reform and downsizing through columns in a PAO newsletter. By 1994, resource materials produced by PAO had shifted their emphasis from 'long term commitment to Total Quality Management' to 'performance measurement, results, and accountability' (Quality Management Coordinators' Forum, 1994; Personnel Administration Office, 1993). For example, the 1994 discussion paper by the Quality Management Coordinators' Forum focuses on the development of three-year business plans and explains how performance measurement fits within the government's new accountability approach. Curiously, the word 'quality' never appears in this document, except in the name of the authoring committee. This suggests that performance measurement and accountability were seen as higher priorities than service quality, at least at the beginning of the process.

In 1995, PAO initiated a program to reward groups of employees, the Premier's Award of Excellence (PAO, 1995). PAO uses a points system to rate nominated initiatives on the dimensions of 'customer focus', 'business practices', and 'supportive work environments'. Winning groups do not receive a monetary reward but the Premier presents them with soapstone carvings at a special recognition ceremony. It is uncertain to what extent the Premier's Award is viewed as an incentive by the majority of government workers in the current downsizing and compensation reduction context. The focus of the award is on

operational as opposed to policy improvements.[11]

Worker Involvement in Reform Related Decisions

Most government and MASH public sector workers and their representatives have had no involvement in the policy decisions about restructuring. Deming (1986) would likely agree that these policy decisions have the greatest power to influence the production systems to which these workers belong, and hence, the probability of enduring service improvements. Worker participation in government reform has been mainly limited to developing business plans, identifying performance measures for departmental or organizational core businesses, deciding how to implement cuts or adapting behaviour in response to the requirements of reform (i.e., 'doing it').

The major directions for restructuring the health system, for example, were established by a minister-appointed steering committee known as the Health Plan Coordination Project. This group recommended the creation of the regional health authorities (RHAs) after reviewing a report on the health roundtable sessions conducted by two Conservative Members of the Legislative Assembly. The Minister of Health, Shirley McClellan, approved the participant lists for the roundtables. She also made the first round of RHA appointments. Workers employed or funded by the provincial health system were specifically excluded from being appointed to RHA boards. Philippon and Wasylyshyn (1996, p. 82) report:

> "The emphasis was on finding good leaders who could steer the course of reform in an objective manner in each region. From the

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11 There appears to be limited evidence that the government is actually doing much to promote supportive work environments besides asking people to work in teams. The government is getting involved in re-engineering. Contracting out and devolution of service delivery are continuing. As one source within the Alberta government recently described it to me, "Employees have their heads down and are just trying to survive."

outset, the medical profession took strong exception to its
exclusion. Other health professionals also felt a sense of isolation
and, at times, even alienation, as the regional business plans
were developed and released with very little input from them."

Thus, health sector workers found themselves in the position of reacting to

the changes as they occurred, changes over which they had little influence.[12]

The situation in the education sector was similar.

Throughout the implementation process, the Alberta government has

closely followed the political advice of a former New Zealand Minister of

Finance, Roger Douglas (1993, p. 215-238):

- Reform should be implemented in quantum leaps, using large
  packages.

- Reform should be implemented quickly. It is almost impossible to
  go too fast.

- Keep up the forward momentum (never stop).

- Sell the public on the reforms (no need to consult them if you're
  fundamentally right).

- 'Don't blink', or you'll lose the public's confidence.

- Use 'incentives and choice' (which are fundamentally right), not
  monopoly (which is fundamentally wrong), and give power back
  to the people.

Involving the public at large has been limited to selling the reforms (e.g.,

televised addresses by the Premier) and asking them to respond to

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[12] In response to a high level of complaints of system bottlenecks and inequities from physicians
and the public, the government has decided to restore funding to health care.

predetermined questions on government-commissioned public opinion surveys

(e.g., what to do with the province's projected surplus revenues). Involving the

workers was never a component of Douglas's (1993) political strategy. Indeed,

according to Douglas (1993, p. 219):

> "Replacing people who cannot or will not adapt to the new
> environment is pivotal. Getting the incentives and structure right
> can also transform the performance of many dynamic and capable
> people who were not able to achieve the right results under the
> old system."

Revenue Generation Strategies

Despite the emphasis on budget cuts, the government's reform program

has included some revenue generation strategies. However, the government

has avoided raising personal and corporate income taxes and focused on user

fees and reducing and eliminating universal subsidies. For example, the

province has increased health insurance premiums and introduced means

testing for health insurance premium and other provincial subsidies for senior

citizens. (Means testing was previously in place for health insurance premium

subsidies for lower income Albertans under the age of 65.) The government's

share of the proceeds of video lottery terminal gambling has proven to be

another highly lucrative revenue source.[13] Taken together, the budget cuts and

increased revenues from these sources have enabled the government to

balance the provincial budget ahead of its original four year schedule. The

province has recently announced the introduction of personal income tax cuts.

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[13] Increasingly Albertans are raising concerns regarding the social and economic impacts of
gambling addiction. Citizens in a number of communities are trying to force local referendums to
have VLTs banned.

Summary

The Alberta government's agenda has exhibited a pattern highly consistent with the elements of a NPM approach. The reforms have been successful in enabling the province to achieve a balanced budget and the government is now paying off its debt, aided by a stronger provincial economy and lower interest rates. In keeping with the NPM notion of the purchaser-provider split, or the separation of steering from rowing, the majority of public sector workers have had no active involvement in shaping the reform policies. Solicited public input has largely been limited to representatives selected by the government itself, and government-commissioned public opinion surveys.

Educational Reform in Alberta

Overview

Since 1993, the Alberta government has made a rapid series of NPM reforms to the province's primary and secondary education system (Alberta Education, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; School Act, 1996). For example, it has:

- reduced its expenditures on education;

- decreased the number of school boards;[14]

- taken control of the education component of property taxation;

- encouraged competition among schools and school boards through:

  - the introduction of a public choice school funding model and

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14 Alberta's public school boards include boards that oversee denominational (separate) public schools and nondenominational public schools.

- allowing the establishment of charter schools[15]; and

- increased local school control by implementing new school-based management requirements, including mandatory school councils.

Currently, the government is phasing in requirements for school boards and individual schools to develop three-year business plans and annual accountability reports, which must include performance measures specified by Alberta Education[16] in accordance with the requirements of the Government Accountability Act (1995).

Similar to the situation in the health system, the educational reform process has been characterized by limited public consultation. The major public consultation process once again involved roundtable sessions. Barlow and Robertson (1994) and Lisac (1995) note that many of the reforms that were eventually implemented by the government were not widely recommended, even at these roundtable sessions (e.g., charter schools, mandatory school councils, kindergarten funding cuts).

Barlow and Robertson (1994) indicate that the key people involved in the design of the government's educational reform agenda included: Provincial Treasurer Jim Dinning (also a former Education Minister); Dr. Steven Murgatroyd, an Athabasca University management professor and consultant (also an author who has written books on the topics of 'challenging the public sector culture' and 'quality in education'); John Ballheim, president-elect of the

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[15] Charter schools, which are operated by societies or corporations have a special charter from the Minister of Education, do not charge tuition fees, are open to any Alberta student, and are governed directly by groups of parents, staff and community members. According to the School Act (1996) they may be affiliated with a school board. Five charter schools have been approved and three were operating as of 1995.

[16] Alberta Education is the provincial Department of Education.

Alberta Chamber of Commerce (also president of DeVry Institute, a private vocational college); and Albertans for Quality Education, an educational special interest group that believes in the value of market competition among schools. All of these individuals and groups were fundamentally sympathetic to the Klein Conservatives' reform approach.

Neither the province's locally elected school trustees nor the province's 27,000 teachers were consulted regarding the reforms. Indeed, the government put a number of smaller school boards out of business and took away powers from the rest, as explained in the following section.

When the government announced the outline of its broad reform plan, including its proposal to cut $239 million from education spending, the ATA launched a public information campaign. The campaign emphasized that Albertans were getting value for their education dollar and that the province's students were performing well in relation to students elsewhere. The ATA also commissioned Angus Reid to do a public opinion poll, which found that 72% of Albertans thought the government was spending the right amount or too little on education, and that half would be prepared to see their taxes increase rather than to see money cut from the province's education budget. But the ATA's campaign did not cause the government to alter the nature or timelines of its reform agenda (Barlow and Robertson, 1994).

Spending Cuts and Governance Changes

The Government's philosophy is that "(e)ducation cost savings can be achieved without affecting student programs by reducing administration and governance costs" (Alberta Education, 1995b, p. 28). Reductions in administration and governance costs have been obtained by amalgamating

small rural school boards, resulting in a decrease in the number of school boards from 181 to 66 and the number of local school trustees from 1,184 to 435. In addition, the number of staff employed by Alberta Education has decreased from 863 to 665 in 1995 and is projected to decrease further. The percentage of school jurisdiction spending on board governance, central administration and support services has decreased from 6.4% in 1993/94 to 5.9% in 1995/96. The targeted average ceiling on school board spending on governance, administration and support services is 5.1% for 1996/97 (Alberta Education 1995b, 1996).[17]

When property tax-funded expenditures are taken into account, education spending has decreased 7.4% from $29.97 per full-time equivalent student per day in 1992/93 to $27.74 in 1995/96. However, the government found it necessary to take steps in addition to administrative spending decreases in order to achieve this reduction. First, it told school boards to reduce employee compensation by 5%. School boards, in turn, threatened to lay off teachers with the least seniority if teachers did not agree to pay cuts. The ATA (Booi, 1996) indicates teachers reluctantly accepted the pay cuts to protect their colleagues' jobs.[18] Second, the Government reduced funds for transportation, maintenance and school construction. According to Alberta Education (1996, p. 20), "Holding the line on funding for transportation and for operations and maintenance ensures that efficiencies are achieved." Priority school capital projects are now funded on a cash basis to enable the

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17 According to the Planning and Policy Branch of Alberta Education, the exact limit depends on the size of the school board ranges between 4% and 6%.

18 Barlow & Robertson (1994) report that ATA president Bauni Mackay had offered Premier Klien the 5 percent reduction in exchange for guarantees on class size and a 300 day delay of reform legislation to allow for public discussion of reform, a commitment to public education and to prohibit tuition fees in public schools, and assurances that all teachers in public schools would remain certified professionals, but he refused.

government to eliminate interest payments on long term debt. Third, the government cut funding for kindergarten programs in half but allowed school boards to make up the difference required for a full program from parents. The latter action clearly did directly impact on programs for the youngest students and proved to be unpopular with many Albertans.[19] Recently, the government (Alberta Education,1996) announced the restoration of full kindergarten funding as part of an 'educational reinvestment program', which also provides additional funding for computer technology and school construction, upgrading and maintenance, but not teacher salaries. The government has also announced it is considering making kindergarten mandatory in Alberta.

A particularly important educational system governance change was the government's decision to assume direct responsibility for setting the school property tax levy. Previously, school boards were funded by grants from the provincial government and any additional revenues they could raise through property taxes. Differences in the assessed value of property in different regions meant that available revenues varied considerably from school board to school board. This resulted in substantial inequities in per student spending on education by school boards across the province. The government began phasing in equalized education property tax mill rates in 1995. *All school boards, regardless of where they are located, now receive the same per pupil instructional grant from the province*[20]. Additional funds are given to school boards to provide for children with special needs, for example, mental and

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19 Under the School Act (1996), a child under 6 years of age as of September 1 does not have an enforceable right to a publicly-funded education.

20 High schools are funded on a slightly different basis -- student credits.

physical disabilities.[21]

School Choice

One of the government's reform objectives is, "to provide parents with greater opportunity to select schools and programs of their choice" (Alberta Education, 1996, p. ii). Public choice theory predicts that introducing market mechanisms into the educational system will lead to schools that are more responsive to the needs of parents and children (Cooper, 1993; Friedman, 1982). Alberta parents can now choose any public or charter school in the province subject to the availability of space.[22] Since *funding follows the student to the school*, the school must satisfy parents in order to maintain its enrolment and its resources. The funding model assumes several things about the market for educational services, for example, that parents act in the best interests of their children, understand the important dimensions of quality in education, and do not face significant barriers to exercising their right to choose.

The School Act (1996) also permits Alberta parents to send their children to accredited private schools or to 'home school' their children through a school board or an accredited private school. However, private schools charge tuition and receive a lower per student instructional grant than public or charter schools. This may reduce their perceived attractiveness to parents, particularly those with low to middle incomes. Home schooling is not a viable option for most single parent families and two parent families where both parents are labour force participants.

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[21] It is not clear to me how the province decides how many children have special needs across the province or in individual school jurisdictions, or how much additional funding is required to meet these needs.

[22] The School Act (1996) requires school boards to accommodate all students living within their jurisdictional boundaries who wish to enrol in their schools.

School-based Management

The province's reform program aims to encourage more decision-making at the school level, including greater involvement by parents and community members. For example, the government has mandated the formation of school councils, consisting of representatives of parents of children attending the school (who must be in the majority), staff and the community at large. School councils provide a formal vehicle for the involvement of these stakeholders.

The public choice school funding model and the government's decision to give individual schools greater autonomy over issues that are not provincially regulated[23] suggest that school boards, particularly urban school boards, may find it necessary to redefine their roles. Increasingly, they may become involved in strategic issues, such as how to position the educational programs offered by their schools given pressures from competitor school boards and charter schools, and the perceived demands of parents.

Accountability Framework

In accordance with the requirements of the Government Accountability Act (1995), Alberta Education requires school boards to produce three-year educational plans and annual results reports, including results on performance measures specified by the province. Similar planning and reporting requirements are being phased in for individual schools. Measures that Alberta Education (1995a) is requiring school boards to include in their November 1996 results reports include:

- the percentage of students who achieve the acceptable standard and percent of students who achieve the standard of excellence

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23 Provincially regulated areas include the curriculum and the number of instructional hours.

on provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations, including participation rates;

- the percentage of parents who are satisfied with their children's schooling and the quality of information from schools about their children's progress and educational achievement;
- the percentage of students who are satisfied with their school overall, variety and challenge in classroom and school activities, opportunities to make decisions about their learning and career paths, clarity of expectations for their learning, behaviour, and involvement at school, and the help and support they receive from school staff;
- the percentage of school jurisdictions spending on instruction; and
- the amount spent per student per school year.

Reflecting the government's desire that the educational system be open and accountable, and in accordance with the Act, school board and school results reports must be made public.

Alberta Education's provincial achievement test and diploma examination results are receiving particular attention as measures of education system, school board, and school performance. Achievement outcomes are defined in terms of the percentages of students achieving an 'acceptable standard' and 'standard of excellence' on provincial achievement tests and high school diploma examinations. Alberta Education (1995b, p. 10) defines these standards as "the percentage of students that should achieve the provincial assessment standards -- 15% for the standard of excellence and 85% for the acceptable standard."

In 1995 the province began to expand its grade 3, grade 6 and grade 9 achievement testing program. Children in grade 3 now write two achievement examinations annually in language arts and mathematics. Children in grades 6 and 9 now write four examinations, in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. In 1996 diploma examinations were introduced in additional grade 12 subjects. According to Alberta Education (1996, p. 8), "Increased testing and improved reporting will ensure that students, teachers, parents and other Albertans know and understand what our young people have achieved and what they still need to learn."

Summary

The Alberta government has substantially restructured the province's educational system since the election of the Klein Conservatives in May 1993. The government states its intended outcomes as reducing administrative costs, ensuring that there are equitable educational opportunities for all students, increasing parent and community involvement, increasing openness and public accountability, enhancing the quality of education and improving achievement (Alberta Education, 1996). The government hopes to obtain these outcomes using the following reform strategies:

- *Reductions in administrative costs* -- reducing the number of school boards and school trustees; setting administrative spending ceilings (targets) for school boards; and downsizing Alberta Education.
- *Equitable educational opportunities* -- assuming provincial control of all education related taxing and spending; providing an equal education grant for every student (note: additional funding is

provided for special needs students); ensuring provincial
education funding follows the student to the chosen school.

- *Increased parent and community involvement* -- allowing parents
to choose any publicly funded school (including a charter school)
for their child,subject to the availability of space; mandating school
councils; providing parents with comparative information on
school performance (i.e., achievement and diploma examination
results).

- *Increased openness and public accountability* -- requiring school
boards and schools to prepare and release three-year business
plans and accountability reports containing information on Alberta
Education designated performance measures (i.e., achievement
and diploma examination results); increasing school flexibility
through school-based management.

- *Enhanced quality of education and improved achievement results*
-- ensuring provincial education funding follows the student to the
chosen school; allowing parents to choose any publicly funded
school for their child, subject to the availability of space; creating
additional competition for school boards in the form of charter
schools; mandating school councils; providing parents with
comparative information on school performance; increasing
school flexibility through school-based management.

The government has decided to make these strategic policy changes on its
own, with minimal formal input from the public, publicly elected school trustees,
schools, or teachers.

CHAPTER 3:

A Study to Investigate Organizational Impacts of Educational Reforms on Schools

Introduction

Background

In Chapter 1, I discussed NPM, including its generic policy elements, motivational assumptions and potential limitations. Chapter 1 also reviewed the limited empirical evidence regarding the impacts of NPM. The strongest support for NPM government reform programs is in the area of immediate cost savings. The weakest support is in the area of improved worker morale. The evidence that NPM produces service improvements is mixed. In Chapter 2, I overviewed the Alberta government's NPM reform program and provided a more detailed description of the government's NPM educational reforms. This chapter describes a qualitative study I conducted to explore how school staff are being affected by, and responding to, recent changes to the province's educational policies, and how teachers and principals perceive the reforms are influencing other system stakeholders.

I was interested in exploring principals and teachers' experiences to learn about the reforms' *unintended* as well as their intended impacts. The government itself is using Alberta Education's (1996) Three-Year Business Plan performance measures to judge how successful the reforms are at producing their intended outcomes.[24] These official performance measures give considerable weight to business values (e.g., overall economy, efficiency, customer satisfaction) but do not appear to place as much emphasis public

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[24] See Appendix A for a complete list of the Alberta Education performance measures.

values (e.g., fairness in distribution of educational outcomes as well as inputs, reduction of inequities related to students' socioeconomic status and ethnicity). The official measures also tend to stress the immediate and tangible outcomes of education, and the economic value of education (i.e., preparation for the workplace) over its public value (i.e., preparation for citizenship). Although Alberta Education has a variety of performance measures, media interest may have focused the public's attention on achievement and diploma examination results.

From a broad systems perspective, the educational reforms are intended to alter the incentives or payoffs for particular behaviours as well as the interdependencies among different system stakeholders. Individual schools' budgets are now directly related to their success at recruiting and retaining students. By assuming full responsibility for education funding and requiring the collection and reporting of data on designated performance measures, the government has acquired some powerful levers for indirectly controlling the behaviour of schools. Furthermore, the government's school choice policy, with funding following the student to the individual school, has given parents a direct method for influencing schools' organizational behaviour.

What is less apparent is how the reforms are perceived by those they are intended to affect and whether these stakeholders are responding to them in the intended ways. According to the government's theory of reform, parents -- not students -- are the school customers. Under the new choice arrangement, parents are assumed to evaluate potential schools along implicit dimensions of quality and to choose the one with the highest subjective utility, much as they make other purchases. Market forces create incentives for schools to improve along the quality dimensions of importance to parents, creating a second kind of

accountability in addition to the accountability embodied in the government's mandatory plans, reports and measures. Students, who are the school's direct service recipients, are expected to reap the benefits. Exactly how the conditions in schools or the behaviours of principals and teachers change in response to the market mechanisms and the government's measures is unknown. However, school personnel are presumed to have the flexibility they need to respond appropriately as a result of the devolution of decision-making power to the school (i.e., school-based management requirements).

Overview

The study looked at the educational reforms from the perspective of the professionals who actually do the educating -- school principals and teachers. Through listening to their stories, I sought to understand how the different reforms, such as school choice and achievement testing, were experienced by these front-line professionals, and how they were responding to the reforms. For example, what kinds of decisions are made at the school level, and how are these decisions made? How do principals and teachers view their roles in decision-making? Do they feel empowered to make decisions and create change? How do they regard the usefulness of achievement test and diploma examination results? How do they use this information in the school? How do they perceive others use this information, and how do they perceive its use by others affects them? How are they balancing their traditional professional accountability to students with the new market and results accountabilities that have been created by the Government's reform policies?

Volunteer principals and teachers were interviewed at their schools. During the interviews, I asked participants to describe how their schools'

environmental contexts, including the behaviours of other stakeholders, were affecting them. I also asked them to reflect on their impressions of school-based management and the province's accountability framework, as well as other aspects of the government's educational reforms. The interview format that I used allowed me to explore their concerns and issues as well as my own.

Study Purposes

The study had two interconnected purposes:

- to gain a better understanding of how schools are coping with and responding to the government's educational reforms, with an emphasis on school-based management and the accountability framework; and

- to develop a theoretical model that would describe the links between the government's educational reforms and organizational and individual behaviours, with the basic propositions of the theory grounded in the information provided by school principals and teachers.

Development of a theoretical model was dependent on the emergence of a consistent picture of the workings and impacts of the reforms. Argyris (1985, 1991) notes that our 'espoused theories' or explanations for our actions typically do not match the actual theories-in-use that seem to govern our behaviours. The province's educators have had limited input into the design and implementation of the reforms. This may increase the chances that the actual results of the reforms will not be exactly as the government has espoused. Fortunately, the information that study participants provided proved

to be sufficiently rich in detail and consistent enough across different participants' accounts to allow me to develop a theory-in-use. In Chapter 6, I present this theory-in-use and compare it to the government's espoused theory.

I did not formally test the theory-in-use. However, I did check secondary sources of data on school reforms for comparison purposes. For example, I examined recent articles on the topic of educational reform that have appeared in the province's two largest daily newspapers, the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald*. In addition, I reviewed the educational literature (books and articles) for information on the impacts of similar educational reforms adopted elsewhere. I present the evidence from news reports and the literature review in Chapter 7.

Method

School and Principal Selection

Edmonton, the capital city of Alberta, has two of the province's larger school boards. The Edmonton Public School Board has 201 schools with approximately 75,000 students, while the Edmonton Catholic School Board has 82 schools with approximately 31,000 students. Principals and teachers who participated in this study came from three of these 283 schools. Study schools were affiliated with one of the two Edmonton school boards and consisted of one elementary school, one junior high school and one high school. To obtain variability in the other characteristics of the study schools while avoiding bias in their selection, I used a stratified random sampling procedure. I used this stochastic choice method, which is described below, because I did not consider that any public school was theoretically more interesting than any other public

school for the purposes of this research. As a result of the selection procedure, the chosen schools also differed in terms of the family background of students served, size of school, type of special programs offered, and comparative performance in terms of provincial achievement and diploma examination results.

Under the terms of the Cooperative Activities Program (CAP) agreement between the Edmonton Public School Board, the Edmonton Catholic School Board and the University of Alberta, I was required to submit my proposal to the Faculty of Business Ethics Review Committee and the Assistant Dean of Research of the Faculty of Education prior to review and approval by the two school boards. I followed this protocol, and I did not approach any schools regarding participation in this project until I received formal approval from both school boards.

The CAP guidelines required me to name the schools that I planned to involve in this study. However, identifying the exact locations where I intended to conduct interviews would have compromised organizational and individual confidentiality. I resolved this dilemma by providing both school boards with a short list of 18 schools randomly selected from the Edmonton Telephones Yellow Pages Directory -- four Edmonton Public schools and two Edmonton Catholic schools at each grade level (i.e., elementary, junior high and high school). This short list enabled the school boards to notify all 18 principals that they might be asked to participate in the project. However, in consenting to allow me to conduct the study in their districts, both school boards kindly agreed to remain 'blind' to the identities of those schools that I actually approached, and the ones I eventually selected.

One additional constraint guiding my choice of schools was the

willingness of the school principal to volunteer to be interviewed. I had two reasons for requiring that the principal was an interview participant. First, I wanted to be able to compare the views of principals and teachers. Second, my ability to gain access to potential teacher participants at a school depended on the goodwill of the principal. At two of the grade levels, the principal at the first school contacted agreed to participate. At the other level, it took three tries (random selections from the list of six schools without replacement) before I obtained a volunteer.

The two principals who did not volunteer cited heavy workloads and lack of time as the reasons for their nonparticipation. The three principals who did volunteer provided me with lists of the names of their teaching staff. Beyond providing staff lists, principals had no direct involvement in recruiting teacher participants and were unaware of which of their teachers volunteered for the study.

Teacher Selection

All teachers at each of the schools were invited to participate through a letter[25] placed in their staff mailboxes. The letter explained the study and included a copy of the informed consent information and form[26]. Teachers were asked to indicate with a check mark whether or not they would be willing to participate and to return their response to their school secretary in a sealed envelope addressed to me. Unless I received a form where 'yes' was checked, the teacher was assumed to have refused. I made no further follow-up approaches except to the four teachers who volunteered. While I would have

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25 A copy of the letter appears in Appendix B.
26 A copy of the consent information and form appears in Appendix C.

preferred to interview more teachers, there was at least one teacher volunteer from each school, enabling principal-teacher comparisons both within and between schools. Given the study's exploratory purpose[27] and my concern at this early research stage with obtaining understanding and insight rather than statistical conclusion validity, I proceeded with the study despite the relatively small participant sample.

During the interviews, teacher participants were asked what other teachers' reasons might be for not volunteering. Explanations offered included lack of time, lack of interest, and fear of taking a stand critical of the reforms. Reasons they gave for their own participation varied from personal interest to a desire to help the researcher:

> "I like doing this kind of thing on a personal level because it makes me stop and think, answering your questions, and I learn from that."

> "I volunteered, I guess, for two reasons. The first one is, if I ever plan to do my Master's, I would really appreciate people volunteering for my questioning in my thesis. Because I did it a couple of times when I was at university, I can understand it being very difficult to get people to do it. And I guess the second reason, I thought, well, I'm a _____ teacher, maybe I can give a different viewpoint."

Participant Characteristics

In addition to the characteristics mentioned earlier (i.e., elementary, junior high and high school principals and teachers, affiliated with the Edmonton Catholic and Edmonton Public School Boards), participants had a wide range of teaching or combined teaching and administrative experience,

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[27] For example, Gersick (1988) developed a model of work team processes using transcript data from eight teams.

ranging from less than five years to more than 30 years. Some of the principals taught classes while some of the teachers had part-time administrative duties. Some of the principals and teachers had previous experience working in school board central administration positions. Other characteristics on which participants differed included age, gender, level of formal training (i.e., bachelor's degree vs. graduate degree) and grade levels and subject specialties (for those who taught). While not chosen to be representative of school board-affiliated staff in Edmonton, participants nevertheless represented a diverse cross-section of educators.

Data Collection

All participants chose to be interviewed at their schools during or at the end of the regular school day. At the beginning of each interview, after answering any questions the participant had about the study, I asked the participant to sign the written consent form. In addition to signing the form, each participant consented to allow me to audio tape the interview. During the interviews I also took notes. However, as there were only two brief tape recorder failures lasting an estimated total of less than five minutes out of a total of approximately seven hours of interview time, I based my analyses and interpretations on the transcripts of the audio tapes.

Each of the interviews covered the following topics[28] :

- the environmental context in which the school operated (e.g., political, economic, sociological and technological trends);
- other stakeholders (e.g., Alberta Education, the school board, the

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[28] See Appendix D for a copy of the interview topic guide. I began every interview by asking the participant about factors in the school's environmental context which affected the way the school operated.

parents and the students) and how they affected the operation of the school;

- school decision-making (e.g., the types of decisions made at the school, how they are made, who is involved and their results);
- examples of information available to the school or specifically collected by the school, who uses the information (including other stakeholders), how the information affects school decisions, and how its use by the school or other system actors affects staff personally and the education of students;
- the perceived value of different kinds of available information and the reasons why certain information is (or is not) perceived to be valuable;
- school uses of achievement or diploma examination results; and
- other kinds of information that would be of value but which are not currently available.

In addition, principals were asked to provide basic information about the characteristics of their schools (e.g., number of students, number of staff, special programs) that might be important in interpreting the results.

The interview format provided me with the flexibility to introduce topics in a different order if that seemed appropriate, to drop lines of questioning that were unproductive, and to pursue emerging issues. However, for the most part, I covered the same general topic areas in the same order for all participants. Conducting these interviews posed few difficulties because all participants were highly articulate.

Data Analysis

My original analysis plan was to prepare a case analysis of each school. However, the two-step random method I used in order to obtain variability in the characteristics of the selected schools proved to be so successful that each of the schools stood out, not only in contrast to the other study schools, but in terms of Edmonton schools in general. Indeed, the fact that my random selection process led me to three schools with such distinctive attributes serves as a reminder that the average or typical school is a statistical fiction.

After weighing the pros and cons, I decided that describing the schools individually in any detail in this thesis would breech organizational confidentiality. In addition, the number of informants meant only a limited understanding could be obtained of individual schools' organizational dynamics. Therefore, I chose to abandon the full case analysis approach but nevertheless used the differences among the schools in conducting a grounded theory-type analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994). Theoretically relevant categories and the relationships among them were allowed to emerge from the transcript data. My general approach was to look for consistent (i.e., similar or complementary) stories or themes across the accounts provided by the seven participants and to use the constant comparative method to understand the factors associated with emergent similarities and differences.

However, I cannot claim my analysis represents 'pure' grounded theory research for several reasons (Glaser, 1992). First, the situational constraints and time limitations under which I conducted the study meant that I did not have the opportunity to conduct repeated interviews with the participants or to 'theoretically sample' observations of them in other settings (e.g., in staff

meetings, parent or student conferences, classrooms, or during other parts of their daily routines). Important impacts and differences between what participants said and how they actually behaved may have been missed because additional sources of data were not used. Second, I assumed that participant and school attributes might be analytically relevant (e.g., whether the participant was a principal or a teacher, the participant's school board affiliation); thus it would not be accurate to claim my mind was a conceptual *tabla rasa* at the beginning of the interviews. However, I did not make assumptions about the conceptual relevance of any *specific* participant and school attributes. Third, I was clearly interested in participants' opinions of the educational reforms and their perceptions regarding the influence of the reforms on their own and others' behaviours and outcomes. Consequently, my line of questioning directed participant's attention to these areas, even if the participant did not spontaneously raise them as issues. Finally, in developing the educational reform theory-in-use (see Chapter 6), I used both inductive and deductive reasoning. I have inductively established important relationships based on patterns that participants' comments suggested. I have also made some higher-level deductive inferences about relationships that cannot be said to be directly grounded in what participants said, although I believe these inferences are not inconsistent with participants' remarks either. Thus, my theory construction approach involved some 'bounding' that affected 'grounding' and some 'forcing' as well as 'emergence'.

Limitations of the Research

Qualitative inquiry has the advantage of flexibility in approach, but it also has limitations. One limitation was noted earlier, namely, that generalizability is

traded off for depth of understanding. In the case of this study, there were many potentially interesting and theoretically relevant viewpoints that were not explored, including those of private school, charter school, and rural school staff, as well as parents and students. Inclusion of these other perspectives might have prompted the refinement or extension of the theory-in-use.

Another limitation is the certainty that my active participation in all phases of the research, including data collection, analysis and interpretation has introduced some degree of bias into the findings. For example, interview participants may have altered their remarks to reflect their perceptions of my interpretive framework. One participant mentioned after the conclusion of the interview that she used different terms to describe her situation to me than she would have used to describe them to someone with a formal background in education.

However, my lack of affiliation with the educational community, my academic status (graduate student) and female gender may have yielded certain advantages. Participants could not assume a shared perspective and therefore had to provide clarification and explanation in order to help me understand. Furthermore, except for the possibility that my Faculty of Business affiliation[29] may have led some participants to make attributions concerning my personal opinions about the educational reforms, my own attributes were relatively non-threatening. Where a status differential existed, it was in the direction of the participant having greater expertise on the topic and/or status than I did. This may have led to greater candour in participants' responses.

All researchers have expectations and values that influence their

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[29] The possibility cannot be ruled out that other teachers in these schools did not take up the offer to participate because of my Faculty of Business affiliation.

personal interpretive frameworks and I am no exception. I believe there are two possible areas of concern from the perspective of this study, namely, possible biases arising from my personal experiences with NPM and biases arising from my experiences with public education.

First, in regard to my experiences with NPM, I did not begin this research project with any special knowledge or strong views about educational reforms in particular. However, I have previously been a manager in the provincial government and was personally involved in the process of identifying performance measures for the first Alberta Health business plan. During this period, which spanned the first year and a half of the Klein Conservatives' mandate, I became concerned about the speed of reform implementation, the appropriateness of the performance measures being identified, and the effects of health funding cutbacks and performance measures on health service providers. I also perceived that the reforms were having some negative impacts on my coworkers and myself. After choosing to leave my government job for full time business graduate studies, I began to read about NPM and to exchange ideas with management consultants and evaluators interested in this topic. These experiences and interactions left me, in a general sense, skeptical of NPM's claimed benefits.

In regard to the province's educational system, I have a long history and continuing association with publicly funded schools in Edmonton. I was educated in public schools and believe that, overall, they did a good job of educating me. Many years ago, I worked as a teacher's aide (paraprofessional) in a school. I am currently a parent of two children (an elementary student and a junior high student) enroled in publicly funded schools. I am aware of the comparative achievement examination results for my children's schools, and,

prior to conducting this study, was also aware of my parental right to choose their schools. I am not (and have never been) a member of a school council. My children's schools were not among the schools I approached to participate. All of the principals and teachers in my study were strangers.

I used three primary strategies to limit the possible impact of my biases on my findings. First, I used an interview topic guide. Second, I asked open-ended questions. Third, I tape recorded and transcribed the interviews. The transcripts enabled me to review my question asking strategy as well as ensuring I had an exact (as opposed to reconstructed) record of participants' answers.

In addition, the findings of my study, reported in this thesis, are now exposed to academic and public scrutiny. This provides a fourth, external check on my biases. Others with different beliefs and expectations about NPM and the publicly funded education system are welcome to review, debate, elaborate, and test my theory-in-use, and form and defend their own conclusions from the evidence presented here, or information which they may subsequently obtain and analyze.

Paradigmatic Assumptions

Although the purpose of this study was to explore and describe the educational reforms, and to develop a theory rather than to test one, the philosophical paradigm guiding my research is postpositivism, not constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scriven, 1993). I differ from positivists in rejecting the 'values-free' doctrine of social science. However, I differ from constructivists in assuming that a reasonably accurate, global picture of how the educational reforms are affecting the educational system can be attained with

enough perseverance. System changes are affected by the way that different stakeholders interpret or construct reality; however, the way reality is constructed is predictable and system impacts are not simply 'all in our heads'. To gain a fuller appreciation of the nature of these system changes will require the use of multiple lines of evidence and multiple methodologies, including quantitative as well as qualitative ones.

Findings and Interpretations

In the following two chapters, I present and discuss the basic results of the interviews. Chapter 4 describes participants' beliefs regarding the influence of the school context and other stakeholders on the operation of the school. Chapter 5 examines participants' accounts of school-based management and the accountability framework. The general strategy for presenting these results is to give voice to the views and issues of the participants. I make extensive use of participants' verbatim comments, edited only as far as necessary to protect confidentiality. In Chapter 6, I present the theory-in-use of educational reforms. The theory begins with my interpretation of the educational reform 'story line' as expressed by the interview participants. Then I draw out the implications for macro level changes by asking questions, for example, "What if the reforms are working as the interview participants seem to be saying they are working on a system wide basis?" In Chapter 7, I examine additional, independent lines of evidence related to the theory. Finally, in Chapter 8, I conclude by presenting some ideas for extending and verifying the theory.

CHAPTER 4:

Perceived Influences on the Operation of the School

Overview

I began each interview with a broad lead-in question about the influence of the school's environment context on the operation of the school. If these stakeholders were not spontaneously mentioned by the participant, I followed up with questions on the influence of Alberta Education, the school board, the parents, and the students. Answers to these questions yielded a number of insights into participants' beliefs about the dynamics of educational reform. This chapter highlights the key themes that emerged.

Environmental Context

Family Background of Students

One contextual factor that all participants mentioned as important in influencing the operation of the school was the family background of students, especially their socioeconomic status. Participants described a number of ways in which students' socioeconomic characteristics influenced school staff. These could be roughly classified as the nature of the problems that teachers had to cope with in the classroom and the extent to which parents played an active role in education and communicating with the school. In the school that served students from the poorest families, staff reported dealing with issues related to the students' health status and unstable family situations, for example, hunger, fatigue, and discipline. These were issues that the schools serving students from higher income families were not confronted with on a frequent basis. As one participant expressed it:

"Our children tend to be homogeneous in the fact that they come
from the working poor and sometimes the unworking poor. And
that means, for example, that you do have children coming to the
school hungry, you do have children coming to the school who are
uncared for, would be termed neglected. And that affects their
learning and their ability to learn, their ability to focus. So that in
turn can affect your style and your approach to your teaching and
some of the other problems you have to tackle that perhaps aren't
related directly to teaching itself but in care and management, I
guess you can say, of children."

Staff at this school -- with some cooperation and assistance from community

agencies -- found that they had to do many things that in wealthier areas of the

city would be done by parents. They also found that, unless they addressed

these more fundamental needs, they could not teach the students. However, in

choosing to deal with these needs rather than simply ignoring them, staff had

less time to spend on education. Another participant explained the dilemma:

"A lot of the things that we deal with when we deal with the
students' education are not just educational issues -- they're family
issues, they're social issues, they're parental problem issues. Too
many of the teachers have to spend too much time on things other
than actual teaching. A disadvantage that I see is that these
students already need more time per pupil per teacher and in fact
we're spending time on other things that take away from time per
pupil."

Parents of children at this school were perceived to be less involved in

their children's education. For example, many of these parents did not reinforce

the importance of education at home (e.g., making sure that the children did

their homework). Only a few were able to volunteer at the school or to serve on

the school council. However, in the participants' view, even the highly

motivated parents faced obstacles:

"The parents are not used to, and don't know how the system
works to lobby for their children. For example, in another school in

another area of the city, those parents are very used to the system, they know how the system works, they know how to work the system, so they're going to lobby directly downtown for things they feel their children need. They'll advocate very strongly for those children, whereas our parents, because of their backgrounds, education, generally don't know number one, how to lobby. They may not have the awareness of the need to lobby for the children, or advocate certain rights."

Staff at this school labeled their school 'high needs'. They also acknowledged that they were dependent on their school board's willingness and ability to recognize the special needs of the students, and to provide extra funding.

These comments suggested that parents who appreciate and support the school's mandate are among a school's greatest assets. Furthermore, it benefits the school to have parents who know how to lobby for the interests of their children, for example, parents of special needs children who will persist in advocating their child's case to the school board until the school board recognizes the child's needs and provides the school with extra resources. Severely disabled children will likely be recognized regardless of whether their parents advocate on their behalf or not. However, problems may arise for children with mild to moderate special needs (e.g., learning disabilities, behavioural problems) because they 'appear' to be like the normal population.

Under the new per capita funding formula, some schools may not receive enough extra resources for special needs students unless the school boards take great care to ensure an equitable distribution of discretionary special needs funding.[30] The potential hazard of getting shortchanged appears to be higher for schools who serve students with mild to moderate special needs from

[30] According to my interpretation of a telephone conversation with an official from Planning and Policy Branch of Alberta Education, the funding for students with high special needs follows these students. However, the school boards are given block grants for students with mild to moderate special needs, and the school boards determine how to allocate this funding.

lower income families. As the comment above indicates, these students' parents are not 'the squeaky wheels, who know how to get greased'.

In contrast, staff at the other two schools in my study were in a greatly advantaged position when it came to achieving their mandates. Parents had the resources to fulfill their children's' basic physical and psychological needs, allowing these schools to focus most of their attention on the task of teaching. All of the schools had some students with special needs, but the schools which served higher income students seemed, by their own accounts, to have proportionately fewer of them.

Staff at the schools serving higher income students described the parents as being concerned about and supportive of their children's education, and having high expectations of both school and students. Here is a sample of their interview comments:

"I think that the parents care about the education of their kids. And that's the nice thing about it. Yes, these parents care a lot."

"We tend to have a fairly high academic group of students. We have (name of program) and they tend to be the higher level end of students. That affects achievement and achievement standards or achievement results, and we do get good results. So partly it's the clientele. In terms of the clientele we have high parental support on the whole. That's not to say every single student in the school is extremely academic and has excellent parental support, but on the whole."

"The parents are wonderful."

"The community that I'm serving by and large affects what I do. The expectations of my parent community -- they're well-educated people, they're professional people themselves. Those expectations dictate in many respects the expectations that I have for my school and the children that are in it. I have very high expectations academically for kids, excellence. I mean those are the sort of things that we know we have to produce."

"The (name of program) parents tend to be more involved. . .They want to know that you're qualified to teach their children, and things like that, to be more specific. . . Parents try to be more involved with their student's, their child's education. So that's a big factor at this school."

Taken together, the responses suggest how the socioeconomic status of students affects the operation of schools. Schools serving predominantly lower income students find they have to adjust their programs and expectations because of their students' health needs and behavioural problems. In comparison to schools that serve children from predominantly higher income families, these schools end up placing more emphasis on meeting students' basic needs and in dealing with discipline issues. They receive less support from parents in terms of their educational mandate (e.g., more students come to school ill prepared to learn), but also less pressure from parents regarding the academic achievement of their children. Remarks made during the interviews indicated that schools serving students from lower income families may be particularly concerned about the adequacy of special needs funding in the reformed education system, given the apparent higher prevalence of special needs among their student populations.

Participants' comments strongly suggested that parents are not equal in terms of interest, desire and ability to shape their children's education, as assumed by the government's espoused theory of reform. A more detailed account of the relationship between socioeconomic status, parental behaviour, and the implications for schools, is presented in the section on *parents*, page 84.

Level of Available Resources

A second frequently-mentioned contextual factor influencing school operation was the adequacy of the level of resources. As the special needs funding example in the previous section pointed out, this may be related to the socioeconomic status of the students served and their disabilities affecting learning in addition to the overall size of the student population. Interview responses suggested that staff at the one of the two smaller schools, which was currently experiencing a difficult budget situation, believed the school's resource outlook would improve in the next academic year. In contrast, at the other school, resources were considered to be adequate now, but staff were pessimistic about the adequacy of resources in the future. One of these schools' principals commented:

> "Right now, because it's the first part of the process and because
> there are cutbacks, we have to plan in relation to every cent that
> we spend . . ."

Resource shortfalls were reported to affect staffing and classroom materials in particular. The two smaller schools used a variety of strategies to cope. These included creating split grade classrooms, or mixing students of different levels in the same classes (e.g., French as a second language), limiting the range of option classes offered, and hiring part-time staff. Principals helped to balance their own budgets by teaching classes. Regular full-time teaching staff in the smaller schools seemed to teach more different subjects and grades than staff in the larger school.

One teacher described having to teach subjects s/he had no formal training to teach but added that, in a small school, this was a fact of a life. The problems of teachers in smaller schools were compounded when they found

they did not have (or could not afford to obtain) appropriate classroom resource materials to support their lessons. For example, a teacher at one of the small schools said:

> "As a teacher, it makes your job extremely hard if you have a program and you don't have anything to teach it with. Especially when we know eighty percent of our children are visual learners and you don't have any visual things to help them with, or that kind of thing. "

With school-based management, decisions such as how many teachers are needed (e.g., whether or not to set up a split grade classroom) and whether to buy maps, textbooks, or basketballs are all made locally because the school has the authority to manage its own operations. However, it means that working conditions for teachers may vary from school to school. Smaller schools may find themselves under more budget pressure because they do not have the advantage of economies of scale. For example, in a large school where there is more than one class at each grade level, several teachers may be able to share the same curriculum resources. As a result, the school may be able to purchase a greater variety or better resources. A small school may be forced to economize, particularly on any expenditure considered to be a 'frill' (e.g., library books).

Staff in the large school did not express concerns regarding access to curriculum resources but major budget items were still a worry. For example, staff at this school indicated that the building needed structural repairs. However, as described in Chapter 2, Alberta Education centrally controls the allocation of funds related to capital expenditures. A school in need of a major repair is at the mercy of provincial capital priorities. School boards, until they receive approval and funds from Alberta Education, can do nothing about

schools requiring major renovations, other than applying 'band aid' fixes or closing them altogether. This is a potential example of goal displacement through cost shifting. The government may save money on school repairs now, but if structural problems are not dealt with expediently, future taxpayers face a large bill to repair or replace seriously deteriorated school buildings.

At the large school, technology upgrades also emerged as a particularly emotional and contentious issue, and once again, the situation faced by this school showed some tell-tale signs of potential goal displacement through cost shifting. The section on *school-based management* in Chapter 5 (p. 98) discusses the technology decision in detail.

School Location

A third contextual factor was the location of the school. The school that served the lowest income students was a neighbourhood school, drawing most of its student population (with the exception of a few) from the local area. According to a teacher:

> "The tradition in this school has been that the children who live in this neighbourhood basically come to this neighbourhood school. So there hasn't had to be a major push for recruitment."

And the principal noted:

> "I don't go out of my area looking to get students from someplace else. In this area people do not tend to want to be mobile outside the area. Because of the fact that transportation to them is a cost, they would rather be in their own area where the children can walk to school rather than where they'd have to foot that cost."

This school expended little time and effort on promoting itself. Given their problems, many of this school's students would not be particularly attractive to other schools. However, the school was vulnerable to losing its few moderate

to high academic achieving students, particularly if their families had the resources to send them elsewhere.

The two schools which served students from higher income families depended on their ability to attract students from beyond the immediately surrounding community. One principal described the school's situation this way:

> "We're in an older neighbourhood. I have (#) kids that live in our attendance boundaries. I have (#) kids in the school. I have to attract the children. I think if this school is going to remain kind of a viable entity I have to attract kids to this school. We have open boundaries in the district, that's other stuff that impinges on us. And people are able to choose the school where they want to send their children."

The other school was a school in transition. It was changing its program, partly as a strategic response to a similar program offered by the other school board and partly to overcome a previous reputation for low academic performance.

The principal there observed:

> "The reputation of the school was not positive. The results on achievement tests were not seen to be particularly good. Mind you, it was dealing with neighbourhood students and there were a number of special needs students who were in here."

And, as a result of its transition to a new program specifically targeted to a more academically inclined type of student, s/he noted that:

> "If you were to ask me about the community, at this point the community is really irrelevant other than the site for the building."

Staff at both the schools which served higher income students talked about the importance of creating and maintaining a positive reputation for the school. They saw the critical element of the school's reputation as its academic performance, especially its comparative performance on provincial

achievement or diploma examinations. However, other factors were perceived

to influence the school's reputation. A teacher at one school described some of

these factors as "smaller environment, more direct contact with teachers, more

of a family atmosphere." At the other school, the principal discussed the

reputation issue in terms of the school's priority on academic achievement,

safety and enjoyment:

> "What's important in this school is number one achievement.
> Absolutely number one, achievement. You know, that's first and
> foremost, that's what schools exist for. The second thing is safety
> and comfort of kids. Parents have to send their kids here so that
> they know they're going to be safe and comfortable in the school.
> Kids have to learn that they're going to be safe here. No tolerance
> for violence and that sort of stuff. And then the third thing is
> enjoyment. Just like you and I want to enjoy where we work, I
> want kids to enjoy where they work."

A teacher provided this example of how perceptions of student behaviour can

affect a school's reputation:

> "When you get a bad core of kids it can really change the
> reputation of the school and then influence who is going to be
> coming into the school. You know, they determine your future
> clientele. So, for instance, we were having a little bit of a worry
> about drugs. Kids were going to (public gathering point) and
> smoking drugs or buying drugs and all of this kind of stuff and
> there's a big worry that all of a sudden this school is going to be
> known to be a druggie school. Parents are not going to send their
> children."

The need to recruit students from beyond the local community meant

both these schools had to promote themselves fairly widely. In response to my

question, "How is it that you do draw your students to the school?", one of the

principals replied:

> "Marketing. That's become quite an issue in terms of the district
> and the province in total. Open boundaries exist in the entire
> province and the money follows the student so any students that
> we serve in our school we are funded for."

Marketing activities included advertising in community newsletters, producing a program booklet, participating in several open houses and holding an open house at the school. This principal also met individually with interested parents and students. The other principal, who was at a school with a well-established reputation, mentioned similar recruitment strategies with the exception of community advertising and individual meetings. The latter principal emphasized that:

> "It's not a hard sell. We basically tell the kids and the parents that there are choices available to you and we want you to make informed choices so we're going to give you as much information about our school as we can. Please go to orientation sessions of other schools and make a good, informed choice. These are very important choices. Spend time deciding."

Both of these principals took a very positive approach to school choice and felt they had been given enough freedom and flexibility to adapt their programs in order to attract students and to obtain sufficient resources. Indeed, at the very start of the interview, when I first asked about contextual factors affecting the operation of the school, one of them replied, without hesitating:

> "I think that what affects me primarily in terms of the operation of this school and that impinges most on the operation is the kind of authority that I'm given . . . And with that amount of authority I can look at the environmental factors that impinge upon my school and do stuff for this school. I don't need someone in central office telling me what to do because my school operates a whole lot differently than somebody's in (other city location)."

The fact that both of these schools served higher income students may account for their principals' endorsement of school choice and school-based management. Both these schools had a strategic advantage to help them in the new competitive educational marketplace.

Alberta Education

When asked how Alberta Education influenced the school, participants noted that Alberta Education had legal jurisdiction in certain areas, such as curriculum and hours of instruction. They also indicated that the government reforms had created system changes that had impacted on the operation of their schools. One teacher described Alberta Education's influence as a 'far domino effect.' Using a curriculum change as an illustration, s/he remarked:

> "When they change their program of studies that means we have
> to spend money, the school has to spend money, to access
> resources for that change. That affects our budgeting and in turn
> affects the resources we have or do not have in the school. But
> with the grant system now following the child, it's not as directly
> linked with the province."

This points to a school-based management issue, particularly for small schools. Alberta Education may choose to implement a revised curriculum or change the approved currriculum resources in a subject (e.g., textbooks). When this happens, schools must absorb the cost out of their budgets, which, for the most part, reflect the number of students enroled. The resources that a school has available to respond to this change will be less in a small school than a large school because of the economies of scale problem. Consequently, small schools would be expected to feel the budget pinch the most.

Although there is a sense in which Alberta Education now seems more distant in terms of influencing the school's operations (i.e., finding the resources to implement a curriculum change), there is also a sense in which the Department was seen to be having a greater impact in terms of additional expectations and the associated work required to meet those expectations. The teacher went on to say:

"When the Department of Education changes policies, for
example, they make it so that every school, let's say, has to have a
three-year business plan, that in turn will affect someone here who
has to create that, someone has to generate that. The same with
any kind of paperwork. If the province is demanding certain things
to be filled out then those are going to generate work here on the
site at the school."

Schools are now legally required to prepare three-year business plans under

the provisions of the Government Accountability Act (1995). However, this

quote hints that school staff may largely experience the development of these

plans as a make-work exercise. Instead of stimulating them to improve,

business planning may simply distract the staff from doing other, more valuable

things. In the next chapter, I explore this issue further as part of the discussion

of school-based management.

In addition to per student resource allocation and three-year business

planning, participants noted Alberta Education impacts in the areas of school

choice, expanded achievement testing and reporting, and standard setting.

Alberta Education was seen as influencing operations primarily through its

policy steering role. For example, one principal said:

"Alberta Education -- you know, this almost sounds sacrilegious to
me -- hasn't affected a great deal about the way that I operate
specifically. Certainly, there are some regulations that they have
that sometimes give people heartburn but in terms of direct
operation of my school . . . yes, they ask the kids to write
examinations, grade (#'s) at the end of the year, I welcome that. I
think that's wonderful. We need some benchmarks. We need
some standards that we can go on. They establish curriculum.
That's their mandate. I welcome that."

And another participant commented:

"I think you have to realize that every school operates within
constraints: the constraints of finances; the constraints of budgets;
the constraints of what's mandated; the constraints of the talents of
your staff; the constraints of the make-up of your student body. So,

> some people might tell you, no, we don't make any decisions on
> our own. . . and in a sense because there's some things we simply
> have to do. We don't have any choice about it. . . . On another
> level, because of school-based budgeting, we do make decisions .
> . . So I think it's two very different levels. And you could say, no,
> we don't have any freedom to make decisions or we have a lot of
> freedom, and the truth is somewhere in-between."

There was general consensus among the study participants that the mandating of school councils was one government policy change that was *not* affecting the operations of their schools. Of the two mechanisms the government has given parents to influence the operation of the schools, parent choice and parent 'voice' (i.e., through school councils), participants' comments implied that parent choice was by far the stronger influence. This is discussed further in the section on *parents*, on page 83.

One of the key indirect or 'far domino effects' that was mentioned or alluded to by several participants was the impact of the government's educational reforms on the school boards, especially the restriction on the amount school boards are allowed to spend on administration. Both school boards were reorganizing or had recently reorganized. Participants perceived some positive effects (especially in terms of the authority of the principal) from downsizing and flattening the administrative hierarchy. However, administrative restructuring meant that schools, particularly those affiliated with the Edmonton Catholic School Board, were in now directly paying for supplies (e.g., textbooks) and support services (e.g., specialized testing and referrals) that, apparently, were formerly budgeted as part of school board administration. Schools were also taking on additional responsibilities in unfamiliar new areas (e.g., computer technology).

Evaluative reactions to Alberta Education and educational reforms ranged from positive to negative, with some participants having mixed views (i.e., liking some aspects and disliking others). Some participants (generally principals) found the systems changes exhilarating, while others (generally teachers) reported fatigue and stress. (See page 96 for more discussion of these impacts.)

School Boards

One factor that seemed to affect participants' reactions to the government reforms was their school board affiliation. Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) staff remarked that their board had made earlier changes which anticipated many of the government's system-wide changes. While EPSB staff didn't always personally agree with their school board's policies, there was a sense in which the school board's earlier decisions to adopt open boundaries and school-based budgeting, and to make school achievement test results publicly available, seemed to have prepared staff for change. Clearly, EPSB staff seemed more confident in their knowledge and understanding of the 'rules of the game'. Impacts of the reforms appeared to be muted or cushioned in their case because fewer new behaviours were required to accommodate them.

An analogy might be drawn to the impact of the introduction of a workplace no smoking policy on a non-smoker vs. a smoker. The non-smoker's enjoyment of the work environment increases but his own behaviour is the same before and after the introduction of the no-smoking policy. On the other hand, the smoker's enjoyment of the work environment is decreased (at least in the beginning) and he has to make a major and stressful behavioural accommodation to comply with the new rule. In this case, EPSB staff were like

the nonsmokers in that they already were doing a number of the things within

their school system before the government mandated them. Consequently,

they found themselves in the middle of reform implementation, instead of at the

beginning.

Here are some interview observations made by Edmonton Public School

Board participants:

"Our district is different than many districts in that we started out
many, many years ago, the forerunner of what the province is
really doing, local decision-making and decentralization of
decision-making and we've had site-based budgeting here for,
gosh, I don't know, fifteen to twenty years. Our superintendent that
left used to call it site-based management, but it wasn't. Our new
superintendent, however, has really brought that on, and we are
now empowered. He has done away with middle management in
the district. We do not have associate superintendents anymore.
The senior staff in the district right now is the superintendent, a
couple of department heads down in Central Services, and 200
principals. And, so we are now going through a paradigm shift."

"I think you have to be really aware of how advanced the district is
in this area. That if you were checking other school districts, they
haven't had the luxury of being able to make their own decisions in
schools like we've had . . . Our former superintendent was really a
man ahead of his time in terms of seeing that as the trend in
education and has certainly done everything possible to make it
possible for us to be -- well, he used to refer to us as a lighthouse
district in this regard. I think what it's done is given leaders in
schools incredible power and incredible freedom. And I think
that's the reason for stress on some parts but it's also the reason
for joy that we have in knowing that we can do what we want and
the only conditions are things that are policies of the province and
the district, and these are becoming fewer."

"I think this whole business of the district, for example, being a
district of choice and removal of the boundaries is a really good
decision. And I'm thinking of situations like the all girls junior high
school . . . I know that for some girls that would be an ideal
situation. Would it be an ideal situation for all of them? No. But
certainly for some it would be an ideal situation. And we now have
the freedom to do that where in the past we wouldn't have. You

get the flip side of it, the whole controversy now about Logos for example, because of the religious aspect involved. What the flip side becomes, then, is are we creating a stratified society, you know, stratifying the school system? Are we creating elitism? Are we . . . and so on and so forth. So that maybe is the con side."

"Our district, if we look at the mission statement, has within it, an advocate of choice. And our board and our superintendent strongly believe that we are in the business to provide what the parents and the community want. And there seems to be a trend in education that says academics, rigor, working to capacity has become important, where it could be argued by some that it hasn't been in the past."

In contrast, at the time of the interview Edmonton Catholic School Board staff (ECSB) were engaged in the budgeting process, which seemed to be significantly different from previous years as a result of the new per capita funding formula. Staff were unsure what to expect from the school board in response to their budget submission. Like workplace smokers who must change their behaviour overnight when the company brings in a no smoking policy, and must do so without adequate levels of support from the company, staff were experiencing stress:

"We're sitting here and they're saying you make these decisions on this, and you make decisions on that, as far as your budget goes and your needs of the school and your planning in the school but, the thing is, when its getting around the middle or the end of April now and I don't have the information to be able to know what they're going to be giving me, I guess I find it difficult to say that I'm planning ahead. Even though our parent group (the school council) and as well as our staff are all aware of approximately where we sit. The reason why I say approximately is because we're not sure ourselves -- as soon as I know more, they'll know more."

"My biggest concern right now is because we're going on to student allocation of monies, how much everything is going to cost. Because everything is going to cost, a lot of the individual referrals that we put in on testing because we want to find out

specifics about students and learning difficulties, we may no
longer be able to afford. It is very possible -- and I'm not saying
that it's going to happen because they haven't finished the
allocations yet -- it is very possible that they will have it in such a
way that we'll get more money and therefore we'll be able to afford
all the referrals. Right now I look at it in the school and can
honestly say that there's no chance that if they stay the way they
are that we'll be doing as many referrals to the outside agencies
that have specialized testing."

In the ECSB schools, some of the impacts of Alberta Education and

school board changes, such as schools being charged for specialized testing

and having to pay for these items out of per capita student allocations, were

complicating the budgeting exercise. In the past schools could use these

services as needed without having to worry about the cost implications. The

change, as the participant notes, could have undesirable as well as desirable

impacts. Some students who, in the professional opinion of staff, need referrals

may not get them for budgetary reasons.

Certain aspects of school board reorganization were welcomed as

having a positive effect on the operation of the schools, for example, reductions

in the number of levels of supervision between the principal and the school

superintendent. One principal was particularly enthusiastic about the change to

a flatter school board organization:

"Oh, I love it. I'm just really excited about it. And it looks good.
Because I tell you, I worked out here for (#) years, and there's no
secret about it, we had what were known as associate
superintendents. There was the superintendent, who didn't really
get involved in the schools . . . In the nearly(#) years that I was in
the school, he never set foot in this school once. I was dealing
with an associate superintendent, and what I felt -- good people
and everything -- but a very unnecessary cog in the organization.
And these people almost had to develop their own little empires.
In other words, they had to make themselves visible so they would
get on their own little bandwagons, and we had about (#)
bandwagons going because there was about (#) area associates

in the district and they were almost competing with one another. And it's like we were (#) areas going off in different directions . . So at any rate, yes, I was frustrated. But, you know, I worked with these people, pleasant, got results out of my school. But I just feel like a breath of fresh air. I've been given the power and this is the way it should be. But I really think that what we're doing here is going to be a model for a lot of jurisdictions. I don't think this has ever been tried before, this flat an organization that's as large as ours."

On the other hand, participants also recognized that their school board central administrations consisted of more than supervisors. It appeared that administrative cutbacks meant less central support services for schools, or support on a user pay basis as noted earlier in relation to ECSB referrals for diagnostic testing. Participants affiliated with both school boards spontaneously offered appreciative comments about the quality of the support services they received from their central administration staff:

"Our assessment guys are great. I just phone them up and ask them stuff, whatever I need to know, and they don't treat me like I'm an idiot."

"Well, the district does an annual survey. I don't know if you're aware of that. But it does an annual survey. It surveys all staff, a representative sample of students, a large sample of students. Like for instance in my school, there's (#) kids and there would be (#) kids who would do the survey. I don't know if it's every second year, parents . . . and every second year, non-parents . . . so we get a lot of information, a lot of feedback, as a result of what we're doing in the district. . . . And, I mean, that's a really, really vital part of the district. We get a lot of information. So there's a lot of school-level information. I get attitudes and feedback from parents, from my parent committee that way, staff, kids -- solid information. Because we get that I don't have to do surveys."

"Our school system makes it really user-friendly with the use of the (name of test) and the (name of test), friendly in the sense that we have all the books here, they ship our forms that are all pre-done for us. Except in the (name of test) case, all the forms just go back to them and they do all the tabulation for us and then send us out

the scores. And that's all done within the frame of two or three
months so we actually get the results back in within the school
year and can make use of them."

However, comments made by EPSB staff indicated that being ahead of
the government reforms with regard school-based budgeting was not sufficient
to prepare them for all the impacts of central administration economizing. For
example, they raised the issue of their board's recent decision to stop centrally
printing report cards:

"The district has made a decision that's really affected us. We
have, until this year, actually up until January of next year, had our
report cards printed downtown on the mainframe computer. We
provide the information on the bubble sheets and that goes down
and the report cards are printed . . . They're going to do away with
the mainframe and there goes the product service. And in the
process of doing that, we are now expected to develop our own
report cards. Just that one thing is really affecting us."

How this school dealt with the decisions surrounding this issue and the impacts
it had on the school provide an interesting example of organizational responses
to the Government reforms. The case is discussed in the next chapter (page
107).

Parents

As the earlier discussion of school context indicated, parents were
perceived as having considerable influence on schools through the manner in
which they discharged their parental responsibilities. Participants believed that
schools serving students from higher income families were greatly advantaged
in achieving their educational mission compared to schools serving children
from lower income families. At the school serving lower income students, staff
recognized that even those parents who were trying to do what was right for

their children faced problems and barriers. In addition to low income itself, these factors included single parenthood, English as a second language, and limited education. A participant at this school reported that staff strategized around issues such as how to get parents more involved with their children, how to get parents to come to the school to meet with their children's teachers, and how to help parents feel more comfortable once inside the school building. On the other hand, staff at the schools serving higher income students sometimes had the opposite problem, too much (overbearing) parental involvement:

> "The parents, instead of handing them to the regular program . . .
> send them here. But then they expect you to pamper them, to
> monitor them more, to phone more. It should be an expectation of
> the student. They should be expected to know what they have to
> do at school. With some of the kids, it's never been reinforced."

The way that teachers described the relationship between the difficulty of doing their jobs and the level of parental involvement suggested a U-shaped function. Too little or too much parental involvement with the school made their jobs more difficult. Somewhere in the middle was an optimal point. The teacher's ideal parent takes care of the child's physical and emotional needs, communicates the importance of education to the child, ensures the child does his homework, raises concerns about the child's progress to the teacher, and does things that help to support the school (e.g., fundraising, volunteering). However, the parent also places considerable onus on the child to exert the required effort to perform up to his ability level, and does not constantly second guess the competence or judgment of the teacher -- the parent lets the teacher do the teaching.

There was a sense in which some teachers felt the increased power of

parents was infringing on their professional autonomy. One teacher described

the power struggle and principal's role in maintaining the balance:

> "You know, a principal is supposed to be there for you. But they're
> in a very tough situation politically because they need to please
> the parents, too. See, sometimes we wonder where the
> allegiance is, is it to your teachers or is it to your parents? And this
> principal can balance things pretty good. But I think you'll have
> principals that will back up parents more so than the teachers and
> that's when you have a huge transferring out of the school."

To some of the teacher participants, the parent-managed charter school

represented the extreme case of the parents gaining the upper hand to the point

of undermining the whole philosophy of public education. Participants affiliated

with the Edmonton Public School Board noted the strategic response of their

administration in terms of providing parents with equivalent school choices.

Although they generally supported the idea of flexibility and school choice

within the public education system, teachers who voiced an opinion on the

subject disagreed with the government's charter school decision:

> "I don't personally agree with charter schools. I don't personally
> agree with a group of parents mandating and running a school
> because in my experience what you will get is the very vocal
> people who don't represent the majority. They really do represent
> the minority. It's like the kind of cases where a minority group will
> get a textbook banned from a province because there's a zodiac
> in it, and the zodiac is being used to help teach months and dates
> and so on, but they see this as the devil. And, I mean, good Lord!"

> "Well, there's the concept of the charter school and all the politics
> behind that. You think, who are you trying to please, all those
> smaller groups? Basically it plays on parents' ideas, parent
> associations. They create an alternative school but they don't
> have the expertise, usually. They don't know anything about
> teachers. And it gets to the point that they don't have respect for
> teachers. It has to be their way or no way. We have to be a little bit
> careful about that I think. If any association wants to offer a charter
> school program, this district will offer a similar program, like for
> example (name). We have the facilities and we have the staff

already established. But then there is the collaboration between them, to what extent the parent committee can do something, what they're allowed to do and what they're not allowed to do. And there is the ethics. Because we are a professional association. We graduated from university. We studied. We know what we're doing. And they think we're a bunch of jerks. But we educated them, and we educate their kids."

Teachers believed that the effort and the long hours they put into teaching were neither understood nor appreciated by the government, the media, and many of the parentss:

"On a daily basis, the teachers don't receive many rewards. We get our salaries at the end of the month . . . oh, well, there's some teachers that get awards, and stuff like that. But at the ground level the teacher is working his/her butt off until late at night, so that the morning s/he's prepared . . . We're lonely in this environment. We're whole bunch of teachers all together, but we don't have that much interaction . . . We see that we're robots. Like, they expect that you press a button, the teachers do this, and like we complete it, and that's it . . . The teaching profession has been so bad-mouthed by the media and the parents. We're always the targets of the criticism."

"You don't have enough time to do everything -- and I know that's with every job to an extent -- but there's jobs that you get paid for putting in that extra time. And in teaching, they will not name a gym after you, they will not be giving you a Christmas bonus. You are just putting in the time because it's almost like it's a calling. . . . it's expected of you to put this extra time in. And I'm not on the pitty-pot or anything, you know, people say, oh yeah, teachers think they're always so hard done by and they have their two months or summer and things like that. But it's the long days, you know. It's a lot of work."

And one of the principals offered these observation concerning the impact of the reforms on teachers:

"There are a lot of people . . . putting more expectations on the teachers. In other words, that the teachers have to be held more accountable for certain types of things. I think it's going to cause a lot of stress with the teachers. I think even more stress than there

is. I think in our board there's twice as many people out this year
as last year on stress-related leaves. Consequently, this has to
mean that something in the structure that has changed is causing
this increase. I think that the teachers in our school do an
excellent job. As far as I'm concerned, they work too hard. They
spend so much time, they're dedicated -- it's unbelievable. I'm
surprised that some of them don't drop on the spot."

In addition to using their market power to exert influence on the operation

of schools, parents also had an opportunity to participate in school-based

management through their representation on school councils. Participants

were quick to point out that both Edmonton school boards had a long history of

parent advisory groups. The government's decision to mandate school

councils was of perceived to be of little consequence to the participants' schools

because all of them already had a similar structure in place at the time of the

change. In contrast to charter schools and school choice, this reform evoked

little emotion. Here is what participants had to say about the impact of

mandating school councils:

"I can't speak for other areas but we always had a PTA or
something like a parent advisory group. We haven't seen any
dramatic changes this year but school councils are also in their
infancy. I think maybe in the next two years there might be more of
an impact."

"In my view, it doesn't make a difference. If people were adverse
to having parent involvement, those school councils will still be
meaningless. If they were confident they wanted the involvement,
they already had it. So while it's a mandatory thing, I don't think it
would make behaviour change. Those kinds of regulations can't
change behaviours."

"Well, I mean, that was an expectation before but in some schools
I doubt that it's changed anything because most schools had it."

"Well, we've always involved parents. We've always had . . . we
used to call it a Parent Teacher Association and now it's a school

> council. So that hasn't changed. Some people were worried
> about it, got all excited about government regulation and such, but
> basically, it's the same sort of thing that we had happening
> before."

> "I really haven't noticed a difference as far as more
> accomplishments."

> "I mean I wish I could say, and I'm sure the government would like
> to say, yes, it's made a major difference, but no. In the actual day-
> to-day running of the school, no. "

The next chapter describes how these school councils were involved in making

decisions related to the operation of the schools.

All participants were certainly well aware of the new economic realities of

school choice including the competition among schools affiliated with their

school board and, to a certain extent, the competition with the new publicly-

funded charter schools and the other school board. Comments presented

earlier on the need to recruit students from outside the surrounding community,

and the need to maintain a positive school image on the dimensions of

academic achievement and appropriate student behaviour, provide evidence of

their growing sensitivity and responsiveness to the preferences of parents.

Participants indicated that they believed making information about

provincial achievement and diploma examination results public was having a

definite impact on the school choices of some parents. When I asked one staff

member at the lower income school if the parents made use of the achievement

test results at all, s/he replied:

> "Not in this neighbourhood. Now my sister-in-law, who lives in a
> totally different neighbourhood, oh, you better believe it. They look
> for that when they go shopping for a new (grade level) school, but
> here, no."

According to the view of this participant, higher income parents are more likely to be 'school shoppers' than lower income parents. This observation suggests that schools with comparatively low achievement examination results will use different approaches to strategically position themselves in the educational marketplace than schools with comparatively high results. In general, these schools will not use these results to sell themselves. If the population of students in the surrounding neighbourhood is large enough and their family incomes are low enough, the school may continue to survive in the low achievement niche. Alternatively, the school may decide to set up a unique program that targets a particular educational market (e.g., elite amateur athletes, performing arts, special needs, honours students). If the school sets up a new program that appeals to higher income parents, then it will promote itself based on its program promise, and discount its past academic performance. The comments of study participants indicate that schools in Edmonton are responding strategically to educational market conditions in precisely this manner. For example, another staff member at the lower income school said:

> "I mean, we can't go and advertise ourselves as being a top
> educational school . . ."

This participant was concerned about how the school's provincial examination results are interpreted when published, especially by parents of the academically better performing students (possibly, the very parents currently most active in supporting the school, and those with the highest incomes):

> "I do not see that as being a positive toward assisting the
> enrolment in this school because if you are a parent who has a
> child who is average to above average you have written
> information that shows that this is how this school did last year in
> relationship to these things, you're going to automatically take it

for what you see on paper without looking at the extenuating
factors that go along with it."

In contrast, the principal at the largest school, which did have a record of

consistently good achievement results said:

"My achievement scores in the school are wonderful. . . . That says
a heck of a lot. There are high expectations out there for my
school. There are high expectations for my staff. Those things
really affect the way that we operate."

Indeed, both of the smaller schools were involved in serving a particular market

segment or niche. The school that served low income students also served

some special needs students from outside the local area. This school was also

trying to stabilize its resource situation by obtaining external funding from

supplementary programs not mandated under the School Act (1996).

A staff member at the other school that served higher income students,

which had decided to change its program focus in order to attract more

academically-inclined students, said this about the school's achievement

results:

"Well, this school is an interesting one because we don't have a
history. We have the (old program) history which is not good . . .
Because we're new and we're growing, our targets have no
bearing. We have no basis on which to set targets."

The reader may recall from the earlier discussion that this school was the

most involved in marketing itself, and used the greatest variety of strategies.

What has not been mentioned is that parents and students played an integral

role in promoting the school. For example, to prepare for school board and

school orientation sessions and open houses, the principal noted:

"I and some teachers and parents and students, we made a little
group of staff for each of those sessions . . . Open house evening
our biggest fans are our students and our parents and they were

here in force, opening the (name) room, helping out to ensure that
people saw it was a positive learning environment from the parent
perspective. I never went to one of the open houses, the
orientation evenings, and there were (#), without at least one
parent, sometimes as many as three."

As noted earlier, supportive parents can be a school's greatest asset,
and nothing may help a school's marketing efforts more than enthusiastic
testimonials from parents whose children are currently enroled, particularly if
those parents are articulate and attractive spokespersons. In this case, the
school's new program did not as yet have a track record of high achievement
examination results and this principal had the difficult job of attracting high
achieving students away from other schools. The school may find that other
schools in the same niche will fight back. Now that market forces are a reality,
the Alberta school system provides an interesting setting in which to study the
'coevolution' of different school organizations -- how schools systematically
influence their organizational environments, and how organizational
environments consisting of other schools influence them (Baum & Singh, 1994).

While school choice was having a definite impact on the schools, as the
government intended, school staff did not see it working in quite the way the
government espoused. Thus, according to my interview participants, school
shopping behaviour is positively correlated with income. Furthermore, higher
income parents value achievement-oriented schools, particularly those with
proven track record of high achievement examination scores. Higher income
parents also have the luxury of choice, in that they have the resources to send
their children to preferred schools, regardless of where they are located. The
school choices of low income parents are less sensitive to school performance

(e.g., achievement examination results) because: 1) these parents place a lower value on school performance or 2) they face income or other barriers to exercising choice (e.g., they cannot afford the transportation costs).

Over the long term this differential school shopping behaviour would be predicted to result in an exaggeration of the natural tendency of schools to be stratified by socioeconomic status. A serious educational equity problem arises if schools that serve lower income students end up lacking the critical mass of students needed to provide for basic, adequate staffing and classroom resources, especially when it is considered that many of these students are already educationally disadvantaged by their family backgrounds. Assuming events are unfolding as participants' comments suggest, any system-wide improvements in achievement and diploma examination results that occur could simply reflect educational gains made by advantaged students in well-resourced schools at the expense of disadvantaged students in small, poorly-resourced schools. In other words, provincial and school board measures showing average achievement improvements may hide a widening achievement gap between higher and lower income students. Impacts of achievement and diploma examination results on the organizational behaviour of schools, including the schools' efforts to improve their achievement examination results, are discussed in the next chapter.

Students

As described earlier, participants perceived students to have an indirect but pervasive influence on the operation of schools. Students influenced schools through their capacity and willingness to learn, for example, their abilities and disabilities, and their ability to obtain desirable scores on provincial

achievement and diploma examinations. School achievement outcomes and the socioeconomic status of students are correlated. Participants at all three schools recognized that the ability of schools to attract students and school academic outcomes were reciprocally interdependent -- schools that were able to attract students tended to have good academic outcomes, and schools with good academic outcomes tended to attract students.

Both student numbers and the special needs classification of students affected the school's resources. Resources affected staff working conditions. Because of lower overall resources, staff in the small schools appeared to have less desirable classroom working conditions. Teachers at these schools also faced greater uncertainty regarding their teaching assignments from year to year. For example, they could be 'surplused' (moved involuntarily from one school to another) if enrolment declined or the school's program emphasis was changed in an attempt to cut costs or boost enrolment. However, these staff also had less committee work, which was a benefit of working in a small school.

Students were perceived to affect the operation of the school through affecting the staff's psychological rewards. Participants' comments suggested that high achievers were the most intrinsically enjoyable students to teach. One teacher described the benefits of teaching the high achieving students this way:

> "It's rewarding because you get the cream of the cream, in some ways. Not just nice kids, but ones with good work habits, general knowledge, and culture. Some kids, you ask them a (subject) question and they have no idea . . . Others, they want to be challenged intellectually, they want to be pushed forward and they make connections with it."

According to this teacher, these students enjoyed learning for its own sake, in contrast to average students, who had to be 'entertained' in order to engage

their interest in the subject material. The principal at the school aiming to
recruit high achievers, in response to a question I asked about how competitive
it was for a teacher to get a position in this kind of a program replied:

> "I'm going to be advertising very shortly. And I believe that
> anybody who knows anything about our school would see this as
> a plum because I don't have badly behaved kids. Discipline is not
> an issue for us . . . So, yes, people who are interested in teaching
> in an environment where learning is valued would certainly find
> this an appealing place to be."

In contrast, a teacher noted the challenges associated with dealing with special
needs children integrated in a regular classroom:

> "So if you have thirty or thirty-two children, six of which have
> special needs, suddenly, you have a whole different feel. And if
> you have a child with extreme special needs, mentally disabled,
> for example, or who has a physical disability, and you don't have
> enough aide time, I mean, you're doing things that are not related
> to teaching again. You're doing bathroom skills suddenly with
> grade(#), when really, the program of studies does not outline
> having to do bathroom skills in grade(#). So that can really
> change what you're doing in the classroom."

These comments suggest that, overall, teachers are likely to find the prospect of
teaching high achieving students to be more attractive than teaching low
achieving or special needs students. Likewise the greater stability of a school
with a larger student population is likely to be appealing for both classroom
working conditions and job security reasons.

Thus, students may influence a school by affecting the kind of teachers it
can attract. Student responses to the teacher's efforts were seen by teachers as
an important determinant of the rewardingness of teaching:

> "(T)he kids . . . They make you happy, although they frustrate you
> sometimes. The bottom line is, you are there for the kids. I feel I
> can change their way of thinking by what I know and how I
> perform. And it's not an easy task on a daily basis. It takes quite a
> while to build up confidence . . . and the kids can see that you're

doing a good job or you have a certain role."

There was little evidence in participants' interview comments which suggested that students had any significant direct control or influence over decisions regarding school policies or their own educational experience except at the high school. This may reflect a maturation effect -- older students are more capable of contributing, and so they tend to be more involved. However, it may partly reflect an impact of the government's reform policy, which emphasizes meeting external academic standards set by the government and behavioural standards set by the parent and the school. The student's role is to live up to these standards.[31] The high school principal's personal leadership philosophy, while not disregarding the importance of meeting external standards, also placed a high degree of emphasis on developing the unique talents and abilities of students and fostering their internal motivation. S/he mentioned several concrete examples of student contributions to the operation of the school, from managing and operating student store and lounge to networking the school's computer lab.

Curiously, neither this principal nor the other study participants mentioned the school choice decision as an example of a way in which students might influence the operation of schools. From my own perspective as a parent, it seemed that school staff might be underestimating the influence that children have over their parents' choices. If students do play a significant role in this decision, or if some parents allow their children to influence this decision while other parents do not, the situation with regard to what influences school choices and how school choices are made may be more complex than

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[31] Encouraging students to develop a capacity for eventual self-determination does not come across as particularly important in the official documents, at least in my own view.

comments made by the participants in this study would suggest.

Individual Impacts of Educational Reforms on School Staff

In addition to the potential for stratification of schools and educational opportunities by the income levels of students' families, it appeared that educational reforms might be having some unintended impacts on school staff morale. As the interviewer, I found I could not prevent myself from forming an impression from the content of comments as well as the manner in which the participants expressed themselves as to whether each participant saw him or herself as a 'winner' or a 'loser'. The split among all participants was approximately 50:50. Principals' morale seemed closely linked to the current and anticipated fortunes of their schools with regard to achievement results, enrolment, and resources (all of which were positively correlated), while teachers' morale seemed more immediately influenced by personal workload factors, for example perceived overload caused by teaching multiple subjects, parents who demanded too much or too little, and committee work. Teachers who spent all their time in the classroom seemed to be experiencing greater job stress than teachers who had part-time administrative duties, which may reflect differences in the demands of the two kinds of teacher jobs but could also reflect relative empowerment and security of tenure effects.

CHAPTER 5:

A Close-up Look at Two Reforms: School-based Management and the Accountability Framework

Overview

After interview participants described the impacts of contextual factors and key school stakeholders, I asked them to reflect on their experiences with school-based management. What kinds of decisions were actually made at the school? Who was involved? What kinds of information were used? And how were the decisions made? The questions elicited both positive and negative reactions to school-based management, provided clues as to why some participants regarded themselves as empowered and others did not, and revealed some unexpected consequences of decentralized decision-making.

I also followed up on the province's achievement and diploma examination results. As Chapter 4 indicated, these results were perceived to influence parent choice behaviour. However, the government's espoused theory of educational reform talks about improved quality of education for all. The purpose for asking additional questions was to find out how the examination results did or did not affect the school's educational strategies. Some unexpected consequences also emerged in relation to the perceived impact of examination scores on the morale of both teachers and students.

School-based Management.

As the earlier section on school board influences alluded, participants' reactions to school-based management varied considerably. School board affiliation seemed to be one factor. Participants with the Edmonton Public

School Board, who had greater experience with aspects of the school-based

management process, expressed greater confidence at the time of the interview

than participants with the Edmonton Catholic School Board. Nevertheless,

even within the EPSB district, a principal noted that positive acceptance was not

universal among his principal colleagues, some of whom were still having

difficulty making, as s/he labeled it, the paradigm shift:

> "What (the superintendent is) doing, he's flattening out the
> organization. He's saying the people that are really important in
> this district are the principals. They're the ones that really make a
> difference. And research has proven that, you know, the effective
> school studies and all that sort of thing, as the principal goes, so
> goes the school. And he is really, really taking that to heart, and
> he's saying okay, now all 200 of you are the big decision-makers in
> the district, you're part of senior staff. There's no more we-they
> mentality. I could have sat here a couple of years back in this
> interview and told you about all the bad things that they're doing to
> us, all the things that they are putting in our way to prevent us from
> making decisions, and you haven't heard that in this discussion.
> So I think I've made the paradigm shift. I'm thinking this way. But
> there's still my colleagues, when I meet with some of them, they
> frustrate me, because they've still got this we-they mentality and
> don't realize there's no longer a 'they', it's all 'we'."

Chapter 4 identified a link between the school's resource situation and

the outlook of the principal. Indeed, the extent of 'we-they mentality' may in part

be a function of the principal's perception of the adequacy of the school's

resources. My interview findings suggest that principals at schools serving

higher income students, who believe they are facing favourable resource

situations, have positive reactions to school-based management. However,

they also suggest that principals at schools serving lower income students are

not as positive. To the extent that the school's environmental context means the

principal as manager starts with 'one foot in a hole, and the other foot on a

banana peel', he may come to the conclusion that he is not competing on the

same level playing field as his resource rich colleagues. In this study, at the school serving lower income students a pessimistic enrolment forecast meant every decision involved a difficult program trade-off. When asked about examples of decisions that are made now at the school level, the principal replied:

> "Well, the problem is are they decisions that we're really making or decisions that we're forced to make? To me there's a difference between the two. One is a positive planning thing and the other is a survival thing."

Participants noted that there were a number of different kinds of decisions made at the school level. Decision processes employed and satisfaction with the outcomes obtained reflected the type of decision, the leadership style of the principal, and, as the comment above underscores, budgetary constraints.

One group of decisions related to the classroom. Teachers generally managed issues related to instruction and ongoing assessment of the students in their classes on an individual basis. However, in one school the principal had definite expectations regarding teamwork in classroom management. Teachers in a subject area were required to agree on a timetable for covering the curriculum and to set common examinations. This principal also insisted that teachers develop plans to help students experiencing academic difficulties:

> "I have to provide a fair bit of leadership beyond just the nuts and bolts of what's offered. I also have to give some guidance in terms of what expectations are known in terms of other dimensions. For example, school jurisdictions used to fail kids with wild abandon before. Kids used to get behind and stay behind and everybody thought that if you failed them it would help them catch up. Well, it really didn't do that. So we've basically taken an attitude -- there's no policy on the books in this district -- that only in rare exceptions would you really fail a kid, hold him back. You'd really have to provide demonstrable evidence that this is going to help.

Research tells us that it doesn't help kids. So, I've got to work with
my staff. Okay, we're not failing kids, then what are you going to
do? I mean, continue pushing them ahead not knowing stuff and
we'll end up with lawsuits like we've seen south of the border
where the kid can't read at the end of grade twelve and so on."

This principal raises an interesting issue, namely, the legal accountability

of individual schools now that decision making has been devolved. Will the

parent customers (or the students themselves, at some future date) sue schools

and school officials over a student's academic deficiencies, or the inability of a

student to obtain a spot at a preferred school, or to obtain access to specialized

testing and referral? Once parents are given rights by the government, we

would expect that eventually some of them will seek enforcement and remedies

through the courts.

At all three schools, teachers were involved in decisions related to

purchasing curriculum resource materials. Depending on the size of the school

and the number of teachers teaching a particular subject, individual teachers or

committees of teachers made these decisions. One teacher described the

process:

"We took people who had interest and background. I basically
found out everything that was in the field that was possible and I
had it brought to the school. Our grade (#) teacher was interested
so s/he did an analysis of the different programs in grade(#) and
our grade(#) teacher did the same with the stuff and myself, who
was in-between, and I've taught every grade level so that helped,
and I love (subject). And we took a look at everything, then we
went back to the staff and we presented the analysis, da-da-da,
because we have a choice of two here, what do we do, you know?
And then we came to the conclusion that. . . the (name) Series was
the best one for us."

This teacher noted that there are three parts to a curriculum resource decision:

first, locating appropriate resources; second, ranking or rating them; and third,

selecting the best resources that the school can afford. Some participants reported situations where preferred curriculum resources could not be obtained because the school did not have the money in its budget .

At another level, principals, teachers and school councils were involved in policy and resource decisions that affected the whole school. Participants provided a number of examples of these school-wide decisions including three-year business planning, budgeting, changes to school operating hours, school climate improvements, student discipline policies, and major technology purchases. Some decisions, like the preparation of three-year business plans, were generated by external requirements. Others were generated from within the school (e.g., as a result of an issue raised at a staff meeting). The decision-making process for internally generated issues was described as follows:

"If the issue is broad enough and big enough that everyone has to deal with it, then everyone deals with it and usually the procedure . . . is that it goes to the staff or becomes an awareness or an issue with the staff, then that's taken to the larger community. And by the larger community I mean all the people involved, as the government loves to call it, shareholders -- the students, the parents, and in some cases the community itself."

In the small schools, a staff meeting committee-of-the-whole approach was the preferred means of involving staff, and principals tended to stress broad, democratic decision-making:

"Staff is involved in everything, all decision-making. I don't make any decisions on anything."

"Participative decision-making is the way we normally would structure things. The staff is involved in providing input. Ultimately, I'm responsible for all decisions so I don't give that away in every instance but work it through so that it is a shared decision that we look at what's in the best interest of staff, students and parents."

In the large school, there was a greater reliance on staff working groups and subcommittees. Here is how the principal at the larger school described handling a complex decision, preparing the three-year business plan and budget:

> "We have a committee of people that will get together and devote time to coming up with priorities and plans and what's important. We try to get as much input as we can from everybody. But I'd sooner like have something that people can react to rather than having large groups of people trying to develop something. You know what I mean? It doesn't work! So we have this committee of maybe half a dozen people or eight or ten people which will get together and spend the time to do it. So you come up with a plan and basically we take it back to the staff . . . Then we take it to our parent group. We say, here's a proposal, what do you think? And our school council will then go over it and make suggestions, reactions to it. Then you finally come up with the budget that is presented. In terms of administration, there's never any doubt, that I am the one who is responsible for that budget. Certainly, because they've had involvement, teachers and parents, there's ownership of that budget, but ultimately I am accountable and responsible for it."

School councils were perceived to play a positive and supportive role in making these decisions. None of the participants who had contact with the parents on the school council reported power struggles or conflict. One participant described the relationship this way:

> "They're already the ones who are doing the things that we'd like everybody else to do. So, I mean, we have no trouble with decision-making with our parent group because our parent group agrees with the same philosophy."

However, another participant noted that very little time had passed since the mandating of school councils:

> "We haven't seen any dramatic changes this year but school councils are also in their infancy. I think maybe in the next two years there might be more of an impact."

This participant's remarks point to the possibility that, over time, the competitive school funding mechanism may transform the school council, traditionally a supportive parent auxilliary, into a political body.

Some participants expressed mixed feelings about their personal involvement in newer decision areas such as the goal-setting required by three-year business planning. On the one hand, they recognized that teachers and principals tend to get caught up in the immediate, day-to-day details of their jobs. The requirement to develop a three-year business plan provided an opportunity to take a bigger view of what the school was doing:

> "The growth plan . . . or the government calls it a three-year business plan, that has an effect because it makes people define things and become aware of things and articulate issues and strategies, etc. That was very beneficial."

On the other hand, they were not always sure that the goals they were setting were meaningful, given year-to-year fluctuations in achievement outcomes and survey results. Furthermore, for staff in schools that already had developed their own plans, the government's requirement for schools to prepare business plans according to a new format and including specific performance measures generated additional demands on the resource in the shortest supply, their time:

> "So all they're doing now is they're saying, okay, you did all the things that you were doing, now we want you to do them a little differently because of what the government has to say, eh? And I consider that to be good and bad. Some of it can be a waste of a lot of time you could best spend doing other things. At the same time, another way to look at it is, well, if you're doing all those things already, you just have to change how you structure them and make it into that. Well, I consider we have most of the things that we need for it, but it takes a lot to put them into one package because they haven't been part of one package and that's what they're looking for."

"The long view, or the big view, if you want to call it, is something
that we do when we have extra time, if we have any extra time.
That's what our professional development days are for, to look at a
bigger picture. But without that time, we literally don't have time to
be reflective and that's one of the biggest issues with teaching in
(grade level) school is to facilitate time to be reflective, to do
assessment, to do any form of evaluation that is reflective, to then
implement that, you need time to do that. Not just thinking, you
need the time to think about it. And most (grade level) teachers
just don't feel they have the time."

It appears that the time associated with developing government mandated

business plans could simply reduce the already limited time teachers have

available for doing this reflective appraisal.

Teachers said they preferred to limit their involvement in decision-making

to those areas where their expertise was really needed and would make a

difference, or where they were given the authority to make the decision

themselves. To regular classroom teachers with no administrative duties,

delegated decision responsibilities often meant extra work that was less

psychologically rewarding than teaching, and which could interfere with their

effectiveness as teachers. To the extent that participation in school decision-

making is not an area where teachers' performance is appraised or rewarded, it

appears organizational reward structures may further discourage teachers from

getting involved in broader school policy decisions. Here is a sample of

comments from classroom teacher interviews:

"With the budget that we have, for example, the technology
budget, we know that if we want to attract a certain population we
have to be technologically up-to-date. And (the principal) asked
us, because technology evolves so fast, s/he asked us, as a staff,
what do we think? What should we do with technology? How
should the money be spent, in which direction? S/he had the staff
make the decision."

"You get yourself on a committee, and you become passionate about how you feel things should run and you really put a lot of heart and soul, you put time into it. And so I guess when your proposals aren't taken seriously . . . I guess you get a little egocentric about it. You think that your way is the right way, or the highway. But it gets you down."

"As teachers, we don't make that many decisions outside of our classrooms. We're quite limited in central expense decisions. Well, we have certain portions of the budget. We spend them. But the rest, there's the school budget that you have to do, but it's more the principal's job. We will say a word about certain spending or decisions, but overall, we trust the principal will make wise decisions for the good of the school."

"I'm not going to volunteer for another committee for quite some time . . . this is all above marking and teaching."

"I don't believe in committees that much myself. It just duplicates work, when you know that (the principal) has that responsibility. S/he has been put there. S/he has been chosen to be our principal and s/he gets the power to decide . . . S/he's the one that makes our staff happy by telling them what they're going to teach and by helping them to be successful. S/he has to make those decisions on the functioning of the school. I don't have to worry about whether we put the temperature of the school at 67 or 69 to save one percent of the heating bill. And I don't care about that."

And principals agreed that they had the power to make solo decisions in most areas, for example:

"I would be able to decide virtually any aspect of the program insofar as it was within the policies of the province and our board: I allocate resources; I determine the staff composition; I select staff -- I don't hire them to the district but I can select staff that the board has hired on the basis of advertising for a position; I can determine what course offerings we will have in the optional areas -- for instance, we offer (subject) here . . . we do not offer (subject) -- that was my decision based on a whole bunch of reasons. So I think I can decide almost anything that has to do with the running of my school to meet the needs of my students . . I evaluate the staff."

However, all three principals felt that it was important to have teachers and

school councils participate in major decisions, and if possible, to reach a consensus in order to obtain the buy-in needed for effective implementation.

Unfortunately, achieving consensus is time-consuming and it is not always reached, as an example raised by staff in one school illustrated. The need for a decision at the school level was occasioned by the school board's decision to stop providing central computer support for the production of school report cards (p. 84). This case reveals some of the difficulties associated with devolved decision-making.

A number of the participants in this study were not comfortable with their level of understanding of computer technology, particularly the future directions of technology. This may have been an underlying factor contributing to the problem in this case. For example, participants said:

"I am kind of a technology moron. You don't see a computer in my office. I'm not proud of that, okay. It's just the way it's gone. It's worked well for me to have other people who are knowledgeable and so on. I know enough about it to know what I want out of it. We're computerized in the office . . . And so it's not that I don't know anything about it, it's just that I have not really gotten involved in hands-on technology."

"I think the area that I would like to be more confident in is being able to talk long term about technology. I don't think I have a full vision of what that's going to mean for us down the road. I know I can talk about the hardware; I can talk about the software; I can talk about Internet; I can talk about CD-ROM; I can talk about that kind of thing. But I would feel more comfortable if I had a sense of what it will look like in five years."

"We make decisions based on the best information we have at the time. And only time will tell us if we've made the right decision. Maybe 'right' isn't even the right word. Four or five years from now we'll look back and we'll say, in 95/96 when we made the decision to network the school and buy these computers, that was a good decision. Or we'll look back and say, gee, were we ever stupid! Or we'll look back and say, no, we're not too bad. But it's the time that will tell us."

"Spending money is a big thing, where if we're spending money on computers, are we choosing the right computers for our students to prepare them for the future?"

According the information provided by participants at this school, the principal decided to strike a committee to look at the issue of how to produce computerized report cards within the broader perspective of developing a long range technology plan for the school. However, staff opinion was polarized, with some staff members supporting the purchase of Macintosh computers and Macintosh software for report card production and others supporting the purchase of IBM-compatible computers and software. The principal, feeling that it was unlikely a consensus solution could be reached, was faced with a dilemma:

"Once a decision was made, (I knew) that there was going to be a large proportion of people that weren't going to be happy. I told the staff at that meeting, I said okay, that committee is really providing input to me. Ultimately, I'm the one that's going to be responsible for the decision that's going to be made and I'll make the decision. You see what I mean? I can't make that committee responsible for that decision because then you get staff against staff, and stuff like that. I said, fine, they've given me lots of good input, now I'll make the decision. So I'm still going to have some teachers who are not going to be happy with the decision that's going to be made, but that's okay. Because I am responsible for making that decision, they can be mad at me. And it will be up to me to use my administrative skills to diffuse that kind of anxiety and say, okay, let's get on with the job."

A teacher in the school, commenting on the work of the committee, observed that some members felt that its mandate was fuzzy and the technology problem it had to deal with was more difficult than it appeared on the surface. S/he added that when the responsibility for report card production was handed off to schools by the school board, the schools were not given any additional

resources for implementation. Furthermore, there was a perception among the staff that the school board's central administration was strongly in favour of one of the alternatives. The teacher was not sure whether, in reality, there was actually a choice to be made. S/he also observed that the seemingly innocent task of developing a set of report card comments for the site-produced report cards had revealed the negative side of competitiveness among schools in the district. In response to a question I posed about whether the schools were pooling resources and ideas, s/he replied:

> "What's happening is every school is making up their own report
> card comments instead of sharing . . . They're all saying, well,
> we've made up ours but we don't want to give you ours because
> they're specific to our school. Well, I thought they were supposed
> to be curriculum-based comments. We do teach the same
> curriculum. So you'll have schools that will be more sharing and
> then others (where the reaction is) we did this work, why should
> we give it to you?"

Certainly, this teacher's observations raise an interesting question: How has the school board's decision to devolve responsibility for report card format and printing resulted in more efficient or effective delivery of educational services at the school level? While it appears that money has been saved at the school board administration level, any savings achieved could conceivably have been canceled out or exceeded by total costs aggregated across all affected schools in the district. If these aggregate costs exceed total system-wide benefits, then administrative inefficiencies have not been reduced. Indeed, administrative inefficiencies have been increased in the form of needless duplicate effort and equipment and software purchases by the schools. Because these purchases come out of the school's operating budgets it will appear that fewer public dollars are being spent on administration and

more are being spent on educating students, when this is not the case --
administrative costs have just been shifted to the schools.[32]

In addition, there may be intangible costs arising from the competition
among schools. The principal commented on the problems created by having
staff within the school divide themselves into rival camps. But what about the
costs associated with rival schools within the same school system? Incentives
for schools to cooperate for the benefit of all students enroled in the system
(which might help individual schools save money) appear to have been
reduced by the competitive school funding mechanism.

Technology decisions may not be unique in this regard. Other
administrative responsibilities devolved as part of school-based management
could have similar unanticipated impacts. Indeed, given the government's
externally-imposed spending restriction, school boards may have little
alternative but to decentralize responsibilities to schools, whether they feel the
decentralization is justified from an economy, efficiency, or effectiveness
perspective or not.

Another unintended impact of school-based management was the
problem of information overload. When asked whether they had enough
information available to make decisions in their schools, participants frequently
mentioned their biggest problem was not too little information, but rather, too
much. Some participants made a connection between information overload
and educational system restructuring. For example, one noted that the school
was constantly being bombarded with literature, including 'required reading'
from Alberta Education and the school board. Vendors of products and services
were

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[32] Hopefully, schools are able to find some additional instructional uses for the computers.

evidently well aware of the local decision-making and purchasing power of the school:

> "There's a tremendous amount of advertising. Publishers, companies, educational institutes -- you name it, we get it."

This school had an entire office wall filled with shelves of information on administrative policies and other resources. Another participant remarked:

> "Curriculum guides, all of those areas, those are all there, all the expectations from the provincial government. Our teachers have all the information in relationship to learner outcomes for every course. We have all of those things. So I'm saying that there's more than enough material. In fact, I'll be honest. I consider there's too much material. I think there's too many people who are passing things on to the schools. They don't realize that they pass one thing on, but that's not the only thing that we've got."

Even principals who expressly enjoyed the power that accompanied school-based management recognized that there was a price associated with freedom. In two schools, participants mentioned that the job of screening or filtering incoming information had been partly or completely delegated to assistant principals or secretaries. In some schools, the administration actively limited the external information passed on to teachers to those things directly related to the teachers' interests (e.g., social studies resource catalogues might be circulated to social studies teachers). Participants described their coping strategies in colourful terms:

> "I could spend all of my life reading publications that come in that have some kind of a government stamp on them but they're not my first priority. I look at them quickly and see whether or not they affect the children in our school and if they don't, they get put on Pile Three and they get their turn."

> "I also have a fairly good -- I don't know if you want to put his in your study, but -- a fairly good crap detector index. So the stuff that comes in that's irrelevant, I don't have any problems getting rid of. And so I think that because I've been around for so long

and done so many different things, I have a fairly good handle on what's important and what isn't or I've made a decision that I'm confident that I can live with that I've determined what's important and what isn't. And the right stuff is all there. I suppose it's a matter of sifting and sorting and deciding."

"When you get catalogues and things of resources, somebody has to look at that stuff and decide, you know, File Thirteen, it goes in the garbage, or yes, keep this."

Perhaps there is still a role for the school board central administration to play in screening the solicitations to reduce the number directed to individual schools. There may also be value in school boards assembling information that helps schools to make informed decisions (e.g., comparative information on the price and features of products). If the quality of education is to improve in the devolved education system, then it may be important to ensure that schools are not overwhelmed by distractions unrelated to their educational mandate. Considering the volume of external requests and demands that school principals and teachers reported, it was in a way remarkable that even seven staff members at these schools volunteered their time to participate in my interviews.

The Accountability Framework

What impacts were Alberta Education's provincial achievement and diploma examinations and their accompanying standards perceived to have on the organizational behaviour of schools? One key impact was described in the previous chapter. Higher income parents are school shoppers. School shoppers use comparative information on examination results to select their children's schools. Higher achievement examination results contribute positively to the school's reputation and affect the school's marketing behaviour.

Schools with below average examination results either do not market themselves outside their local neighbourhood or change their programs in order to rid themselves of their bad reputations. In this study, the school that changed its program in order to draw more academically inclined students was most actively involved in marketing itself. It appears that different schools can experience very different market situations

Besides parents, participants mentioned two other external users of the provincial examination results. One was the news media, particularly newspapers which had begun to publish comparative school results. The other was Alberta Education.

Some of the participants seemed to feel that Alberta Education's interest in achievement and standards merely reflected a general societal interest in achievement and competitiveness. However, others used words such as 'political' and 'controversial' when describing the examination results. One participant wondered:

> "Whoever is making the plans in relationship to those tests, what
> is the real reason why they're doing those tests? And I haven't
> decided. Whether or not the real reason they're doing those tests
> is accountability of the schools, whether or not it's public relations
> to show that we're keeping the school systems, well now, I'm not
> going to use the word 'in line' because that wouldn't sound
> positive, but keeping ourselves abreast of what's happening in
> the school systems, they test us, you know, who knows?"

An important issue, of course, is whether schools or teachers are actively changing their behaviour in order to improve their examination results, as predicted by the government's espoused theory. The easiest way for schools to maintain good examination results or to improve their results is to attract the most academically capable students, assuming they are strategically positioned

to do this. Given school choice and per student funding, the school with above-average results is in a better position to perpetuate itself because it will be more likely to attract higher income, more academically inclined students. For example, a school could implement a high performance academic program, which automatically denies entrance to low achievers. Schools have an obvious incentive to 'cream' or actively select top academic students if demand for student spaces exceeds the school's physical capacity. The remarks of participants taken across all interviews indicate that some schools are indeed engaging in creaming in response to the financial incentives in the system (i.e., the per capita funding formula).

Another way that schools could achieve better examination results would be to focus their attention on strategies for improving the achievement examination results of students already served by the school. The virtue of the second approach is that it involves some concerted efforts to actually change the way that the school educates students. The difficulty arises when the school directs all of its energies toward obtaining a certain performance on the achievement tests, at the expense of less tangible or easily measured aspects of education. Education has multiple goals and multiple outcomes. For example, in addition to certain levels of achievement in the examined subjects, society may believe that schools should develop and foster students' inquisitiveness, creativity, adaptability, oral presentation ability, social skills, self-confidence, tolerance of others and positive attitude toward the value of learning. Because many of these outcomes are not reflected in achievement examination results there is a risk that goal displacement may occur. In this case, goal displacement is likely to take the form of selective attention -- teachers placing an inordinate emphasis on 'teaching to the test' or 'teaching

students how to take the test' to the exclusion of all else. Teachers may also concentrate more effort on students who are above or close to meeting the provincial 'acceptable' and 'excellence' standards than those students experiencing severe academic problems. Effort expended on the latter students, while potentially greatly benefiting these students from an educational standpoint, is unlikely to produce dividends in terms of improved results on the achievement and diploma examinations. Goal displacement, to the extent it occurs, would tend to work at cross purposes to equality of educational opportunity.

Throughout the interviews, participants offered a number of observations concerning the impact of examinations on the process of education within the school, as well as their impacts on teachers and students. The participants' schools included schools with above-average and below-average examination results. Regardless of the type of school in which they worked, many participants, but teachers in particular, questioned the value of unadjusted school results as a measure of school performance. Participants recognized that results were highly dependent on the backgrounds of the students they taught, and teachers at schools with high achievement examination results were no more likely to be good teachers than teachers at schools with low examination results. Nevertheless, the results evoked emotional reactions in teachers, depending on how well the school's students performed on the exams. Here are some examples of the reactions:

> "There's no way you can predict how well your students are going
> to do. You can't. You don't even know who is going to be
> transferring into your school three years from now. It could be half
> of a low SES neighbourhood whose clientele is not nearly as
> strong as ours."

"How our students do is a reflection on us, whether it's an accurate
reflection or not, because sometimes what happens is you have
one group of kids who happen to be extremely high academically
so your scores are really good and everybody feels really good.
The following year your scores might drop. Does that mean that
your teachers are less effective the following year? You know,
you've got to be careful how you use that information. What are
the demographics of your group taking the test that year, and so
on? Of course we look at them and if they're good we look at them
with pride. And if we're one of the schools at the top of the list as
was right in the newspaper, gee, you'll talk at your school and you
talk to the orientation night. If you're a school at the bottom of the
list there's a whole different light on it."

"It's a real frustration to get back a set of results like this: Where do
we go from here? . . . What's the best way to say it? It's not a
positive pat on the back when you've worked for a whole year and
your students are like a part of your family and you see that they're
still over a year behind from where they should be as a total
group."

Poor examination outcomes had a negative impact on school staff, even though

teachers did not believe these measures were an acccurate reflection of their

own or others' performance. This was the downside of the achievement

examination performance measures:

"And we're now in the process of assessing how we deal with
assessment, if that makes sense. In other words, we don't feel we
make enough use of our achievement exams and our(name of
test). No, our (name of test) we do. But we're going to take a more
serious look at that and say, well, if this is, again, for public
consumption, what does this reflect? What does this mean? What
doesn't this mean? Without having teachers feel that they
somehow personally have failed."

Participants mentioned this information was getting external attention in the

media and is being used by parents to compare the performance of schools,

however unfair the comparisons might be.

Interview comments indicated that the examination results were having

impacts on other organizational behaviours besides marketing, most notably in the area of formal business planning and goal-setting. But there was little evidence that planning and goal-setting were affecting classroom behaviour. One reason for the lack of impact may have been teachers' tendency to attribute much of the fluctuation in year-to-year scores to student factors over which they perceived they had little control. In addition, teachers did not find the examination results to be particularly useful for diagnosing weaknesses in their presentation of the curriculum, or for identifying students' learning difficulties. Rather, classroom tests developed by the teachers themselves and other diagnostic tests available through the school boards were viewed as more useful for these purposes. Teachers occasionally hinted that 'other teachers' might teach to the tests or use the existence of the test as a way to motivate students but, overall, teachers' remarks did not suggest a direct link between examination scores of past or present students and changes in teaching strategy. Here are some teacher comments on the topic of provincial achievement and diploma examinations:

> "Now, I know if we never send those on to (next grade level school) they would never ask for them! So you wonder why we're doing this, basically. I mean, unless you mark them yourself and want to use them, they're not a useful assessment tool for you as the present teacher and we're very unsure that anyone else is ever using them, ever again."

> "You see schools saying that three years down the road, there's going to be X percent achieving the standard. Okay, so they pass. How can you predict that?"

> "I don't have to prepare kids for the grade (#) exams. In (subject) we don't have an exam. There is less pressure in terms of them having to achieve and meet those requirements. Like in (subject), they have to cover the stuff to be prepared . . . you can reinforce those things. Like, 'Guys, we have to meet those requirements before you write the final exam, if you want to be successful.' And

that's not blackmailing but realistically they can play on words like that, the other teachers."

"We try to say, well, X percent of my kids are going to achieve the standard and then so many will achieve the standard of excellence. Okay, and I think, not that we build excuses, but you cannot change students' moods at that time when they wrote the exam. You know within yourself if you've taught the curriculum, you've done as much as you could to make sure that they're prepared. But most people don't know what the exam is supposed to have on it. Some teachers do know so they can teach that specific question if they really want to, which they're not supposed to. But what happens is, we take this information and we look at it very objectively. Saying, well, what was my clientele that year, what was the ambience of the classroom . . . "

"For individual assessment, if you're doing assessment for the children, it is not very useful. If you're doing assessment for the school, it might be useful. So for example, if we took our achievement exams and said let's take a look at language arts and our children for the last four years at this school have scored much poorer in their writing skills than the other half of the test, well, that would be an indicator to us, in the analysis, that maybe we should be doing more in writing skills. But to be quite honest, that's very rarely used that way. Teachers are primarily looking for ways to assess the children, because children come first, they're the target. And rightly or wrongly then the administration is your next level which then has to take the responsibility to broaden that aspect and have the members doing assessments for the whole group of us, not just this grade, but for all of us."

Locke and Latham (1984) have found that goal setting helps to improve worker productivity in a variety of settings. However, as reflected in the quotes above, teachers in this study reported that setting goals related to improving the school's achievement examination results did not have the motivational effect desired by the government and the school boards. There several possible reasons why goal setting may not work in this situation. First, the raw achievement examination results are not something that teachers feel they can

individually control (i.e., student factors have a bigger influence) and, therefore, goals related to them are not seen to be realistic. Second, the results do not provide much direction regarding how to improve (although patterns may emerge over time indicating weaknesses in particular areas such as writing skills, as one of the quotes indicates). Furthermore, they do not provide any direct feedback at all to teachers who are not teaching the examination grades and subjects. Finally, the results feedback is public and poor results can have negative consequences. School shopping parents can use it to punish schools with below average results, despite the fact that the teachers in these schools may actually be doing a good job considering the type of students they serve.

There was some evidence in the interviews that the examination results might impact on the teachers' classroom behaviour indirectly. However, this indirect effect appears to have more to do with the principal's leadership philosophy and associated behaviours than with the principal requiring teachers to set performance targets or to participate in business planning. One principal got to know each student in the school individually, encouraged them to set academic goals and then periodically reviewed their progress with them, including the reasons for success and failure. In addition to putting more onus on students to take responsibility for their own educational outcomes, these one-on-one sessions with students may have alerted the principal to learning difficulties related to presentation of the curriculum or other issues that could be taken up with the teachers. Another principal, described earlier, had staff work in teams to set common examinations and develop common expectations about how much curriculum would be covered by certain dates. Teachers who might otherwise have operated as independent professionals were required to do these things in teams, which may have created an opportunity for teachers to

exchange ideas regarding the curriculum or teaching strategies. This same principal expected teachers to assist students in academic difficulty. Furthermore, s/he took an active interest not only in the school's achievement examination results but how students leaving the school were performing at the next grade level. This principal did not use achievement examination outcomes as the only measure of the school's effectiveness.

During the interviews, teachers described the methods they actually used to improve their teaching and these had little connection to business planning. By far, the main strategy was participating in professional development activities such as conferences and in-services and doing professional reading. Formal staff performance appraisals or actively soliciting advice from colleagues did not emerge as important sources of improvement ideas. Except in very limited situations, teachers did not report seeking feedback directly from students, or using non-traditional student assessment techniques to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

Teachers attributed changes in their day-to-day behaviour to changes in the classroom environment and the behaviour of the students. Their concerns were often immediate and short-term:

"What's here, what's up front, what do I do tomorrow?"

"Trying to survive."

Lack of time made it difficult for teachers to reflect on their personal teaching practice and how to improve it, although the nature of the work, which involves constant interaction with and assessment of students and limited opportunities for interaction with coworkers, may also contribute to their here-and-now orientation.

When principals and teachers were asked to identify information they

would find useful for doing their jobs but didn't currently have, they spoke of the need for information on valid educational principles and approaches that would allow them to do a better job of preparing students for the future, given that the future can only be anticipated and never known with certainty. They wanted information to help them decide whether they were doing the right things. Two paradoxical themes emerged in their responses: first, that education has not adapted enough to changing times; and second, that education has been too quick to adopt many innovations, sometimes on the basis of minimal and questionable evidence regarding their benefits. The educational reforms were seen as an example of the latter quickness to adopt innovations without evidence:

> "If you look at a provincial and district perspective, I'm not sure that we've done anything that has really impacted on education in the last ten years. Really and truly impacted on education. And I don't know that in the next ten years we'll say anything different. Education is an institution that if you look back, how much differently are we doing it now than we were fifty years ago? Let's take the parallel of medicine. A doctor walking into an operating room today isn't walking into the same operating room he was walking into fifty years ago. How much different does a classroom look? Let's take the analogy of, if you have to have an operation, you want a doctor using the state of the art equipment, but you want him using state of the art equipment from 1996, not 1970. I don't know."

> "(I would like to have) information on studies that have been done that actually show why changes are taking place. By that I mean, quite often in education, we are bombarded with change on a consistent basis. Some of the changes are fads or fashions in education and some people cynically say, just wait six months and it'll be gone. The thing is we have a tremendous amount of change, sometimes it's at a very base, philosophical level but yet we do not necessarily see that this is going to have an outcome that will improve education. So, for example, we do whole language now. So where is the basis that says . . . you know, that kind of thing. Those are usually the pieces of information we don't

get. For example, we make changes such as school councils. Are there any studies that show this will make any difference to the children in their classrooms? Is there any study that says a three-year business plan will make any difference to children in their classrooms? So what I'm saying is, changes seem to be made for philosophical purposes. We don't have any proof as to why we are changing this, other than this is the new 'in thing'. Oh, there's rationale, but I'm talking actual studies that show that this actually has an effect."

"Sometimes you wish there wasn't as much information but . . . I think that education is sadly lacking in terms of research. In many respects, we've come a long, long way in this business, and I've seen (#) years of the history of this business. But in other ways, we haven't moved anyplace. The whole idea, I can remember when I started teaching, we all knew that kids learned at different rates. And from raising children ourselves, we know that they learn to tie shoes at different times, they get toilet trained at different times, they learn to talk at different times. And yet we point them all into grade one at the same time and expect them all to move along. We use a lot of verbiage to say, yes, we're looking after each individual child. I still think that there are a lot of kids that are lost in the shuffle. And I would love to be able to see continuous progress, where a child is taken from that exact point where he is or she is in that subject area, moved along so that they can really see success, they can see growth, and so on. So I guess to make a long story short, I'd love to see more research in my professional field that is meaningful, that really means something. It seems to me there have been millions of dollars wasted and there hasn't been any real good, solid, meaningful research come out that's made a lot of difference."

"We are Canadians. We try to copy the Americans too much. We don't share the same reality. For example, drugs, the violence . . . Well, there is some, and I'm aware of that, but let's stop, think, and evaluate. They have those circular schools, round schools. But we know that they don't work. Or like this school, it's like _____ type of school. (Comments on design.) What kind of an environment is this? I hate it."

A number of participants remarked that the focus of schools seemed to be shifting to academic achievement, and while this may have benefits for the

students who are academically inclined, some believed there could be serious

repercussions for other students:

> ". . . in a smarter environment, where you put twenty smart kids together, they get smarter. That doesn't mean that if you put a weaker kid in a brighter group, that makes him better. He may become weaker and weaker because he can't follow."

> "We have a lot of special needs students and a lot of students that need a lot of extra help. The more times that you pass on testing areas to them that they know that they have less understanding of, the more chance you have of them being turned off . . . we spend a lot of time here in the school trying to show them that they're an individual person with their own strengths and we turn around and in one week, in the second last week of school, the Government has (#) tests . . . If you're a nonacademic student that says, okay I'm looking at leaving grade(#) now, after writing those (#) tests you know that you didn't get too much right on those tests. . . your self-concept is going to be poor. And that's not what I consider the kind of present you should be giving any students at the end of the year . . ."

> "Right now the big word is 'success', strive for success, try to make them successful, achieve their goals, and all that. Some of the kids, you're telling them too much, and they're just losing it. It has the opposite effect on them. You just discourage them. They lose their self-esteem. We just don't get it."

> "Do we as a nation look at education beyond getting a kid ready for university? What is it, eleven percent of the students who graduate from grade twelve even get to the doors of a university, never mind finish? Do we look enough at the technological side and the logical aspects of education? Do we look at education enough as learning for the sake of learning as opposed to learning to get somewhere?"

> "We've done cross-sections of classes with the (name of diagnostic test) and in some of them we have no students in the standard of excellence. Well, I mean that's not considered acceptable any place, not to have that and that's a standard fact of life here. And we can show and prove why there are no students there. But at the same time even though we can show and prove that, with the new staffing allocations it doesn't seem to make any difference. There's one rule there and that's what it is, so much

per student . . . "

Thus, not only did the reforms seem to make winners and losers out of schools and staff, but some participants expressed the belief that they made winners and losers out of children. The educators I interviewed seemed earnest and dedicated, but some of them were clearly having difficulties in determining how to balance their new accountabilities to the government and to parent customers with their traditional professional accountability to student clients, particularly those students who didn't measure up well against the province's achievement and diploma examination standards.

CHAPTER 6:

A Theory-in-Use of the Impacts of Educational Reform

Introduction

In Chapters 4 and 5, I described the main themes that emerged from my interviews with Edmonton principals and teachers. In this chapter, I derive a theoretical model of the dynamics of the education system, a 'theory-in-use' of educational reforms based on my interpretation of participants' comments. I use the theory-in-use to make predictions about the impacts of the reforms, assuming no significant policy adjustments are made by the government.

The theory-in-use is presented with recognition of its caveats. It is based on the interview comments of a small group of principals and teachers. These educators worked in Edmonton, an urban area with many schools. The dynamics of educational reform could be different in rural areas of the province where schools are located farther apart. The theory-in-use makes propositions about the behaviour of parents based on principals and teachers' impressions. However, parents may well have different views of their own behaviour and the behaviour of principals and teachers.

The theory-in-use reflects a pattern of apparent relationships that I perceived across the interviews. Individual interview participants are not in any way responsible for, and may not agree with, the theory-in-use. It is my interpretation and extension of their remarks and I accept responsibility for it. Its propositions have not been not been tested, although I provide some generally supportive secondary data from newspaper accounts and the educational literature in Chapter 7. This evidence is suggestive, not conclusive. The apparent confirmatory nature of the secondary sources could reflect human

information processing limitations, for example a tendency to seek out, attend to, and more readily assimilate evidence that confirms expectations than disconfirms them (Dawes, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additional research is needed to elaborate and validate the theory-in-use, including research using rigorous quantitative methods. Chapter 8 presents some ideas for further research.

The theory-in-use is offered for consideration not because its correctness has been demonstrated but rather, because it presents a picture of the educational reforms that contrasts sharply with the government's espoused theory. The theory-in-use points to some currently unmeasured areas of reform. It also calls attention to the possibility of cumulative negative impacts. It suggests that, over time, the educational reforms will have undesirable consequences because they will increase the existing opportunity and achievement gap between the richest and poorest students, and increase the levels of stress and turnover among teachers and principals.

According to the theory-in-use, schools will become increasingly stratified by the experience level of teachers, the socioeconomic status of students, and examination results. Contrary to the government's espoused theory, which predicts that competition will lead to improved educational outcomes for all students, the theory-in-use predicts that improvements (if they occur) will be in the examination scores of children from higher income, better educated families.

The theory-in-use also predicts that the fiscal and accountability pressures on school boards and schools will gradually take their toll on those doing the educating, resulting in higher rates of turnover and stress leaves, with a larger effect observed for principals and teachers working in schools serving

students from lower income families. Furthermore, the trend toward teaching staff having an increasing level of professional training (e.g., Master's degrees) will reverse, as school boards and schools have fewer resources to compensate teachers with graduate level credentials.

As other career opportunities become more attractive, as the status of teaching as a profession declines, as parental pressures and/or student discipline problems increase, as pay and benefits decrease (in real terms), teachers will leave the profession in greater numbers and fewer individuals will enter. Depending on labour market conditions this could eventually result in a shortage of qualified teachers.

The predictions of the theory-in-use are pessimistic. They point to a gradual weakening of the province's educational system. Most Albertans who are interested in the welfare of the province's children, including this researcher, hope that the theory-in-use is not supported. However, there is great danger in dismissing the theory-in-use, just as there is great danger in dismissing the espoused theory, without first seeking out and thoroughly evaluating the evidence. There is an onus on the government to ensure that policy changes *do good* (i.e., confirm the espoused theory). There is also a responsibility to ensure that they *do no harm* (i.e., do not confirm the theory-in-use). Documented harmful effects should be reduced or eliminated through appropriate policy adjustments.

In the the remainder of this chapter, I provide a detailed explanation of the theory-in-use.

Parent Behaviour

According to the comments of the teachers and principals I interviewed,

higher income, well-educated parents use information on school examination results to choose schools for their children, but lower income, less well-educated parents either do not have access to the comparative information, do not regard it as important, or do not have the means (e.g., money for student transportation) to act on it. Consequently, the theory-in-use hypothesizes that comparative school achievement examination results influence the school choices of higher income, well-educated parents but do not influence the school choices of lower income, less well educated parents.

- *Proposition 1A*: Higher income, well-educated parents will send their children to schools with better achievement or diploma examination results, regardless of school location.

- *Proposition 1B*: Lower income, less well-educated parents will send their children to local schools, regardless of school achievement or diploma examination results.

Schools with higher achievement or diploma examination results will also tend to be located in higher income neighbourhoods. Indeed, parents with the financial means may decide to buy a house within the school's attendance boundaries to guarantee their child a place in that school.[33]

The propositions suggest that examination results will have a lagged impact on school enrolments. Examination scoring and feedback delays will mean that published examination results from the spring of one year will tend to have their greatest impact in September of the following year. However, examination scores in one year may have a favourable or unfavourable impact for several years, to the extent they influence the school's reputation. Schools

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[33] This indicates that school achievement or diploma examination performance could influence real estate prices. The policies of the province's school boards appear to be to accommodate students within a school's attendance boundaries first, then to accept others if there is space.

with poorer examination results will tend to be located in low income neighbourhoods. These schools will gradually lose those neighbourhood children who have higher income, better educated parents. Future examination results and enrolment will decline as a consequence. These schools will have difficulty improving their examination results because of the characteristics of the neighbourhood student clients who remain and the resource problems created by declining enrolment.

The theory-in-use's model of parent choice behaviour suggests the existence of a reinforcing feedback system (Senge, 1990). Individual choices by higher income, well-educated parents acting in their perceived best interests have significant consequences for the children of lower income, less well-educated parents. Over time the exercise of choice by the former parents results in the schools becoming increasingly stratified by socioeconomic status, and ethnicity/race, to the extent these are correlated with choice. (As the following sections on principal and teacher behaviour indicate, individual choices of principals and teachers may similarly operate as reinforcing feedback systems, stratifying the schools by principal and teacher experience.)

Although parents who are dissatisfied with a neighbourhood school could attempt to improve this school by 'voicing' concerns to the staff or through the school council, choosing another school for the child may bring about a satisfactory outcome with less expenditure of effort. Unfortunately, the loss of resources that go with a loss of student population shortchanges socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhood students. Neighbourhood schools in lower income areas may eventually lose the critical mass of resources need to deliver the same quality of education as schools serving advantaged students. They face three choices: to remodel their programs and

market them broadly to more advantaged students; to find some way besides remodelling and marketing to alleviate their chronic resource problems; or to close.

Principal Behaviour

A principal at a school with higher than average examination results has a strategic advantage in marketing the school because the school's results can be used to maintain or increase its budget by recruiting the children of higher income, better educated parents away from their neighbourhood schools. Principals at schools with the highest examination results can attract the 'cream'. If a school has high examination results (or is hoping to produce them in the future), the principal also has an incentive to actively engage in creaming strategies. For example, the principal can implement special programs that only high academic achievers are qualified to enter (e.g., the International Baccalaureate program). Unless prevented by school board policy from doing so, the principal can also allocate surplus space to students from outside the school's boundaries based on academic merit, assuming that parent requests for student placements exceed the school's physical capacity. The principal will be more attuned to pleasing, and hence selectively attend to, higher income, well-educated parents. Children of these parents are more likely to fit the image or reputation the school is trying to project -- they are good for business.

- *Proposition 2A:* Principals at schools with high examination results or hoping to achieve them will focus on pleasing the higher income, well-educated parents.

- *Proposition 2B:* Principals at schools with high examination results or hoping to achieve them will actively engage in creaming

strategies, either through the school's program focus, or by selecting students based on academic merit if demand for spaces in the school exceeds capacity.

Not only does creaming help to perpetuate the high examination results of the school, it acts to screen out children who are discipline problems or who have special learning difficulties. Community-minded school councils could establish a 'no creaming' policy because creaming effectively bars entry to the disadvantaged. Unfortunately, there is an incentive for the school council to allow or even encourage creaming because it benefits the self-interest of parents on the council.

Schools with the lowest examination results will tend to be located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to serve local children. Principals in these schools have two ways to increase the school's resources.

First, the school's program focus can be changed in an effort to make the school attractive to higher income, well-educated parents. However, this involves a reputation management issue if the school continues to serve local children. Indeed, if the school does continue to serve local children, it may not be able to post the achievement examination results or develop the reputation it needs to attract students from outside its boundaries. If the school changes its program focus, a considerable marketing effort will be required because the school will have to compete for students that other schools also want to attract.

Second, the principal can seek other means besides changing the program to recruit students from outside the area. For example, the more students the principal can get classified as special needs, the better the school's resource situation. An educationally disadvantaged student for whom the school does not receive extra resources is costly (i.e., a liability, not an

asset, from a budgetary impact perspective). Furthermore, educationally disadvantaged students who cannot be exempted from the provincial achievement examinations lower the school's achievement examination results. This, in turn, can damage the school's academic reputation and future enrolment prospects.

- *Proposition 2C:* Principals at schools with high examination results will use them in marketing their schools.

- *Proposition 2D:* Principals at schools with low examination results will not use them in marketing their schools. Instead they will:

  - Change the school's program focus and market the new program; or

  - Seek to have students classified as special needs.

Principals at all schools will face budget pressures. However, schools with lower examination results will generally have smaller enrolments and proportionately more educationally disadvantaged students, and their budget problems will be worse. Teachers with more education and experience will be too expensive for these schools to hire and to retain. Of course, education and experience are only proxies for good teaching and principals will be sensitive to this, seeking the best deals they can get. All other things being equal, a principal will prefer hiring a less experienced teacher with a lower salary to a more experienced teacher with a higher salary. Nevertheless, principals at schools targeting students from higher income, well-educated families will be in a better financial position to hire the cream of available teachers. These principals also have an incentive to build and maintain an excellent teaching staff, since the parents of their students will tend to be highly concerned with the quality of teaching their children receive.

- *Proposition 2E*: Principals at schools with high examination results will hire more highly educated and experienced teachers.

- *Proposition 2F*: Principals at schools with low examination results will hire less highly trained and experienced teachers, and will tend to employ more recent graduates.

- *Proposition 2G*: Teachers at schools with high examination results will have more education and experience on average than teachers at schools with low examination results.

The new freedom to manage may result in principals experiencing greater stress. However, principals in the higher examination results schools will generally find their work more satisfying than principals in schools with lower examination results. These principals will have larger budgets and be able to hire teachers who are on average, more highly educated and experienced. Parents will generally do their job of parenting and actively support the academic and fundraising efforts of the school. It will be easier for these principals to see themselves as successful and in control of their own fates because they will have a relatively easier time achieving and maintaining success than their colleagues in schools with lower examination results.

In contrast, principals in the lower examination results schools will experience chronic resouce problems due to low and fluctuating enrolments. Regardless of the effort they expend, it will be difficult for them to turn their schools' examination performance, enrolment and budget situations around. These principals will be more likely to experience feelings of failure and inability to control their fate, and higher levels of stress. They will be more likely to seek better opportunities through transfers to higher examination results schools when opportunities arise, or by leaving the profession. Newly hired principals

at the lower examination results schools will have less administrative experience than the principals they replace (in most cases, no experience).

- *Proposition 2H:* Educational reform will cause the rates of turnover and stress-related disability leaves among principals to increase.
- *Proposition 2I:* Principals at schools with low examination results will be more likely to seek transfers or resign their positions and to experience more stress-related disability leaves than principals at schools with high examination results.

Teacher Behaviour

Schools with higher examination results will be more successful at retaining teachers because they will have adequate budgets to cover staff salaries. Teachers at these schools will also find the students easier and more satisfying to teach. In contrast, teachers at the lower examination results schools will have less security because of the low enrolment situation. Teachers in these schools are likely to experience frequent changes in schools as well as less preferred teaching assignments (e.g., subjects and grade levels; part-time work). They will also find themselves teaching more students who are academically ill-prepared and who pose behaviour management problems. Consequently, they will find teaching is less psychologically rewarding than teachers in higher examination results schools.

Teachers may experience more stress as a result of expectations that students in their schools will meet the province's achievement and diploma examination standards. However, teachers in the lower examination results schools are likely to experience more stress than teachers in the higher

examination results schools, because they have the inherently more difficult and frustrating task of teaching academically disadvantaged students. Consequently, teachers in lower examination result schools will be more likely to seek better opportunities, either by seeking transfers to higher examination results schools, or by leaving the teaching profession. The teachers hired to replace them will tend to be inexperienced (in many cases, new university graduates, or teachers who have never held a full-time position).

- *Proposition 3A:* Educational reform will cause the rates of turnover and stress-related disability leaves among teachers to increase.

- *Proposition 3B:* Teachers at schools with low examination results will be more likely to seek transfers or resign their positions and to experience more stress-related disability leaves than teachers at schools with high examination results.

There was general consensus among interview participants that the main way that teachers improved their teaching strategies was through professional training and development. Paradoxically, the budgetary pressures accompanying reform may act as a disincentive to teachers furthering their professional development by taking graduate degrees. Teachers with graduate degrees run the risk of pricing themselves out of the market. Furthermore, individuals considering their career options may view the public release of unadjusted school achievement and diploma examinations results as undermining the appeal of teaching as a profession. If the professional status of teaching declines, it may lose its attractiveness to potential new recruits. In the long run, applications to university and college education faculties at both the undergraduate and graduate levels may decline more than expected based on the population enroled in post secondary institutions. Although there has been

a surplus of education graduates in recent years, a shortage could develop at some point, depending on demographic and provincial labour market conditions (i.e., relative availability of more attractive, better paying jobs).

- *Proposition 3C:* Applications to university and college undergraduate and postgraduate education programs will decline.

An obvious, immediate cost saving could be achieved by hiring more paraprofessionals to replace teachers. A shortage of qualified teachers would mean there would be incentives for school boards and schools to make greater use of paraprofessionals, particularly in the lower achievement results schools.

Student Achievement Outcomes

The government's espoused theory of education reform assumes that the introduction of markets and the provision of unadjusted, comparative school performance information to parents will lead to an overall improvement in provincial achievement and diploma examination results. The espoused theory implies that this improved performance will reflect an increase in achievement, for all identifiable groups of students. However, the theory-in-use views such an overall improvement as unlikely, and predicts that, to the extent that an improvement does occur, all students will not benefit equally. Any trend toward improved examination results over time will reflect an improvement in the performance of students who already perform well, because of the synergies achieved when the best students are taught by best teachers. Lower income students in schools with lower examination results will be instructed by teachers who are, on average, less experienced than the teachers in schools with higher examination results. Thus, observed improvements may mask a deterioration in the performance of disadvantaged students, or an increased drop out rate for

this group.

It should be noted that the proportion of disadvantaged children living in Alberta may be increasing, along with the severity of their economic disadvantage. Many younger Albertans, including young parents, are experiencing difficuties finding and keeping steady and well-paying work. There are demographic changes towards more single parent families, where the risk of child poverty is substantially greater. Furthermore, the government has reduced welfare benefits as part of overall government reform. Any increase in levels of child poverty in the province will work to counteract the efforts of the education system to improve overall student achievement and diploma examination results. The goal of improved student achievement probably cannot be achieved without cooperation from the economy, and will not occur unless more benefits of economic prosperity flow to lower income families.

- *Proposition 4A*: Overall provincial achievement and diploma examination results will not improve over time, and may decline if the proportion of Alberta children living in poverty increases.

- *Proposition 4B*: The achievement gap between economically advantaged and economically disadvantaged students will increase.

There appear to be no meaningful incentives in the system, monetary or otherwise, for improvements in teaching.[34] The release of unadjusted

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34 This is not meant to suggest that pay-for-performance schemes for individual teachers would be a good or workable idea but to point out that there do not appear to be any rewards at all for teachers working harder (e.g., restoration of the compensation reduction). Would the government be prepared to do anything for teachers if, on a province-wide basis, Alberta's students improved in relation to the government's achievement and diploma examination results standards? It has been mute on this point.

comparative achievement and diploma examination results for schools does not acknowledge or reward schools for educational 'value added' but rather rewards them for engaging in strategic maximization behaviour (e.g., creaming the best students and teachers). The theory-in-use suggests that, in the long run, the province's education reforms may create worse problems than the ones they were implemented to solve.

The Theory-in-Use vs. the Espoused Theory: A Postscript

In comparison to the espoused theory, the theory-in-use reveals that apparent gains in achievement and diploma examination performance may come at the expense of increasing educational inequities. Increased educational inequities will result from parents, teachers, and principals engaging in strategic self-interest maximization. The educational reforms have created a structure of incentives that may not only encourage self-interested behaviour, but in essence may virtually force education system stakeholders to behave in defensive, self-protective ways. Those who exert effort on behalf of all the children, not simply their own children or the most academically inclined and trouble free children, are at risk of losing personally in the new, competitive educational game. Ironically, a major espoused reason the reforms were implemented was to obtain an across-the-board improvement in the quality of education through making the schools more responsive to students' needs.

If the theory-in-use correctly describes the way the reforms are actually working, it suggests they could have serious societal costs that should be factored into calculations of the benefits of improved efficiency and effectiveness in the education system. These include increased long term costs for other social systems, notably health, justice, and welfare -- costs that arise

from inequitable treatment of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In the long run, the theory-in-use suggests that reforms will not bring us closer to achieving the mission of Alberta Education, "the best possible education for all Alberta students" (Alberta Education, 1996).

CHAPTER 7:

Secondary Evidence

Introduction

The theory-in-use makes some predictions about outcomes that are similar to those of the espoused theory. For example, the theory-in-use recognizes that schools will close and educators will leave the profession. The espoused theory assumes these impacts will be associated with improvements to achievement outcomes and, presumably, continuous improvement in the quality of education. This will happen because 'bad' schools and 'bad' teachers will be forced to improve or weeded out through the operation of market forces; 'good' schools and 'good' teachers will be rewarded. According to the theory-in-use, however, there will be no overall increase in the quality of education. Educational benefits will end up unfairly distributed, with the rich and academically advantaged getting more than the poor and academically disadvantaged.

In this chapter, I will consider the foundation of evidence on which the espoused theory is built, as well as examine some evidence for the theory-in-use. The sources cited are not meant to be exhaustive but, rather, illustrative. They include the educational literature (books and journals) as well as newspaper articles describing Alberta's education system.[35]

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[35] Newspaper articles presenting comparative school examination results are not directly cited in this chapter but are included in the bibliography.

Foundations of the Espoused Theory: Was the Educational System Broken?

According to Barlow and Robertson[36] (1994, p. 24), the proponents of the educational reforms have been able to implement these changes by convincing the public that the ills of postmodern society should be blamed on the failure of education:

> "The essential component of this business strategy is to convince the public, particularly the educational tree-huggers, that education is the cause of disaster, not the best defence against it. As evidence of disaster is not hard to find in current Canadian life, the public's wish to assign the blame for unemployment, racial intolerance, high taxation and even the supposedly growing crime rate hardly needs encouragement."

A similar motivational attribution is made by Pollit (1993) in his review of educational reforms in the UK and US.

Barlow and Robertson (1994) maintain that much of the evidence that has been used to sell the education reforms is inaccurate and distorted. For example, the high rate of adult illiteracy is frequently offerred as proof that Canada's schools are failing, although adults classified as illiterate tend to be older people educated in other countries, not recent high school graduates. Another misleading statistic is the oft-quoted 30% school drop out rate. This figure includes every Canadian student who does not graduate in the expected year from the high school in which they first enroled. (Recently, Statistics Canada has released new dropout rate estimates based on an improved methodology. These percentages are considerably lower. The actual school dropout rate for Alberta is among the lowest in Canada at 14%.) Similarly, the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation figure that is often

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36 Maude Barlow is chairperson of the Council of Canadians. Heather-jane Robertson is director of professional development services for the Canadian Teachers Federation.

used to justify the claim that Canada spends too much on education (14.4% of Gross Domestic Product) includes expenditures on elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. Most other countries' OECD estimates do not include post secondary spending. Other statistics offered as evidence that our educational system is failing (e.g., the number of days that children spend in school vs. the length of the school year in other countries; performance of Canadian students on international achievement tests) also do not point out the problems and limitations of these comparisons.

Another justification that is given for educational reforms is the existence of a skilled labour shortage in Canada (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). The statistic most commonly cited as evidence for this skills deficit is actually the estimate of current job vacancies. However, current job vacancies are not the same as chronic job vacancies. Indeed, Canada does not keep official statistics that address the issue of the magnitude of the skills shortage, or areas where skills are needed. All of the available evidence (e.g., the number of science and engineering graduates) points to a skilled labour surplus and a jobs shortage. Furthermore, technology has replaced the need for skilled workers meaning that many Canadians work at jobs for which they are overqualified. Barlow and Roberson (1994) observe that many of the jobs that businesses are creating (including many of the technical ones) are outside of the country, in low wage economies. A good many of the rest do not require more than a grade 8 education. However, they believe that to the extent that business leaders can convince the public that the education system is failing to graduate students prepared to fill important economic roles, business gains respectability as an education system stakeholder, and a foot in the door in terms of influencing the curriculum and even the operation of the schools.

For example, consider technological literacy. The Alberta government's educational reinvestment program includes a major technology thrust. Schools feel they are under pressure to be technologically up-to-date but according to Postman (1996, p. 43-44), the importance of computers in the school to the quality of education delivered may have been greatly exaggerated. Speaking of the US situation he observes:

> "approximately 35 million people have already learned how to use computers without the benefit of school instruction. If the schools do nothing, most of the population will know how to use computers in the next ten years, just as most of the public learned how to drive cars without school instruction . . . what we need to know about computers, television, and other important technologies -- is not how to use them but how *they* use us."

Postman (1996) believes the real need for technology education lies in making technology an object of inquiry that is studied at school, much as students might study the impact of automobiles on the design of their communities and the quality of the air they breathe. Postman's (1996) approach does not require the purchase of a computer for every student. However, information technology companies obviously benefit if schools and parents can be convinced of the importance and value of the latest computer technology to children's futures.[37]

Another major reason that the government has given for reforming the education system is to ensure that it is more responsive to the public. Barlow and Robertson (1994) contend that there is little evidence that the public at large, and the parent customers of education in particular, had high levels of

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[37] Computers are obviously a significant factor in modern life, but technology changes quickly, making it expensive for schools to stay up to date. Furthermore, computers are becoming increasingly user friendly. Perhaps students would learn all they needed to know about the technical side of computing if they were exposed to computers in high school. Is it any more important or desirable for children in kindergarten and the elementary grades to be spending hours in front of a computer than hours in front of a television set? There is an urgent need for research to inform this debate.

dissatisfaction with the education system or schools prior to the reforms. Citing the results of a 1993 Gallup poll that assessed Canadian's 'respect and confidence' in a variety of institutions, they note that 44% of the public had 'quite a lot/a great deal' of respect for public schools, in comparison to 22% for large corporations, 19% for large unions, and 9% for political parties. This figure suggests that the public perceived problems with the education system, but it appears that the crisis of confidence was not of the same magnitude as dissatisfaction with other social institutions. American surveys by Gallup and Canadian surveys by the Canadian Education Association (Barlow and Robertson, 1994) indicate that the closer the contact that adults actually have with the schools, the more positive their opinions about schools in general, and about the school their child attends in particular. Thus, it does not seem to be widespread dissatisfaction with the schools that drove Alberta's reform agenda but, rather, the need to find ways to cut spending.

Nevertheless, Barlow and Robertson (1994) believe the government, the media, business and conservative religious groups have used an 'educational crisis and mismanagement' story in an effort to get public support while conveniently forgetting to mention the achievements of public education in Canada. Examples of achievements they cite include: doubling the percentage of Canadian students who graduate from high school compared to only a generation ago; one of the highest rates of participation in post secondary education in the world; worker productivity that ranks among the highest in the world (as computed by the Japanese Productivity Center); and, perhaps most importantly and significantly, the maintenance of a stable and peaceful democratic country.

Barlow and Robertson (1994) argue Alberta's educational reforms will

benefit special interests but not the public as a whole. Their analysis calls the empirical foundations of NPM educational reforms and the espoused theory into question. Despite shaky evidence that the province's system was broken in the first place, it has been fixed anyway. Unfortunately, the objectives-oriented performance measurement system that is an integral part of the educational reforms does not encourage us to look beyond the official goals, targets, and measures to identify unanticipated impacts, such as increasing unfairness of the distribution of benefits to students in different socioeconomic groups. The theory-in-use suggests a different approach to the evaluation of the reforms, namely, to identify and study all of their signficant impacts, whether captured by official measures or not. It encourages us to avoid the ecological fallacy by looking beyond global outcomes and to use additional information to assess the reforms are working, and for whom.

Secondary Evidence for the Theory-in-Use
Parent Behaviours

There is considerable anecdotal and research support for the idea that the reforms induce some parents to engage in school shopping. High income, well-educated parents are more likely to be school shoppers than low income, less well-educated parents, in accordance with the theory-in-use's proposition.

Here is a what Barrett (1996f, p. A1), an Edmonton Journal reporter, said about school shopping in the Edmonton Public School System, where an open boundaries policy has existed for many years:

> "Whether you are a fan or an opponent of Edmonton's approach to
> public education, there's no denying one effect of allowing parents
> and kids to pick their schools. Individual school reputations and
> populations are on a constant elevator ride. Some schools literally
> go out of business for lack of students."

In the same article, which chronicled the efforts of Westmount Junior High

School to turn its negative reputation around, the reporter interviewed a parent

who had decided not to send her child to Westmount (Barrett, 1996f, p. A12).

According to this parent, a number of parents liked the improved image of the

school, but didn't think its achievement examination outcomes were high

enough:

> "Not so long ago we were raising our kids not to be competitive,
> not to worry about winning and losing, but times have changed . . .
> Now us yuppie parents are focused on academic success. We're
> worried that our kids will be cut out of options or fall behind if they
> don't have the best academic qualifications."

This parent defined the process of getting a primary and secondary education

for her child in competitive terms, despite the legal right of every child to receive

one. Furthermore, she linked the future competitive success of her child to her

choice of a school. Another parent was quoted as saying she had considered

sending her daughter elsewhere, but her daughter was so impressed with

Westmount, she let her daughter choose.[38] The latter parent indicated her

pleasure with the outcome of that decision, and added that her daughter's

achievement had not suffered (Barrett, 1996f, p. A12):

> "They don't slack off here. Some parents are afraid their kids will
> drop academically, but that hasn't happened."

A series of *Calgary Herald* newspaper articles on the achievement

examination results for Calgary's schools, which appeared from May 11 to 17,

1996, also confirms a trend towards school shopping based on examination

results information. The *Calgary Herald* did not get the comparative

examination results information from the school boards but went straight to

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[38] This is evidence that some parents do, indeed, allow the child to influence the choice of
school, an effect that has not been included in the theory-in-use.

Alberta Education. One Calgary parent used an analogy to information needed to make a car purchase in describing the perceived value of this information (Jaremko, 1996, p. B1):

> "As parents we invest a lot of time, energy and money in our children's future. It's like buying a car. If I'm going to spend so much, I should know what I'm buying."

This parent indicated that she would be prepared to move her child if a neighbourhood school performed badly and would be willing to pay the extra costs, lending support to the idea that there are costs associated with exercising choice, and that costs can be a barrier for some. She went on to observe:

> "Of course, this is undesirable socially. But as a parent, you want the best for your kid. Publishing test results does make the schools work a little harder. So long as they improve, that's fine."

This parent may have recognized that moving her child out of the neighbourhood school had the potential to create social inequities, but her own child's interests took priority over behaving a socially desirable way. Her comment about publishing test results making the schools work harder is somewhat ambiguous. Perhaps she is implying that the fact the test results are published makes the schools work harder and prevents parents from moving their children. On the other hand, she may mean that when parents actually choose to remove their children on the basis of the test results, *then* the schools work harder.

An *Edmonton Journal* story about a new private company called SchoolWorks Inc. (Dawson, 1996d, A6) also highlighted the importance of the achievement examination results in influencing the school choices of higher income parents. According to this report, the company gathers information on schools' discipline policies, safety and academic performance for parents

willing to pay the fee, which is $300 for three schools. At the time when the article was published, SchoolWorks Inc. was encountering resistance because the school boards were reluctant to give the company public information to sell at a profit, when parents can obtain this information themselves for free. An Alberta Education official was quoted in the article as saying the government objects to the practice of private companies charging parents for this information. But a spokesperson for Albertans for Quality Education said he saw nothing wrong with it. The existence of SchoolWorks suggests that the owners perceive there is a market for the kind of information gathering service the company provides. Given price of the service, it is unlikely that this market includes lower income parents.

Some of the opinion columns that the *Calgary Herald* ran during its one week 'special report' on examination results actively encouraged parents to engage in school shopping behaviour. For example, one columnist dispensed this wisdom to Calgary parents (Gold, 1996, p. A10):

> "The provincial government knew that it was responding to the
> genuine wishes of voters when it began testing . . . People yearn
> for an insight into an educational world that is increasingly closed
> to them . . . Parents need new tools for guidance in these scarier
> years. The temper of the times no longer allows trusting parents to
> leave those tools in the exclusive hands of the educational
> establishment."

He went on to criticize educators for being remote and bureaucratic and, while adding the qualification that the stereotype is not always fair, indicated that 'caring parents' need to 'arm themselves' with achievement test results. Commentator Nikoforuk (1996, p. A13) went further, accusing the Calgary Public School Board, whose spokespersons had stressed the relationship between achievement results and socioeconomic status, of:

"both a singular arrogance and a distasteful class bias. According to the 'educrats' the only important factor that seems to affect student performance in Calgary is the wealth or poverty of one's neighbourhood."

Columnist Braid (1996, B1) also jumped into the fray, indicating that the problem was the self-interested motives of the publicly-elected school trustees and school administrations:

"By handing over the data, Alberta Education was clearly aiming a sharp dart at the Public and Catholic boards well-padded backsides."

There is an evident confrontational tone to these columnists' remarks that would be hard for school trustees and school board staff, including principals and teachers (who are all implicated directly or indirectly) to overlook. The impact on teacher morale is explored in the section on *principal and teacher responses*, p. 153.

It should be noted that the relationship between students' performance on standardized achievement tests and socioeconomic status has been confirmed many times in the educational literature (e.g., Scheerens, 1992). Students' family backgrounds account for around 50% of the variance in these scores, while schools account for around 11 or 12%. Natural differences in students' abilities and chance would presumably account for the rest. In interpreting these effects, Scheerens (1992) reminds us that they are comparative and not absolute. There is a bigger variation in students' family circumstances than in the quality of schooling they receive. In other words, all schools (at least in the past) had relatively equivalent resources and teachers who had similar professional training. Consequently, schooling would be expected to have less of a statistical impact on students' achievement

examination scores than students' family backgrounds. However, saying schools have less of an impact (because the quality of different schools in a jurisdiction tends to be relatively similar) is not the same as saying that schools (vs. no schooling) have no impact.

Educational literature from the US and the UK provides insight into the dynamics of parent choice. In the US, educational reforms have not been centrally coordinated as in the UK (Pollitt, 1993), and tend to show greater interest in the equity goals of education than their British counterparts (Madaus, Airasian & Kellaghan, 1980). American programs are often compensatory (i.e., targeted to students of low income, less well-educated parents in an effort to compensate for educational disadvantage), as opposed to broad brush.

For example, Hanushek (1994) reports the findings of an evaluation of a voucher program which enabled low income Milwaukee students to attend approved private schools. Parents who took advantage of the voucher program were originally more involved with their child's public school and they increased their involvement with the private school. Total enrolment in the voucher program more than doubled between 1990-91 and 1993-94, suggesting that if financial barriers are removed, a substantial number of low income parents are interested in choosing their child's school. After joining the voucher program, parents reported they were happier with the private school than the previous public school. Unfortunately, no clear benefits were obtained in terms of improved achievement for the voucher students and there was a high rate of attrition from the program. For every 100 students, only 27 were still in the program after three years. However, this statistic may say as much about the mobility of these students' family situations as it does about the success or failure of the voucher program.

In contrast, the UK reforms are similar to Alberta's in that they emphasize 'choice for all'. Alberta's education reforms differ in two important ways from the UK's. First, the UK government had to devise a standardized national curriculum so that standardized achievement testing could be implemented. A standardized provincial curriculum and standardized achievement testing were in place prior to reforms in Alberta. As part of the Alberta reforms, achievement testing was expanded. Second, the UK government actively encouraged the conversion of schools to 'grant maintained schools,' or schools which are independent of the local educational authority (the equivalent of a school board) control and are managed by their own independent boards of governors (the equivalent of school councils), which report directly to the government (e.g., Department for Education, 1995). The Alberta government allows publicly funded 'charter schools' to be formed by interested groups (a charter school being the rough equivalent of a UK grant maintained school). However, the Alberta government has stopped short of giving school councils at existing public schools the power to break away from the authority of the school board, which is allowed and even encouraged in the UK.

The UK reforms have indeed had a reported impact on parental behaviour, and the nature of that impact is consistent with the theory-in-use's propositions. School choice is more frequently exercised when schools are situated close together and it is primarily exercised by higher income, well-educated parents, who respond to achievement test information in making their choices. Working class parents are more likely to let their children choose their own school or to choose a school based on location; however, some working class parents do move their children 'up' to schools in middle class neighbourhoods. Middle class parents, on the other hand, never move their

children 'down'. The exercise of school choice by parents is also correlated with ethnic origin. Asian parents are more likely to choose than Caucasian parents, and Caucasian parents more likely to choose than Afro-Carribean parents. The reported result of school choice is increasing stratification of UK schools by students' socioeconomic status and ethnicity (Ball, 1993; Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball, 1994; Walford, 1994).

Socioeconomic biases have also been observed among UK school governors, who overwhelmingly tend to be caucasian and university-educated. Deem (1994) conducted a longitudinal, multi-site case study of school governing bodies in two local educational authorities. She identified governors with two distinct value orientations, 'consumer interest' and 'public interest'. Consumer interest governors tend to be more demanding of the staff, use the media and gossip as information sources about the school, and display more concern with meeting the needs of the school's above average academic students than the school population at large. In contrast, public interest governors spend more time volunteering at the school, work with the staff, and tend to think in terms of the impact of policies on the entire student body. Based on her longitudinal analysis, Deem (1994) reports a trend toward increasing numbers of consumer interest governors.

UK educational reforms have been accused of exacerbating the social reproduction of the wealth and privilege of the advantaged, and systematically disadvantaging the working class students and schools. For example, Ball (1993) reports that special needs funding is being reduced and disconnected from those students with the special needs. He notes that, increasingly, British politicians are shifting the blame for children who do not perform well from the school to their parents. Unfortunately, finger pointing is unlikely to solve these

children's academic problems.

Principal and Teacher Responses

School marketing and recruitment. Comments by participants in my study left little doubt that achievement examination results in combination with per capita funding and school choice are causing the staff of schools, particularly the principals, to pay more attention to parents' preferences. Edmonton Public School Board participants mentioned that EPSB strives to be a district of choice. Newspaper accounts present examples of some of the choices the board is offering. For example, Worron (1996) described the decision to implement the Christian-based Logos programs in five EPSB schools. At the time of the article, the program was expected to serve up to 800 students, most of whom were currently attending private schools, Catholic schools, or being home schooled. Another article (Kent, 1996) described EPSB interest in supervising home schooled students who are currently enroled with other school jurisdictions. The number of home schooled children in Alberta has risen from 1,276 in 1989 to 6,582 in 1995, an increase of 416%. Over the same period, the number of home schooled students registered with EPSB has increased only 96%, from 116 to 227. EPSB is evidently trying to make up for lost market share in the home schooled student category.

The Edmonton Catholic School Board is also responding to parent choice. Barrett (1996a, 1996c) describes the decision to convert St. Joseph Catholic High School from a regular high school program to a 'student-centered learning' program . The new St. Joseph program will be modeled after Calgary's Bishop Carroll High School, a school with extremely high diploma

examination results.[39]   Students in the St. Joseph student-centered program

will move through the high school curriculum at their own pace, monitored by

teacher advisors. The head of the ATA Catholic local is concerned about the

program because it may make use of less certified teachers and more

noncertified personnel. He is also concerned about the fate of the school's

traditional, lower income student population. Bishop Carroll High School

serves a higher income student group, which may account for much of its

success with the student centred learning approach. But St. Joseph's principal

thinks the program will provide a 'challenging alternative'. In his view, those

who want to come can come, and those who don't work out can move on.

However, given that the St. Joseph's traditional student population does not

consist of high concentrations of the top academic students that other schools

prize, where will these students move?

Morningstar (1997) reports that the ECSB has decided to pursue new

markets by serving international students. The superintendent is reported to be

joining a trade mission going on a 12-day tour of the Phillipines, Thailand, and

Korea to recruit foreign students for Catholic schools. Currently, ECSB has 79

foreign students, including 21 from Hong Kong and 15 from Korea. These

students pay $5,000 in tuition. By pursuing international markets, ECSB can

seek to increase its student base while avoiding zero-sum competition with

EPSB and the local charter and private schools.

In contrast to completely changing a school's program focus, the

previously-cited article on Westmount Junior High School (Barrett, 1996f)

reveals the uphill battle faced by an undersubscribed neighbourhood school in

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[39] Students at Bishop Carroll are reputed to take one semester more than other students to
complete high school.

its attempt to regain lost neighbourhood students. The principal is quoted as saying the school's reputation is 'madding', because the school has turned itself around yet the community hasn't realized it. While acknowledging the need for improvement, he commented on the difficulty of producing the kind of achievement examination results that higher income parents expect because the school currently serves a predominantly lower income student population. In the article, a student at the school is quoted as mentioning that the school has young and caring teachers. The reference to the age of the teachers supports the theory-in-use's prediction that a school in this circumstance will find it difficult to attract and retain more experienced staff.

Examples of school board and school behaviour provide independent confirmation that schools, and particularly principals, seek to please school shopping parents. St. Joseph Catholic High School has deliberately changed its program's focus, either in an effort to attract high achieving students similar to those who attend Bishop Carroll High School in Calgary or because the school board and the principal believe the new program will produce better diploma examination scores. The principal of St. Joseph is reportedly unconcerned about losing some of his traditional student population. (Indeed, it is likely the very presence of some of these students that could make the school less attractive to school shopping parents.) Over time, if the program offered is not appropriate for students of average and below average ability, the traditional student population may leave the St. Joseph program. Selective neglect, through the lack of sufficient qualified teachers who can help academically disadvantaged students, could accelerate this process in a form of reverse creaming. The ATA representative's concern about what happens to these students is valid. There may be a greater risk that these students will not go

elsewhere in the ECSB or publicly-funded education system. Indeed, some may not complete high school at all.

The EPSB's Logos program is obviously aimed at attracting school shopping parents, although it is not clear in this case whether the Logos parents tend to fit the higher income, better educated profile. The critical issue in the case of Logos parents appears to be how the curriculum is taught (i.e., inclusion of Christian values). Logos parents display a prior history of willingness to withdraw their children from the public school system. They may be quick to criticize the school if something displeases them and be more prepared to use exit or threat of exit as a negotiating tactic. School principals at the Logos sites may find the program is a mixed blessing in terms of the 'customer relations' issues that may accompany it.

The newspaper articles do not reveal the extent to which schools are engaging in overt creaming strategies, for example, using students' grade point averages to assign surplus space. However, it is evident both from my interviews and the information in the press that a subtle form of creaming may be occurring. Consider the case of Grandview Heights Junior High School, the top EPSB school on grade 9 achievement test results. Grandview Heights is located in one of Edmonton's most affluent neighbourhoods. According to Holobitsky, (1996), 30% of the students live within Grandview's attendance boundaries and another 25% are in a program for 'elite academic achievers'. The rest are high achievers from elsewhere. This school has more parents requesting space than it has space available. Obviously, the presence of the elite academic program puts Grandview Heights in an excellent position to perpetuate itself and there is an obvious temptation to engage in further

'selection' given the school's oversubscribed situation.[40] An interesting question is the extent to which the public availability of comparative achievement test information has altered the enrolment situation, the characteristics of the student population, the characteristics of the staff, and the organizational behaviour of Grandview Heights.

Maxwell and Maxwell (1995) have studied the issue of how elite anglophone Canadian private schools socially reproduce the economic elite in Canada. Social reproduction is apparently becoming more and more difficult for elite private schools because of the influence of mass youth culture on higher income students. Students from high income families are not always sufficiently motivated and committed to perform well. Elite private schools must put enormous effort into socializing their student charges so they do not behave like 'pushed up paupers'. Consequently, many of these schools now have entrance exams to make sure that their students can handle the school's demanding academic programs and behavioural expectations. The schools make no secret of recruiting the most academically gifted students from among those families who can afford to pay. To the extent that the educational reforms are encouraging private sector management practices in public schools, we would not be surprised to see parallels between the recruitment strategies of schools like Grandview Heights and private schools.

Staff morale, burnout, and turnover. One of the teacher participants in my study was bitter about the badmouthing the profession receives from the media as well as parents. Quotes from *Calgary Herald* columnists, presented earlier, are examples of negative press. Indeed, the most vocal advocates of NPM

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[40] Westmount Junior High School, in contrast, has surplus space and must take any student it can attract.

education reforms have shown little respect for the teaching profession, stereotyping teachers as inflexible, defensive and self-interested. Economist Milton Friedman, who popularized the idea of market competition in education, went so far as to denigrate teachers' intelligence. Friedman (1982, p. 96) argued that we would see better teaching under competitive incentives because a monopoly public education system "repels the imaginative and daring and self-confident" and attracts the "dull and mediocre and uninspiring". (Friedman's comments leave the reader to ponder how individuals with the ascribed traits could possibly have sufficient ability to obtain the Bachelor of Education degrees needed to become teachers in the first place, or whether any set of educational reforms could be found that would motivate these service providers to the desired levels.)

Certainly, by their own account, teachers were extremely unhappy about the *Calgary Herald's* decision to release comparative achievement examination results for that city's schools. A number of the articles that appeared in the *Herald* series did include factual information about the achievement tests and how to interpret the scores, pointing to the major role played by socioeconomic factors (e.g., Dawson, 1996a,1996b, 1996c, Jaremko, 1996; Pitts, 1996; Pollock, 1996). However, from the perspective of teachers, it appears the factual information presented was not sufficient to control the damage. Dawson (1996c) quotes the president of the Calgary Public Local of the ATA, Lynn Nishimura, as saying teachers were angry. In a subsequent letter to the *Calgary Herald* Nisihimura (1996, p. A21) stated:

> "While this action may satisfy the curiosity of many Calgarians, it won't do anything to improve the education our children receive. Indeed, the publication of these results has left parents, students and staff who work in the schools appearing at the bottom of the list feeling undervalued and betrayed . . . Community help and

support, not competition between schools, is the way to improve our education system."

In the same week, Dawson and Geddes (1996), reported that ATA members debated a motion saying that school-by-school results should be withheld from the public. A Calgary teacher, Wallace (1996), wrote a *Calgary Herald* column in which he asserted that the results are a poor indicator of school performance and that the provincial examinations are not worth the expense of the testing program. He suggested a number of alternative strategies parents could use to find out what they needed to know about the quality of their child's school, including asking the child, visiting the school, volunteering in the school, monitoring the child's homework and attending parent-teacher conferences.

The actions and remarks of teachers following release of the comparative achievement test results for Calgary schools suggest that teachers perceive a great potential for misinterpretation and misuse of the data. Nishimura's (1996) remarks indicate that teachers in the lowest results schools are experiencing particular distress, as the theory-in-use predicts. A Spruce Grove teacher expressed a similar sentiment in response to the *Edmonton Journal's* release of 1996 comparative examination results for Edmonton schools. Mik (1996, p. A9) commenting on an *Edmonton Journal* report which named an inner city school as having no students who achieved the province's standard of excellence asked, "Who would want to send their children to that school?" She went on to express her personal frustration and anger, and resignation to resorting to goal displacing strategies :

> "Even though I don't teach in the Edmonton system, I have been teaching for 35 years and I resent this kind of reporting for it indirectly labels me and all my hardworking colleagues, not to

mention that particular school . . . As a teacher, I will certainly 'teach to the test' because I don't want to be evaluated in an unfavourable light, but is this the best education that we want for our children?"

Unfortunately, such remarks by teachers could be taken as further evidence of the rigidity and defensiveness of educational professionals by advocates of parent choice, in the same way that a school board official's explanation of the link between student scores and socioeconomic status was interpreted as evidence of a school board cover up by *Calgary Herald* columnist Nikiforuk (1996). School boards, principals and teachers appear to face a 'lose-lose' situation in trying to explain low achievement examination results to media critics and parents who already have their minds made up about their importance. Principals and teachers would be expected to experience feelings of helplessness and lowered self-worth when they get blamed for the scores. Those who work in schools in the lowest income neighbourhoods, would experience these feelings most intensely. The theory-in-use predicts principals and teachers working in schools with lower examination results will be more likely than other principals and teachers to leave the education profession[41] and to seek reassignment to schools serving students from higher income families.

A limited search of the educational literature did not turn up much specific research information on the human resource impacts of NPM education reforms. Barlow and Robertson (1994) point to a shortage of teachers willing to work in American inner city schools and a shortage of money to pay them. The

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[41] On this point, I beg to differ with Milton Friedman (1982). The imaginative and daring and self-confident teacher will be attractive to other employers and will be capable of starting up a successful business. It is likely that the most imaginative and daring and self-confident teachers will get discouraged and leave the reformed educational system.

problems that Alberta inner city schools face are not as severe. Nevertheless, Alberta could be falling into a similar trap if the theory-in-use is correct, because the per capita funding formula is combined with school choice, which is stimulated by achievement examination information, to which high and low income parents are differentially sensitive. The predicted result is that the neediest children end up in schools with the fewest educational resources. Furthermore, the chances of improving the future of Alberta children living in poverty, through providing them with opportunities to obtain the best possible education, will be diminished to the extent that their teachers are not given the professional respect and encouragement they need to do their jobs.

Pollitt (1995b) reports surveys of American and British teachers that provide tangential evidence for the theory-in-use's predictions regarding teacher burn-out and the decreased attractiveness of teaching as a profession. The majority of teacher respondents say that if they had the opportunity to live their lives over again, they would not choose to be teachers. There is no doubt that teaching can be a difficult profession. In addition to coping with parents who make too many or too few demands, the teacher must try to encourage students of different ability levels to learn. Some students are neither cooperative nor enthusiastic. Participants in my study noted that teaching is an exhausting occupation, with too few opportunities for meaningful contact with peers. A few of the recent newspaper reports on schools in Edmonton suggest that involving teachers in team teaching projects seems to improve both student achievement and staff satisfaction (Barrett, 1996e, 1996g; Holubitsky & Stevenson, 1996).

Larson (1992) reviews the school improvement literature and argues that governments place too much emphasis on the benefits of forcing change

through policy reform, and do not focus nearly enough on the importance of small scale change initiated from within schools themselves. According to Larson (1992), the best place to expend effort is on getting the classroom teacher to more effectively deliver the curriculum, through working on defined, concrete improvement projects. Furthermore, teachers can be motivated by appealing to their professionalism and stimulating their internal desire to improve. The principal, as educational leader, can encourage teachers to bring in and share ideas from professional development courses and the educational literature. Teachers can also be encouraged to use achievement examination results to diagnose problems with curriculum delivery. However, in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching, it is better to take a behavioural observation approach, which considers how well the teacher's classroom style reflects what is known about good teaching (e.g., Scheerens, 1992), or a value added approach, which considers students' learning gains, not unadjusted achievement scores.

Larson (1992) believes that school-based management involves more time demands on both principals and teachers, and the additional pressures tend to counteract the cooperation and collaboration needed to bring about genuine school improvement. He recommends adding extra teachers to site managed schools, to give staff more release time to deal with the additional demands on their time. Otherwise, he believes that staff burnout will increase. This recommendation was not followed in Alberta, where school-based management was an add-on. On the basis of what he has observed in the UK, Ball (1993) believes that school-based management is compromising educational leadership as principals' time is increasingly consumed by financial management issues and marketing and public relations activities.

It appears that the province's elected officials may be starting to sense problems with the NPM educational reform model, even if they do not speak of them publicly. Recent remarks by Alberta's last two education ministers have emphasized the need for parents to work cooperatively with school staff to diagnose and correct problems as opposed to the importance of exercising school choice. For example, Dawson and Geddes (1996, A1) quote the former Minister of Education, Halvar Johnson, as telling the legislature in regard to the release of comparative school achievement test information:

> "The bottom line is that with this information in the hands of particularly the people at the local school level and the parents that are involved, they will address the deficiencies identified . . . I also expect they will recognize positively the good results that are produced."

Similarly, in an *Edmonton Journal* article on Edmonton Public School Board achievement test results from the spring of 1996, the new Minister of Education, Gary Mar, is quoted as emphasizing the importance of parents working in partnership with the school (Barrett, 1995d).

Interestingly, the same article reported that Edmonton parents contacted by the reporters were not concerned that EPSB results for grades 3, 6 and 9 were below the provincial average. EPSB has been releasing school-by-school examination results information for around six years and the novelty of the school examination results may be wearing off. Perhaps caring parents who have been entrusted with this information -- as opposed to being forced to 'arm themselves' -- are coming to understand its limitations. There may be a 'Hawthorne-type' effect of the achievement examination performance information that simply wears off over time, a diminishing impact that has not been taken into account by the theory-in-use.

Student Achievement Outcomes

The NPM educational reforms would not be expected to produce significant improvements in the Alberta average scores on achievement and diploma examination results in the short time since their implementation. At the lower grade levels, the examination program has just been expanded and a sufficient longitudinal data are not yet available. Data appear to be the most complete and useful at the grade 12 level. Alberta Education (1995) information on the percentage of students writing grade 12 diploma examinations who achieved the standards does not show much of a trend, except for an improvement in the number of students achieving the standard of excellence in Physics 30. However, only 20% of grade 12 students complete the course and take the diploma examination in Physics 30, compared with 56% for English 30. Thus, the high school physics test takers appear to be a highly selective group. This may account for why 32% of the Physics 30 test takers achieved the province's standard of excellence, compared to only 10% of English 30 test takers.

When the desired improvement in achievement test results happens, we can be sure that Alberta's Minister of Education will be quick to make an announcement. However, I personally do not expect to hear this announcement any time in the near future. My search of the literature did not yield a single reference indicating a sustained improvement in population examination scores as a result of implementing NPM educational reforms (e.g., in the UK).[42] Furthermore, the outcomes of the Milwaukee voucher program,

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[42] If the population examination scores did begin to improve, particularly at the high school level, the province's post secondary institutions might become concerned about high school grade inflation. Certainly, there would be a need to demonstrate that the educational gains were real, and are not attributable to changes in the difficulty of the provincial diploma examinations.

reported in a book which is sympathetic to aspects of the NPM approach (Hanushek, 1994), indicated that enabling low income students to attend private schools did not produce a significant improvement in the achievement outcomes of these students.

The Edmonton Public School Board has an 'open boundaries policy' and began releasing comparative achievement test results six years ago. If the espoused theory is correct, the EPSB might be beginning to show improved examination results. Barrett (1996) does report a slight improvement in the grades 3, 6, and 9 scores in 1996 compared to previous years. However, EPSB scores are still below the provincial average for these grades, and there is as yet no clear cut evidence that the recent improvement represents an upward trend (Wallace, 1996). Curiously, the grade 12 EPSB results are above the provincial average. If the EPSB examination results from lower grades are meaningful indicators of the quality of education delivered by EPSB, high school students should have similar (if not worse) results than their younger counterparts. Perhaps the superior grade 12 results reflect the attrition of students in academic difficulty by grade 12. Or they may reflect the fact that grade 12 diploma examinations affect students' final course grades and hence students' chances of gaining entry into post secondary institutions. Students in grade 12 have an incentive to take the examinations seriously, whereas students at the lower grade levels may not.

The EPSB provincial achievement and diploma examination results raise more questions than they answer. As yet they do not provide evidence for the overall academic benefits of school choice. Nevertheless, some parents believe that choosing a school will make a difference. Thorne (1996) reported in May 1995 that there were 350 parents who wanted to register their children in

the new Aurora Charter School in Edmonton. Aurora has claimed it will turn average students into high achievers using old fashioned (not child-centered) back-to-basics teaching methods.

New school programs have made similar claims in the past, for example, the American school performance contracting experiments that took place between 1969 and 1972. Performance contracting involved agreements between school systems and private businesses to provide instruction, with contractor pay determined by the amount students learned as measured by standardized, norm-referenced tests. Carpenter-Huffman, Hall, and Sumner (1974) observe that the performance contracting experiments were introduced with a lot of start-up ballyhoo. Contractors inflated expectations by promising large gains, then for a number of reasons were unable to implement programs that delivered what they promised. By 1972, the performance contracting experiments were judged, overall, to have failed.

CHAPTER 8:

Life After Reform: Research and Practical Suggestions

Impacts of Educational Reforms

Alberta's educational reforms have changed the incentive structure in the educational system through introducing market competition between schools, created new accountability requirements for schools and school boards, and devolved responsibility for many decisions to the schools. In contrast to the government's espoused theory of reform, the theory-in-use presented in this thesis postulates that any educational benefits of reform will be inequitably distributed. Indeed, it suggests that the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students will widen, as educational resources flow away from neighbourhood schools in low income areas towards schools attended by children from high income, well educated families. However, if neighbourhood schools close and excess physical capacity is taken out of the education system, the parent customer, who now has the ability to choose a school, could find that choices are greatly reduced or effectively eliminated particularly for children who, for one reason or another, experience academic difficulties.

Furthermore, the theory-in-use indicates the educational reforms as a total package[43] are changing the working conditions for teachers in ways that may act to undermine the profession and eventually weaken the quality of public education. Government cost cutting and fiscal restraint, increased external accountability demands, and the use of comparative achievement and

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[43] As noted in Chapter 1, it is difficult to determine, based on this research alone, which particular elements of the reforms are having the greatest impact on working conditions in schools -- the cost cutting, the public choice school funding model, the performance measures, etc.

diploma examination results information by parent customers may be contributing to increased burnout and turnover, particularly among principals and teachers in small neighbourhood schools struggling to survive. Teaching may become less attractive as a career, both to those who are already in the profession and those who might contemplate entering it. Fiscal pressures (and teacher shortages, if they materialize) could lead to pressures on principals to hire less educated and experienced teachers, and to make greater use of paraprofessionals.

In this final chapter, I consider two issues. First, I address possible directions for research. How might the research on which the theory-in-use was based be extended, so that we can better understand how educational reforms are impacting on different stakeholders, and how they are influencing stakeholders' behaviours? And how can the theory-in-use be more rigorously tested, so we can determine if the reforms are having unintended, long term negative impacts? Understanding the benefits and costs of reform now and in the future is important, not only for Alberta but for other Canadian provinces that are contemplating adopting similar reforms. Second, I make some suggestions regarding how parents and school staff might respond to the reforms in constructive ways, given that changes or adjustments to the direction of educational policy may not be immediately forthcoming.

Researching the Educational Reforms

One potential response of the Alberta government and education reform supporters to this thesis might be to dismiss the theory-in-use's claims outright. At this point, they might argue, the theory-in-use is little more than conjecture based on one researcher's interpretation and extrapolation of themes from a

small number of interviews. However, as Chapter 7 indicated, similar disquieting themes emerge from newspaper accounts and from educational researchers' and policy analysts' descriptions of educational reforms elsewhere, particularly in the UK. There appears to be sufficient evidence about the *potential* for unintended impacts of reform that it would be worthwhile to investigate the claims of the theory-in-use. Findings of this research could be used to increase policy makers' and educators' awareness of how the educational reforms work, especially their impacts on students and the education profession. Research results could also be used to increase public awareness and understanding of the operation of the reforms, including which underlying values the educational reforms are actually maximizing (i.e., the best possible opportunities for all or the best opportunities for the most capable). Informed members of the public can decide whether they wish to affirm these values or use the democratic process to bring about the changes they believe are necessary.

Qualitative Research

Given the relative lack of research on the impacts of Alberta's educational reforms, additional research using qualitative methodologies would be valuable. Qualitative research findings are likely to be particularly useful to educational professionals working at the school level, who would like to increase their understanding of how other schools are responding to the reforms. In-depth case studies that provide contextual information and detailed descriptions of implementation could be useful in helping principals and teachers decide whether a particular organizational strategy used by other schools is likely to work for them. For example, two of the schools in the current

study were very active in marketing and promoting themselves. Much could be learned by studying how schools in different circumstances vis-a-vis their examination results market themselves, and the costs and relative success and failure of different approaches. Another example is the case of devolved decision making. One school in this study encountered difficulties involving staff in making decisions related to a newly devolved responsibility to develop and print their own report cards. The interview responses in the current study indicated this may not have been handled in the optimal way by the school board given the conflict which developed within the school, and the duplication of effort across a number of schools. Greater insight into the processes involved in school-based decision-making could be obtained by studying the financial and behavioural 'ripple effect' this school board decision created in a number of schools, and the strategies that different schools used to deal with it.

The current study also raised important questions about the way in which parents and teachers were responding to the educational reforms. To the extent that the educational benefits that Alberta children receive from their classroom experiences improve, this will occur because these groups behave differently in response to the government's changed incentive structure. A great advantage of using qualitative methodologies is avoiding the trap of being 'captured by the discourse' of reform (Bowe, Gewirtz & Ball, 1994). For example, both the espoused theory and the theory-in-use assume that at least some parents define themselves as school customers and choose among schools. The difference is that under the espoused theory, the likelihood that a parent will exercise choice is not related to the parent's income or educational level. Unfortunately, the 'choice perspective' could lead immediately to surveys of parents, which are likely to imply by their line of questioning and prespecified

response options that parents define their relationship with the school as a market one, combine information about schools in a rational, linear way and choose the most desirable school. The danger of doing surveys which are not grounded in reality, is that a reconstructed picture of a school shopping parent may emerge that may not resemble most real parents (Bowe, Gewirtz, & Ball, 1994). Using qualitative methods, it would be possible to explore the school shopping issue further by interviewing parents individually or in focus groups to find out how individuals in different social circumstances come to send their children to particular schools, which may or may not be perceived by parents as a choice or decision.

Similarly, qualitative investigations might focus on the difference that the school's resource base and student clientele make to the working lives of principals and teachers. Participants' comments suggested that principals and teachers may have different views of reform, with principals more likely to feel empowered than teachers. The number of students in the school, which determines its resource base, and the family backgrounds of students served had a considerable impact on the experiences and work satisfaction of participants in my study. Staff at schools serving small student populations, especially schools situated in low income neighbourhoods, appeared to face the most difficult and stressful working conditions. Some of these schools are choosing to change the focus of their programs to attract additional students or to appeal to better disciplined or more academically inclined students. However, we know little about how these changes are experienced by the students or their parents. For example, how do staff at a school with a 'special' program (e.g., a Logos Christian curriculum) that appeals to school shopping parents and a 'regular' program that appeals to neighbourhood parents deal

with or reconcile potential value differences among staff, parents and children? And what happens to the neighbourhood students when a school decides to focus solely on a market segment different from the one it currently serves? These are important considerations because they have potential impacts for the quality of our lives and our children's lives, as well as our children's economic futures. Historically, the school has been an important institution enabling people in a neighbourhood to meet, know, trust and support each other. What happens when people who live near a school no longer view that school as an important part of their community?

Quantitative Research

Although qualitative research may shed considerable light on how reform influences the processes associated with educational delivery, the government may view the results of qualitative research as lacking in credibility, precisely because NPM prefers hard, 'objective' performance data. Qualitative research can help to identify impacts of reform; however, it is limited in that it does not allow the researcher to estimate their size or significance on a school board or provincial basis. Consequently, it is important to locate suitable quantitative data sets and use them to test the theory-in-use. Data that are already collected by school boards and education degree-granting universities and colleges may be perceived as most objective, particularly if their records are shown to be accurate and complete by an external audit. These types of data would include provincial achievement test results, student enrolment data, personnel data, and, in some cases, school board survey findings (provided the surveys employ proper sampling procedures, have well-constructed questions, have been conducted on repeated occasions, and have reasonably high

response rates).

For example, this thesis suggests that high income, well-educated parents shop for schools and they place particular emphasis on comparative school achievement test results in making their choices. Additional research is needed to establish the extent to which school shopping occurs (i.e., effect size) and its impact on the student population of schools over time. For example, information on student postal codes could be used to estimate the average income of students attending a school and to determine the proportion of students coming from outside the school's attendance boundaries. Multivariate statistical techniques could then be used to examine the effects of the socioeconomic status of a school's students on examination results in one year, and the impact of those examination results on the number of students attending the school, and the proportion from outside the school's boundaries in the September following the release of the examination results .

Examples of other questions that could be addressed quantitatively include:

- The extent of cross-district and cross school enrolment and the implementation of educational reforms. (To what extent are school boards now attracting and receiving students from outside their boundaries, for example, students from St. Albert attending Edmonton schools and vice versa? To what extent are public and separate school boards with overlapping boundaries, for example, the Edmonton Catholic School Board and the Edmonton Public School Board, serving students who have switched from a school in the other district? To what extent are students switching schools within the same district? Where were students enroled in charter

schools enroled previously?)

- The extent to which school selection procedures are indicative of creaming and the relationship of this practice to school location and enrolment (i.e., whether the school gets more requests for places than it can fill).

- The impact of making comparative school achievement examination information publicly available on subsequent school achievement examination performance and parent and student satisfaction with the school. (This is an area of great concern to school board officials, principals, teachers and the ATA.)

- Relationships among school achievement examination scores for high income and low income students, average income of the families in the school , and the implementation of educational reforms (e.g., whether students are improving their scores, whether the achievement gap is widening, narrowing or staying the same for students from high and low income neighbourhoods and whether the school the student attends -- e.g., small or large enrolment, high or low average student family income, high or low average examination results -- makes any difference to a student's performance when family income level is taken into account).

- Relationships among the average education and experience levels of staff and the school's organizational 'success' (as measured by achievement examination results, number of students, number of FTE staff, and/or budget), and the implementation of educational reforms.

- Relationships among the incidence of principal and teacher stress-related disability leaves, organizational 'success', and the implementation of educational reforms.

- Relationship between the incidence of principal and teacher turnovers, organizational 'success', and the implementation of educational reforms.

- Relationships between trends in applications and enrolments for undergraduate and graduate education degrees at universities and colleges across the province and the the implementation of educational reforms.

Large school boards would likely have the data required to investigate these kinds of questions. Unfortunately, with provincially mandated administrative spending cutbacks, school boards may lack the resources to conduct these investigations, particularly with the province's additional demands to measure performance and report results. There is also the possibility of a perceived conflict of interest issue if school boards conduct the research themselves. Consequently, given appropriate confidentiality safeguards were in place, school boards might prefer to allow university-based education policy researchers to access and analyze the critical data sets. In addition to resource considerations and the greater openness of the process to peer reviews, an advantage to allowing independent researchers to perform the research would be the opportunity to compare patterms of findings across different school boards.

Practical Advice

The findings of research are unlikely to result in immediate changes to the educational reforms. Regardless of their opinions of the reforms and their impacts, system stakeholders must continue to deal with the reforms. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline some positive response options for parents, principals and teachers.

Parents

The research results discussed in the previous chapter suggest claims the school system as a whole was 'failing' prior to the reforms or that our economic productivity is suffering as a consequence of the educational system are difficult to support. Furthermore, school effectiveness studies indicate (and the educators interviewed in this study concur) that the most important factor in determining a student's comparative performance in school as measured by standard achievement examinations is the student's family situation. Consequently, parents concerned about their child's achievement in school should, first of all pay attention to their role as parents and do the best they can at performing their parenting role. Second, they should reinforce the value of education with their child through activities such as reading to the child and taking an interest in the child's school work. Third, whether or not they become actively involved with the school as a volunteer or school council member, they should keep the lines of communication with the school open, visit the school, and interact periodically with the child's teachers and principal.

Parents who want to choose a school should recognize that achievement examination scores and promotional brochures may not tell them all that they need to know. Parents should consider visiting and observing what

goes on in a school during a regular school day, not just on open house night. They should also be realistic about what to expect from school choice, and the inherent uncertainties involved. All schools in Alberta teach the same basic curriculum. There is usually some turnover in school staff from year to year. For these reasons, there is no guarantee that the school chosen will turn out to be exactly what the parent thought she was choosing, or significantly better than the rejected options. Any school could potentially be a good choice, if the parent is prepared to work with, support, and recognize the efforts of the staff. The issue is perhaps not so much which school is 'best' as how the individual child responds to the school, and whether his interest and enjoyment in learning is maintained or increased by the program (i.e., the school is the right school for the child).

Some parents may now be expressing their freedom to choose by threatening to withdraw their child from a school whenever a teacher, principal, or other student at the school does something that displeases them. This is unlikely to be produce long run benefits. More likely, it will increase adversarial relations between the school and the parent. Furthermore, withdrawing or threatening to withdraw a child from school models a conflict resolution strategy that emphasizes blaming problems on others, winning at all costs and immediate personal gratification. Subsequent use of this strategy by the child is unlikely to lead to successful and fulfilling interpersonal relationships in school, in the community or in the child's furture workplaces. Therefore, parents should consider withdrawing a child from a school as an option of last resort, only after other alternatives for resolving the problem have been thoroughly explored with school staff and with the child, and have proven unsatisfactory.

In the case of some problems arising at the school, depending on the

maturity of the child and the seriousness of the problem, the parent might be wise to encourage the child to deal directly with the principal or teacher or other student to obtain a resolution. A child who is continually protected from dealing with the consequences of her behaviour (e.g., failing to turn in assignments on time) is unlikely to acquire a winning set of work habits or social skills. A parent who deliberately exercises restraint in wielding 'customer power' may do more to facilitate the education of the child than one who uses it frequently.

Principals and Teachers

The educational reforms are making what can be a difficult job at times more stressful. There are many drawbacks to government reforms, but there are some potential advantages if parents are, or can be convinced to become, supportive partners in their children's education. Open and constructive dealings with parents are becoming increasingly important, and most parents will respond. The more opportunities that parents have for positive interactions with the school, the more they are likely to support the school and the efforts of the staff.

There appears to be no particular benefit to a school with low achievement examination results getting defensive about them, despite the potential damage that they may do to a school's enrolment and resources. Expressions of concern about the publication of unadjusted results by school board officials or teacher representatives may simply intensify parent interest. Members of the public, wondering why educators are so upset about the release of this information, may conclude that educators are trying to hide something.

While it is likely there will always be some level of curiosity or interest in

this information, the current high levels may be partly attributable to the novelty of the information and media attention. It is possible that, over time, the fascination with comparative achievement examination results may diminish somewhat . For example, the comparative achievement test results of Calgary schools, which were released for the first time in May, were front section news in the *Calgary Herald*. However, they tended to appear further back in the *Edmonton Journal*. EPSB schools have made these results available for years; hence, they are no longer 'news'. There is nothing that precludes a school board or school principal from measuring or reporting performance in additional, more meaningful ways for external or internal consumption, or adding explanatory commentary to accountability reports, provided the province's reporting requirements are satisified.

In motivating teachers to improve, principals should appeal to teachers' desire to do better for the children, rather than focusing excessively on meeting the school's business plan achievement targets. Furthermore, curriculum-based projects that encourage teachers to become more reflective about, and critical of, their own approaches are likely to have greater paybacks than involving teachers in the more mundane school management decisions. For example, news articles discussed in the previous chapter point to the possible benefits of team teaching as a way of countering the feelings of loneliness, fatigue, and stress that some of the teachers in this thesis study reported experiencing.

Teachers who are encouraged to increase their classroom effectiveness are likely to find they get a more positive response to their teaching from students. They will enjoy their jobs more if they see the motivation and achievement of their students is improving, and probably suffer less from stress-

related illnesses. Principals who emphasize their educational leadership role, encouraging their teachers to increase their effectiveness, are likely have an easier time balancing the competing accountability pressures described in this thesis. For example, they will likely have fewer parents threatening to withdraw their children (because their children enjoy school more) and fewer teachers requesting transfers (because they enjoy teaching more).

A principal who puts a high emphasis on professionalism, and the evaluation obligation that being a professional entails, will encourage teachers to self-appraise but will also encourage them to maintain an open stance to external evaluative feedback. This principal will encourage staff to make the maximum constructive use of the school's achievement examination results, for example, to diagnose problems in the presentation of the curriculum to the extent they can be used for this, and to help keep staff honest in their self-appraisals. He will also encourage the staff to compare the school's performance to other schools which provide realistic benchmarks (i.e., schools that have student populations with similar demographics, or similar special programs).

Aspects of the market competition between schools, particularly those in the same school system, appear to be counterproductive in that they lead to duplicate effort and expense and to divert time away from the task of educating students. To the extent that principals encourage and reinforce professionalism among their staff, this may mitigate some of the self-interested organizational and individual behaviour that the educational reforms may promote. For example, schools who take a professional approach to serving the needs of students will be more likely to cooperate with other schools and less likely to engage in goal displacing behaviours such as creaming.

Cooperation in the form of exchanging information on strategies and sharing resources makes sense, particularly in the case of small schools serving students from low income neighbourhoods. These are the schools most likely to experience severe resource difficulties, and joining forces may be the key to survival.

Conclusion

Parents, teachers, principals, school boards, Alberta Education, the Alberta Teachers' Association, businesses and the public at large have an interest in ensuring Alberta has a strong public education system. We need to conduct further research to better understand the processes of educational reform and its long term impacts,. However, there is an equally important and urgent need for each of us to consider how we contribute to creating or solving the problems in the public education system. For it is not until we understand how our decisions contribute to the system's problems, that we are likely to devise better policies to guide it.

The theory-in-use paints a bleak picture of the future of public education in Alberta. It is a future where the province's disadvantaged children find it increasingly difficult to acquire the education they need to improve their circumstances and where Albertans lose their sense of compassion and fairness, and their sense of community along with their neighbourhood schools. This thesis ends with a quote from private school researchers Maxwell and Maxwell (1995, p.321-322), which speaks to the importance of public schools to our quality of life. I remain personally optimistic that an awareness of the power of our choices to behaviourally confirm the theory-in-use will lead us to find ways to behaviourally disconfirm it.

"If the public (state) school system were significantly weakened as one of the few phenomena in society that is commonly experienced, solidarity of Canadian society would rest on a precarious base of shopping malls and the mass media -- not a very firm footing for a growing pluralism. Canada has a very strong and high quality public education system and traditionally, both for those who loved school and those who hated it, the school and public education have been a life long reference point."

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APPENDIX A:

Alberta Education Goals and Performance Measures
Source: Alberta Education (1995b)

Goal 1: *Focus education on what students need to learn; ensure that high standards are established, communicated and achieved.*

Learning Standards Measures

1) Percentage of parents and public who agree that students are learning what they need to know.

2) Parents and public ratings of learning expectations for students.

3) Percentage of parents who are satisfied with the quality of education their child is receiving in school.

High School Completion

4) Rate of high school completion.

5) Percentage of Alberta students entering grade 9 in 1988/89 who completed high school within 6 years.

Preparation for the Workplace or Post-Secondary Education

6) Percentage of Albertans who are satisfied with the graduation requirements for high school students in Alberta (principals, teachers, employers, post-secondary instructors, public).

7) Percentage of Albertans who agree that high school graduates are prepared for the workplace or post-secondary education (high school students, employers, parents of K-12 students, public, post-secondary instructors).

Provincial Achievement Test Results

8) Percentage of students in grades 3, 6, and 9 who achieved the standards on provincial achievement tests (acceptable standard, standard of excellence).

Diploma Examination Results

9)   Percentage of students writing grade 12 diploma examinations who achieved the standards (acceptable standard, standard of excellence).

Literacy Rates and Interprovincial Comparisons

10) Alberta students age 13 performing at or above the level 2 standard compared to the Canadian results (based on a five-level model where level 2 is the age 13 standard; areas tested are reading, writing, mathematics content, mathematics problem solving).

11) Alberta students age 16 performing at or above the level 3 standard compared to the Canadian results (based on a five-level model where level 3 is the age 16 standard; areas tested are reading, writing, mathematics content, mathematics problem solving).

Goal 2: *Provide parents with greater opportunity to select schools and programs of their choice and enable greater parent/community involvement in education.*

Involvement in Decision Making and Support for Parent Choice

12) Percentage of Albertans who are satisfied with the opportunity to be involved in decisions affecting education at schools in their community and at their local school board (parents, public, teachers, employers).

13) Percentage of parents and public involved to varying degrees in decision making at the school level and at the school board level.

Involvement in Provincial Decision Making

14) Involvement in Alberta Education decision-making -- special focus consultations, advisory committees, working groups (parents; teachers, principals, superintendents, other school district personnel, post-secondary educators; employers/businesses; public-at large including students, trustees, representatives of associations and agencies; school council members; others).

Role of Business and the Community in Education

15) Involvement reported by employers (businesses, government and non-government in Alberta schools (percentage reporting involvement in funding programs, field trips to place of business, sponsorships, mentoring/job shadowing, speakers' events, career days, student scholarships, formal partnership agreements).

16) Involvement of students and schools in the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) and work experience.

Goal 3: *Improve the coordination of services for children with special needs.*

Services for Children with Special Needs

17) Extent to which services for children with special needs are coordinated between schools/ECS operators and outside agencies and professionals (# of services provided jointly)

18) Percentage of parents of children with severe special needs who are satisfied with services provided for their children (service aspects include overall service, effectiveness, relevance, accessibility, and relevance). Note: Parents of children with mild and moderate disabilities to be added to the survey in 1996.

Goal 4: *Improve teaching.*

Teachers' Knowledge and Skills

19) Percentage of teachers and principals who agree that teachers have the skills and knowledge and classroom autonomy to help students learn.

20) Percentage of teachers and principals who agree that teachers who have taken professional development programs can better meet students' needs.

Goal 5: *Achieve increased efficiencies and effectiveness in the education system through restructuring the governance and delivery of education.*

Albertans' Views on Education Efficiencies

21) Percentage of parents who are satisfied that their child's school is well run.

22) Percentage of parents and the public who are satisfied that their local school system is well run.

Efficiencies in Education

23) Percentage of school jurisdiction spending on instruction and central office services.

24) Changes in the number of public and separate school boards and school trustees.

Students' Satisfaction with Their Education

25) Percentage of high school students who are satisfied with the quality of education they are receiving in school.

26) Percentage of high school students who are satisfied with opportunities for involvement in activities and decisions outside the classroom.

27) Percentage of high school students who agree that school staff support their learning endeavours (percentage agreeing: expectations for behaviour at school are clear; learning to take responsibility for their own actions; have the opportunity to make choices about the courses they can take; clear on what they are expected to learn; teachers provide the help and support they need to learn; teachers use a variety of approaches to meet their individual needs; challenged to do your best).

Goal 6: *Ensure that all school boards are adequately and equitably funded.*

Course and Program Opportunities

28) Average number of complementary course credits competed by high school students.

Jurisdiction Spending on Students

29)   Differences in per student expenditure by school jurisdictions.

Goal 7: _Manage Alberta Education effectively and efficiently to achieve department and government goals._

30)   Staffing levels in Alberta Education since 1992/93.

31)   Cost per student of department services since 1992/93.

Goal 8: _Ensure the cost of education is reasonable and under control._

Cost of Education in Alberta

32)   Total expenditure per FTE student per school per school day from 1992/93.

33)   Cost of school construction per square meter from 1992/93.

34)   Average annual provincial equalized mill rates from 1993 (Alberta School Foundation Fund - Basic Levy).

35)   Percentage of parents and the public who are satisfied they are receiving value for money that is spent in their local school.

Interprovincial Expenditure Comparisons

36)   Interprovincial comparisons of expenditures per student 1992/93 to 1994/95.

37)   Interprovincial comparisons of per capita expenditures on education 1992/93 to 1994/95.

Goal 9: _Ensure that the education system is open and accountable._

Parent Satisfaction with School Information

38)   Percentage of parents who are satisfied with overall student achievement information from their school (satisfaction with access to information; satisfaction with the information itself).

39) Percentage of parents who are satisfied with the information from their school on their child's educational progress and achievement (satisfaction with access to information; satisfaction with the information itself).

Quality of and Access to Education Information

40) Percentage of parents and public who are satisfied with the access they have to information about how money is spent (by the local school; by the local school board).

41) Percentage of parents and public who are satisfied with information received about how money is spent (by the local school; by the local school board).

APPENDIX B:

Letter of Invitation to Participate Provided to All Teachers at the Study Schools

MBA Program
2-30 Faculty of Business
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2R6

Dear _____;

I am a student in the MBA Program at the University of Alberta who is currently conducting a thesis research project. The project is examining the impact of information that schools choose, or are required, to collect on school decision-making and organizational behaviour.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to spare an hour of your time to be interviewed for this project. A description of the project is contained on the attached sample consent form. Your principal is aware that I am approaching teachers in this school to participate. However, your decision to participate is entirely voluntary.

This research study has received ethical approval from the Faculty of Business Research Ethics Review Committee. If you decide to participate, I will request that you sign a copy of the consent form before the interview.

If you have questions about the study you would like me to answer before deciding whether or not you are willing to participate, I would be happy to answer them. You can reach me or leave a message at (telephone number) or contact me at my Internet e-mail address, which is judevans@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca.

I would appreciate it if you would indicate your decision below and return this page sealed in the envelope provided to _____
by _____.

Thank you very much for taking time to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Judy Evans

____ Yes, I would be willing to be contacted regarding an interview.

I would prefer to be contacted: _____ at the school or (please specify):

_____

_____ No, I do not wish to be interviewed.

APPENDIX C:

Consent Information and Form

CONSENT FORM INFORMATION

Title:	Organizational Learning in Schools: Analysis of Information Uses and Impacts
Investigator:	Judy Evans c/o MBA Program 2-30 Faculty of Business University of Alberta T6G 2R6 Telephone: _____ (home) E-mail: judevans@gpu.srv.ualberta.ca
Purpose:	I am interested in developing an in-depth understand of the kinds of information that schools collect, how they use information in school-based decision-making, the impacts of information on organizational behaviour, how principals and teachers perceive the value of different kinds of information, and the reasons for similarities and differences in the way that information is used by, affects and is perceived by staff in different schools. I am using this information to develop a case study of this school for my MBA thesis research.
Procedure:	This study involves one session, which will consist of an interview approximately one hour in length. The interview can be conducted at the school or another location if it is more convenient for you. It can also be conducted by telephone if you prefer. There is a chance that I may need to contact you again for a brief follow-up if I need to clarify or confirm the meaning of something you say in the interview.
Risks:	The interview will ask you to provide your thoughts and views on information use and information impacts in this school. The questions are not believed to be of a highly sensitive or personal nature. However, your decision to answer or not to answer any question is completely free and voluntary. You may refuse to answer.

Confidentiality: With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped. The tape will be transcribed. After transcribing the tape, the tape will be erased. The transcribed information will be stored on computer using an identification code. Any personal information that might identify you will be deleted from the transcript. The data analysis and reporting of results will not reflect the individual identities of participants or the name of the school.

If you do not wish the interview to be taped but consent to participate, I will take handwritten notes.

Time Commitment: The interview will require approximately one hour of your time, with the chance of a short follow-up contact in the next few weeks.

Withdrawal: As your participation is completely voluntary, you may withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice.

Results: Your school will be provided with a copy of my MBA thesis. However, if you would like summary of the results, please indicate this on the consent form.

Questions: If you have any questions about the study, I would be pleased to answer them.

CONSENT FORM

I acknowledge that the nature of this study has been described to me and that any questions that I have asked were answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided with an information sheet on the study and have read it . I understand that I am being asked to participate in one interview which will be taped if I give my permission. I understand that the interview takes approximately one hour and that there may be a brief follow-up contact by the researcher. I understand that am not required to answer any question at my discretion and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that the interview will be completed at the school or some other location or by telephone at my convenience. I have been assured that my responses during the interview will be kept completely confidential.

I understand that I may keep a copy of the information sheet and this consent form, and I know that should I have more questions at any time, I may contact the researcher, Judy Evans.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Signature of Researcher

_____   Check here if you would like to receive a
Date   the results: _____

APPENDIX D:

Interview Topic Guide

I.   Participant's Questions & Informed Consent

- Would you please take a moment to read over the information on the participant consent form.
- Do you have any questions about the study before we begin?
- Have I answered all of your questions to your satisfaction?
- Would you please sign one copy of the consent form? The other copy is for your records.
- Do I have your permission to tape this interview?

2.   Environmental Context

- What are some of the environmental factors that influence the way this school operates?
  - e.g., political, economic, social, technological trends?
- How do these factors influence the operation of the school?
- *If not mentioned previously:*
  - How do your students influence the operation of the school?
  - How do the parents influence the operation of the school?
  - How does the district influence the operation of the school?
  - How does Alberta Education influence the operation of the school?

3.   School Decision-Making

- What are some examples of decisions made at the school level
  - e.g., budgeting, planning, operating, monitoring, evaluating, marketing/recruiting?
- *For 2 or 3 specific examples mentioned by participant:*
  - How are these kinds of decisions made?
  - Who is involved?
  - What roles do they play in the decision process?

4.   Information Available to the School

- What are some examples of kinds of information available for school-based decision-making?
  - e.g., received, collected or generated within the school?
- How or where do you obtain this information?

- If the school collects the information, what costs or resources are involved?
    - e.g., money, staff time, student time?
- Are you required to collect certain information by the district or Alberta Education? Which information?
- *If some information is collected that is not externally mandated:*
    - What led you to begin collecting this information?

5. Information Uses and Impacts

- *For 2 or 3 specific examples mentioned by participant:*
    - How is the information used at the school level?
    - What kinds of school-based decisions are affected by the information?
    - Who else uses the information? For what purposes?
    - How does this information affect the way you do your job?

6. Information Value

- What kinds of information available to this school have the greatest value? Why are they valuable?
- What kinds of information have the least value? Why aren't they valuable?
- Are there any kinds of information that you think would be of value to this school but are not currently available? What kinds of information? Why would they be valuable?

7. Follow Up on Participant's Issues

- Issues raised by the participant but not included in the topic guide will be followed up during the interview or else at this point.

8. Review of Major Themes and Key Points

- Summarize the key points and then ask:
    - Does this reflect what you said? Did I understand you correctly?
- From your perspective, is there anything else about information, its uses or impacts that we haven't discussed that you'd like to comment on or add?

9. Background

Teachers:

- How many years have you been a teacher?
- How many years have taught in this school?
- What grade level(s) do you currently teach?
- What subjects do you currently teach?

Assistant Principals and Principals:

- How many years have you been a teacher?
- How many years have you been an assistant principal?
- How many years have you been a principal?
- How long have you been assistant principal/principal of this school?
- Do you currently teach any classes?
- What grade level(s) do you currently teach?
- What subjects do you currently teach?

Principals

- How many students are currently enrolled in this school?
- How many staff do you have in total?
- How many of these staff are teachers?
- Are there any characteristics of this school that you feel make it different from other schools? (Note: The purpose of this question is to help me interpret patterns of findings that may be different from other schools.)
- I would like to interview 5 to 7 teacher volunteers from this school to see the extent of variation that exists in the ideas and experiences of staff. I'm not looking for any particular teacher characteristics. What I'd like to do is to interview a good cross section of teachers -- teachers with different levels of experience teaching different grades and subjects.
- What is the best way to contact the teachers in order to determine if they are willing to volunteer? For example, do they have staff mailboxes?
- Could a temporary research project mailbox be created so they can communicate with me (e.g., willingness to volunteer)?

10. That's the last of my questions. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me about the project?