## NOTICE

## AVIS

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

**University of Alberta**


POLICY PROBLEMS AND ISSUES:

SCHOOL BOARD DECISION MAKING DURING TIMES OF CHANGE


by

Parnel Patsy Anne Pierce                     ©


A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy


in


Educational Administration

Department of Educational Policy Studies


Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 1995

ISBN   0-612-01746-X

Canadä

# University of Alberta

## Library Release Form

**Name of Author:** Parnel Patsy Anne Pierce

**Title of Thesis:** Policy Problems and Issues: School Board Decision Making During Times of Change

**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

**Year This Degree Granted:** 1995

Permission is hereby granted to The University Of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as herein before provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.
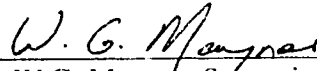
13315-136 A Ave. NW
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada, T5L 4B8

April 5 1995
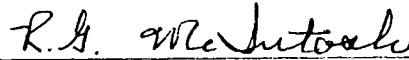
**University of Alberta**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research**
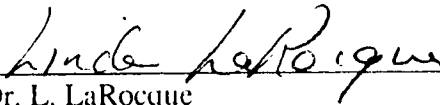
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate

Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled POLICY PROBLEMS AND

ISSUES: SCHOOL BOARD DECISION MAKING DURING TIMES OF CHANGE

submitted by Parnel Patsy Anne Pierce in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration.
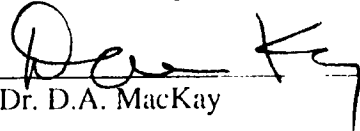
Dr. W.G. Maynes, Supervisor
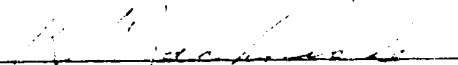
Dr. R.G. McIntosh
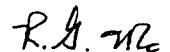
Dr. L. LaRocque

Dr. D.A. MacKay

Dr. K.G. Jacknicke

Dr. B.L. Malen, External Examiner

# ABSTRACT

The thesis *Policy Problems and Issues: School Board Decision Making During Times of Change* is based on the story of a school board as it faced the challenges of imposed organizational change. The general purpose of the study is to analyze and interpret the decision-making activities of the trustees and their superintendent as related to policy formulation. Specifically the study works to explain the human interactions that affect how organizational matters become defined as problems, how issues related to the problems are recognized, and how these issues are dealt with. The study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm utilizing qualitative methodology. Primary data were gathered through a series of individual interviews. These data were clarified and extended by selected observations and a review of relevant documentation. A "real-time" study format was used.

The conceptual areas selected for the study's framework are those of issues, participants, organizational environment, and process. The main research questions guiding the study are relevant to these conceptual areas. To give the study's framework depth in its theoretical perspective, five "conceptual" themes are also presented and serve to synthesize the findings in a holistic manner.

The major findings of the study, expressed as working hypotheses, relate to how policy decisions are made during times of organizational calm and how they evolve during times of change and turmoil. An important observation was that school board decision-making behavior differed significantly from times of organizational calm to times of change. Though activities related to problem definition remained the same, issue

recognition and issue support differed in important ways. The effect of environmental influences on the school board's decision making was also examined. Here the political activities of the government were found to be significant factors in the district's ability to set its own policy agenda.

The thesis concludes with the author's views as a researcher and her personal reflections regarding some of the major findings of the study. This more personalized section was provided because the "real-time" format of the study made its findings so directly applicable to current events in public education in the Province of Alberta.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

proposal. **Dr. K.G. Jacknicke** was supportive and accommodating and brought to our meetings suggestions that encouraged a broader perspective to educational administrative studies. **Dr. L. LaRocque** helped me think through and practice the qualitative methodology needed for my study. She was a warm and enthusiastic supporter of my efforts throughout the entire doctoral program. I thank **Dr. R.G. McIntosh** for chairing my final oral and for his assistance in my preparation for it. His calm, reassuring attitude did much to dispel the stress I was feeling. And finally, it was an honour to have **Dr. B.L. Malen** from the University of Maryland agree to be my external examiner. The thoroughness and scholarly excellence with which she undertook her task was noteworthy. I learned a great deal from the wealth of information she shared with us and wish to extend my sincere gratitude for her assistance.

In closing I wish to acknowledge the support I received from my husband Lynd. His forbearance when I was heavily preoccupied with my work was remarkable. His assistance with the computer technology I used was essential. His continual encouragement throughout my work was a necessary balm to my spirit. I thank him for helping me reach my goal.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Canadian public education is expected to provide students with appropriate educational opportunities from their beginning years in primary school to the post secondary level. In the North American setting, education has been highly valued as a way to achieve important goals. It is believed that individual, social and economic benefits are realized when the citizens have access to quality educational opportunities. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of educational decision makers, at both the provincial and local levels, to ensure that the type of schooling experiences needed to satisfy these multi-level needs are provided. It has been noted that, too often, demands by society are "wide ranging, ambiguous and lack consensus" (Sroufe, 1977). In more recent times, similar questions with respect to the role of public education have been raised by both educators and the general public. Some express the opinion that schools should focus on programs that will prepare students for specific employment and thus enhance the economy of the country, while others insist that schools need to present a broad range of programs in order to produce well-rounded, well-educated individuals. As financial restraints become the norm at all levels of public education, decision makers are finding it increasingly difficult to meet such wide-ranging expectations placed on schools. It is not surprising to find that many educators define today's educational decision making as a process of making difficult choices, among many alternatives, within a context of uncertainty and change. But choices must be made and those in leadership positions must make them.

The study reported herein examines the dynamics of making such choices in a district level, policy-making arena. The focus is on elected school board members who possess the legislated mandate to make these choices. More specifically, the study examined the filtering process which occurs as issues are considered for formal placement on the district's policy-making agenda. This focus suggests a number of interesting questions. How are educational concerns recognized and defined as problems? How do these concerns give rise to issues and why is it some issues become part of a body of policy problems and others do not (Berry, 1989; May, 1986). Delving into the origins of policy issues and examining how they reach the formal policy agenda is important in developing an understanding of policy formulation and policy determination (Pross, 1986).

## Statement of the Problem

The general purpose of this study was to analyze and interpret the decision-making activities undertaken by elected officials of a school jurisdiction and their school superintendent, as they considered policy problems and related issues confronting them as leaders of a district. The goal was to locate, document and interpret phenomena that surround this activity. The purpose of the study was to define and explain those social interactions that affect how organizational matters become defined as problems, how issues related to the problems are recognized, and how these issues are dealt with. In addressing the needs of the study, primary data were gathered through a series of interviews conducted with the members of a board of education and its superintendent. Additional, supportive data were acquired by observing meetings where board members

discussed, debated and made decisions on routine and evolving district matters, and by

undertaking a review of available school district documents pertaining to meetings and

discussions held on school issues.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was developed to provide a basis for

examining how policy issues arise from a policy problem, how issues are recognized and

how they are subsequently dealt with. It served as a guide to data collection and data

analysis. The conceptual framework is based on the assumption that, in an organization,

problem recognition and issue consideration come about through the interaction of a

variety of stakeholders. In addition, many factors in the context of an organization and

elements in its broader environment have an effect on the processes of problem definition

and issue recognition, selection and prioritizing. The conceptual areas selected for the

framework are those of issues, participants, organizational environment, and process.

### Issues

Issues are matters of concern. They are concerns or disputes that arise after a

problem has been recognized in the organization and identified as needing attention.

Issues emanate from discussions related to how a problem is to be solved. An individual

or a group may cite an issue and give it recognition by means of inquiry or advocacy. For

example, if certain questions regarding a problem are raised repeatedly, then issues may

become defined and connected to the problem. As such, the definition of the issue may be

more important in its promotion than its origin (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Often such consideration leads to issue "clusters" being defined (Dunn, 1981). Issues gain further recognition if individuals or groups feel strongly enough about them to actively work at promoting their stance on the phenomena. Issue selection is dependent on a variety of factors. Sometimes circumstances in society give rise to issue recognition. An event, speech or unusual occurrence, either in the organization or in its environment, may suddenly focus attention on a problem (Kingdon, 1984). As a result, issues related to the problem become the centre of attention because, in order for a policy problem to be solved, the issues attached to it must first be dealt with. Further, not all issues are seen to have equal importance by decision makers and thus debates over priorities among issues occur as well. Such discussions reflect the strongly held values and beliefs of those who promote each set of issues and give the debate over issues a political dimension (Lindblom, 1990). In the end, the goal of the decision makers is to agree on a set of policy issues that usefully frame the policy problem.

## Participants

For action to be taken on a policy problem, it must gain the attention of those in the organization who are involved in formulating policy. Someone or some group must bring it forward in a manner that causes other important members of the organization to consider the problem's merit. The priority of one problem over another can be accentuated through a careful selection of issue clusters. Issues help define the parameters of the problem. Herein lies the process of issue advocacy. Such advocacy has many sources. It may originate inside the organization. The administrative officials, members of

the bureaucracy, clients, or supporting staff may bring forward issues. Advocacy may come from outside the organization primarily from those who have vested interests in the organization. Some writers have labelled this group of outside participants the "attentive public" (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984; Pross, 1986). The attentive public is made up of stakeholders such as organizational members, business representatives, government agencies, and sectors of the general public. At various times these stakeholders may choose to bring to the attention of significant others, issues they see as associated with certain unrealized organizational goals or problems (Dunn, 1981). Attention is sought of other sectors in the attentive public for purposes of support, but most of all, attention is sought of people in the "policy community" (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984). The policy community is comprised of people who have the position and/or power of influence to hold sway over policy agenda setting. Political leaders, top-echelon career bureaucrats, government advisors, and government sponsored lobbyists become prime targets for those seeking to promote an issue. Policy issues eventually gain recognition through the action and interaction of individuals and groups within the organization and in its broader environment.

## Organizational Context and Environment

What occurs in both the immediate context of an organization and its broader environment has a significant influence on policy formulation. Of importance is not only what occurs in these areas but what results as the organization interacts and is affected by external factors. An open systems organization is particularly sensitive to environmental activity. In such organizations, identification of policy problems, and discussions

regarding policy issues, will be significantly influenced by situations and participants in the environment. This is so primarily because of the organization's resource dependency on its environment. To survive and prosper, a consistent pattern of interaction is usually developed between the organization and its stakeholders in the external environment. Such interactions influence greatly how policy issues are recognized, clarified and prioritized. What occurs between the organization and it environment might be likened to a filtration process which results in the screening of ideas, facts, values and beliefs between the two. The perception building and decision making that occurs during the filtering process are shaped by factors that are many and varied. They may be the prevailing public opinion, its mood and concerns at a particular time, ongoing administrative changes in the organization, the broader economic circumstances, or a defining political event such as an election.

Other important factors operating within the organization may include availability of personnel time and energy and the availability of resources, both inside the organization and in its environment (Kingdon, 1984; Pross, 1986). Inside the organization, constraints related to the state and capacity of the organization also affect the success of efforts to influence actions. Outside the organization, how organized pressure groups become involved and the effectiveness of lobby efforts also influence the way in which issues are considered. As well, the prevailing values and mores of society affect the filtration of issues. In general, individuals and groups will strive to utilize both formal and informal political arenas in order to present and focus attention on their issues (Dye, 1978; Kimbrough, 1964; Kinder, 1978).

## Process

Process is defined as "an orderly or established series of steps or operations toward a desired result or product" (Webster, 1984, p. 558). Policy making has been described as a set of processes, each occurring at a different time and place along the continuum of overall policy development (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Dunn, 1981; Kingdon, 1984). For example, policy formulation is marked by its own unique set of activities as is policy implementation and policy evaluation. Though a relationship exists between the various policy processes, and one process can affect the other, success in one does not mean the policy initiative will be successfully shepherded through another process level. In an effort to ensure success for a desired policy direction, participants may choose to be involved in one policy process over another. For purposes of this study, the process related to the initial stage of policy making, that is policy formulation, has been selected for examination. Policy formulation includes the activities surrounding problem definition and the recognition and prioritizing of issues relevant to the policy problem. Activities related to policy formulation occur both inside the organization and outside in the organization's environment.

Inside an organization there tends to be episodic activity surrounding policy formulation. It is engaged in by various people at various times. Though speculation may be that those in the organization with the greatest amount of power and authority dominate the policy formulation, such a view may be too simplistic, not accounting for the process in its entirety. For example, elected members may want to elevate those issues that reflect their held values and beliefs, but may be reluctant to do so because of political

considerations, scarcity of time, lack of expert knowledge, or because of bureaucratic

blocking (Kelman, 1981; Kingdon, 1984). As a result, "They may express the sense that a

problem exists but then shunt it off to the administration to decide" (Kelman, 1981, p. 9).

On the other hand, it has been pointed out that though the political executive might

delegate lesser matters to the administration, most often the elite will work to recognize

and promote the more significant problems and deal with related issues on its own (Pross,

1986). Some authors also present information that indicates it is the bureaucracy--the

upper level administrators--of an organization that is in the best position to influence

policy formulation. They point out that since policy making is usually bureaucratic in

nature, bureaucrats, by virtue of their hierarchical position in the organization, are in an

enviable position. They know not only how to promote an issue, but which issue to select

for promotion (Kelman, 1981; Kingdon, 1984; Pross, 1986). "Case studies teach us that

the policy process is highly bureaucratic and the most successful groups know whom to

talk to and when" (Pross, 1986, p. 15). From past practice, the bureaucracy understands

how things get accomplished. Bureaucrats are able to judge which problem is ready to be

identified and which issues are more likely to gain recognition in the system. A further

advantage rests with the fact that senior bureaucrats do their work in close proximity to

decision makers and thus have consistent access to them.

But there are other stakeholders within the organization who are able to impact the

policy process at an early stage. For example, employees may do so through their union

representatives, through their interactions with administration, during contract

negotiations, or through their ongoing contacts with the organization's public. Further,

the venues for problem clarification and issue discussion inside the organization are both

formal and informal in nature and thus expand the realm of who is able to take part in the

policy-making process in either a direct or indirect manner.

Outside the organization, the organization's attentive public is recognized as

having a role to play in policy development in spite of the fact that such a role is more

problematic. It is problematic in matters pertaining to policy formulation because the

attentive public is located outside the organization. This places it at a distance from the

centre of formal decision-making activity. This disadvantage can be overcome by the

effective use of both formal and informal contacts with organizational decision makers.

The attentive public also realizes that it is crucial to impact policy makers before they

begin making judgements on issue selection. This means aiming for the earliest possible

inter ention into policy making (Pross, 1986). If the organization exhibits a positive

policy-making capacity, that is it encourages a wider participation in policy formulation,

then delegates from the attentive public move freely from formal to informal policy-

making arenas where they are able to express their views. If this positive policy-making

capacity is lacking, then participants may form alliances, begin lobbying efforts, intensify

pressure group activity, consider the application of sanctions, and work to strengthen their

communication networks. The above examples serve to illustrate how complex the

process of policy formulation can be.

Important understandings gleaned from the above four policy strands of issues,

participants, organizational environment, and process, comprise the conceptual framework

for the study. Each area provides substance to, and a basis for, the examination of policy

formulation. Woven into these conceptual areas, and tying them together, are five conceptual themes. These themes served as tentative or "working" hypotheses to be explored through the st. ly. A hypothesis can be a theory that explains a set of facts or it can be an assumption that is used as a basis for investigation or argument (Webster, 1984). For this study, the latter definition suits the purposes of research activity.

## Conceptual Themes

The five conceptual themes listed below cut across the four conceptual areas outlined in the previous section. The themes are:

1. Policy matters are shaped by formal and informal power structures operating in both the organization and the organization's environment.

2. Various individuals and groups in an organization, and associated with it, do not possess equal power to access or influence policy making.

3. The level of interest, influence and power enacted by individuals or a group is likely to fluctuate depending upon the policy issue.

4. Variations of power and influence amongst individuals and groups are associated with differences in access to, and control of, political resources.

5. District policies are affected by decisions made outside the authority of the local board of education.

These five "conceptual" themes are revisited in the final chapter of the study. There they serve as a framework for presenting a synthesis of the findings of the study.

## Research Questions

Based on the study of the literature related to each of the "conceptual areas"--

issues, participants, organizational context, and process--specific questions were

developed to serve as guides for data collection and analysis.  Their specificity was

particularly useful for purposes of data analysis.  But, in accord with the interpretive

design of the study, more general and open-ended questions were used for the interviews.

These can be found in Appendix I.  The specific questions are presented below.

### The Issues

1. What issues arise from problem recognition and definition?

2. Wha  ctors contribute to an issue being brought forward for discussion?

3. How .   .ssues filtered for policy consideration?

4. What factors influence the rise and fall of interest in certain issues?

### Participants

1. Which individuals and groups emerge as influencial participants within the

formal decision-making structure of the school board?

2. Which individuals and groups emerge as influential participants in the informal

power structure of the school district?

3. What interest perspectives do key participants represent and to what extent do

they see themselves as representing these perspectives?

### Environmental Factors

1. What factors within the organization affect the type of issues discussed?

2. What external factors influence the selection of issues for discussion?

3. To what extent, and in what ways, do political factors in the organization's environment influen : the recognition of policy issues?

4. What linkages operate between decision makers in the school district and informal and formal power holders in its environment?

<div align="center">Process</div>

1. How are policy related issues brought to the attention of board members?

2. How are priorities among issues established and followed?

3. How are issues which surface dealt with?

4. How do participants see themselves and others as exerting influence on the selection of issues for discussion?

In Chapter VI these questions are addressed as the findings of the study are presented.

## Significance of the Study

The practical significance of this study resides in its relevance to public education in areas of policy development and administrative practice. In the policy-making process, many forces work to influence how policy problems are defined and which issues are brought forward for consideration. Such discussions have a significant influence on the subsequent shaping of policy. By acknowledging these forces as relevant factors and by understanding the interactions that influence decision making, administrators will be better

able to enter the policy arena and influence agenda setting for their organization. The study provides insights into how organizational and political structures and behaviors affect consideration of policy issues. Answers to the research questions contribute to a better understanding of the practical and theoretical dimensions of educational governance and policy formulation.

## Implications for Practice

As district-level administrators perform their duties and are caught up in the hectic demands of everyday work, they must not lose sight of the fact that they do not function in isolation. The local board of education, parents, the business sector, and the community at large all influence administrative decisions made in the school district and, in turn, these decisions inevitably have an impact at the school level. Of the above mentioned participants, the elected board of education is a critical "player." In most provinces of Canada, school boards are granted a legislated mandate to make policy decisions on behalf of the students, parents and citizens of their school jurisdiction. This is a residual right and covers those areas not specifically governed by provincial policy. The board of education is seen as being in an advantageous position to listen to, and consider, the opinions expressed by local stakeholders. The board's activities directly affect district and school administrators. It is through the board of education that the direction of education policy, as defined by the provincial government, is manifested. Therefore, it would seem important that both district and school-level administrators take time to analyze and reflect upon what occurs in policy formulation. Working to understand the interactive forces that affect policy problem and issue recognition will assist administrators in practical ways.

First, such examinations serve to keep administrators better informed on what is occurring inside the various communities they serve. Insights gained into constituent needs and concerns will help place administrators in proactive modes with regard to needed changes in educational services. These changes may be small, or only minor adjustments, but such actions serve to strengthen the bonds of partnership between the school and its stakeholders. Second, if administrators enter the policy process at an early stage, they are better able to influence the shaping of policy in a manner that may eliminate many of the practical problems encountered during policy implementation. Administration knowledge and experience can be a powerful force of influence at the early stages of policy making. Too often educational administrators place themselves, or allow others to place them, in reactionary modes with regard to policy development. As a result, their role becomes that of policy critic and/or supplier of implementation alternatives (May, 1986). Though such a role may be deemed useful to the overall policy process, its limited involvement does not fully utilize administrative talent nor does it lead to a sense of empowerment for educators. Finally, while educators wait to react to a proposal or speak to its implementation, in most cases politicians, bureaucrats, and lobby groups have long been working to set out an agenda that meets their own particular needs. Once this is done, there are few openings for instigating any real changes to the original proposal. Therefore, from a practical perspective, a major contribution of this study relates to its potential to provide insights, promote discussion, and encourage greater administrator involvement in policy formulation.

## Implications for Research

Though much scholarly work on public policy is available, the majority of it deals with general policy-making theory (Dror, 1983; Dye, 1978; Elmore, 1983; Kelman, 1981; Sabatier, 1986) and with models of policy implementation (Levitt, 1980; McLaughlin, 1987; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1979; Van Horn & Van Meter, 1990). Fewer writers take time to explore more fully the decision-making activities concerning recognition of policy problems and issues. At present there is very little research that focuses on what occurs during the beginning stages of policy formulation, particularly the stages of problem definition and the filtering and prioritizing of policy issues. There is also a need for more studies that analyze decision-making activities relevant to local school governance during times of rapid change as compared to periods of stability. The setting for many of the available studies has been the federal government with policy research connected to departments such as transportation, health services, housing, and workers' compensation (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kelman, 1981; Kingdon, 1984; Lundquist, 1988). Fewer studies are placed in the public education arena. Though useful understandings and insights can be gained from parallel studies, educational administration as a discipline needs to continue enhancing its own particular area of study. The insights gained by examining initial decision-making activities undertaken by members of a board of trustees will be of value to prospective researchers in this area.

The results of the study also add to the existing knowledge base related to the initial stages of agenda setting in an organization. The study investigates those forces that drive policy in public organizations. It also scrutinizes the impact of political forces at

work in the organization and in its environment. In general terms, such studies not only improve our knowledge in matters of policy, but also enhance our understanding of how a society makes choices (Dahl, 1984; Dror, 1983; Dye, 1978).

Finally, this work was structured as a "real-time" study where the perceptions and interpretations of the activities surrounding the events were recorded as events unfolded. The advantages of this research methodology, in both quality and usefulness of data, are discussed in Chapter III.

## Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to one school jurisdiction and to the decision-making activities of the board of education and the superintendent of schools for this jurisdiction. The decision-making activities were further delimited to those pertaining to the initial stages of policy formulation, that is, the recognition and consideration of policy issues. Data used for analysis were only those garnered as events unfolded during the ten months of the study. Though background information was sought and included in Chapters IV and V, this was done for descriptive purposes related to the contextual and cultural setting of the study site.

This was a "real-time" study of one school jurisdiction, a circumstance which may limit the transferability of some of the findings. Given the nature of interpretive research, an assumption cannot be made that the recorded interactions and information of one study site are representative of the phenomena as they might unfold in other sites. This limitation is exacerbated by the fact that during the course of the study provincial

legislation, regarding public education and local school governance, underwent extensive and rapid change. These changes are described in Chapter IV. As a result, the findings of the study may apply less well to "normal" times of incremental change than might have been desired. On the other hand, there have been few studies of district level response to such major changes, so the study does have a contribution to make to policy studies, although not specific to what was originally envisioned. A move to a broader focus than that of "agenda setting" was necessitated because the provincial government, in point of fact, imposed a definite "agenda" on the school jurisdiction during the time of the study. Thus, an examination was done of a more extensive range of policy-making activities that took place in the time period. The data collected allowed a comparative analysis of policy making and decision-making behavior during a period of organizational calm and a period of change and turmoil.

## Definition of Terms

Throughout this report, the following terms are used as defined below.

1. Influence - The means of securing the desired actions of others through interpersonal relations.

2. Interest Groups - These are groups associated with an organization who are not politically active in a formal manner. They are recognized because of a common interests and are a precursor to pressure group activity.

3. Lobbying - Planned actions taken by an individual or group for the purpose of influencing policy makers.

4. Lobbyists - Individuals or groups who bring forward demands from their constituents to public authorities. Lobbyists exchange selected information between key players involved in decision making.

5. Organizational Environment - The people, resources, events and conditions outside the organization but related to the functioning of it.

6. Policy - The goal of a decision-making process; namely a guide for organizational action.

7. Policy Entrepreneurs - Elected politicians who are involved in policy decisions and have access to the organization's policy agenda.

8. Policy Issues - Competing matters, concerns or felt needs in an organization that have potential to be selected for future policy action. Issues result from the recognition of policy problems.

9. Policy Problem - A recognized value, need or opportunity that is yet unrealized in the organization but could be attained through policy action.

10. Power - Power is the capacity, on the part of individuals or groups, to influence the behavior of others in a predetermined direction. In an organization it can flow in any direction. Sanctions are definable in power.

11. Pressure Groups - "Formal organizations whose members act together to influence policy-makers in order to promote the group's common interests" (Pross, 1986, p. 3). They can be sponsored by or affiliated to government and business, or to an independent public sector.

12. Trustees/board members - They are the elected members of a school board. These terms are used interchangeably in the report.

## Organization of the Thesis

This dissertation is a report of the perceptions of issues and the decision-making activities of key policy makers as they performed their duties on a board of education for a rural, public school board. The purpose of the research was to examine the policy formulation process at its beginning stage, that is the articulation, consideration and selection of policy problems and issues. A "real-time" study format was used to allow for the extended examination of decision-making activities as events unfolded.

Chapter II establishes the theoretical context for the study through a review of relevant literature. Selected for this review are scholarly works in the areas of policy sciences, organizational theory, and the study of political behavior.

Chapter III includes descriptions of the research design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures used for the study. Also detailed are the activities and decisions made in preparation for conducting the study with respect to methodological assumptions, role of the researcher, piloting, and the attention given to standards of methodological rigour.

Chapter IV provides a broad context for the study. The role, responsibilities, strengths, and weaknesses of school board governance are discussed. Also included is background information on the historical development of school boards in the Province of

Alberta. To complete the chapter, information on changes to the School Act (1988), particularly those which occurred during the study, is presented.

The purpose of Chapter V is to provide descriptive information on the specific study site. It was deemed important to convey the "times and sense of place" in which the study was done. In order to do this, some basic demographic information is provided. Beyond this, other information is also presented. The views and concerns of district parents are given along with data that give an indication of the commonly held values and beliefs of the citizens in the school district.

Chapter VI deals with the results of data analysis. The findings are reported according to categories that address the themes and specific research questions of the study. The analysis of data focuses on the decision-making activities of the school board as it dealt with policy problems and issues. Significant factors in the organization and variables in its environment are highlighted and explained.

In Chapter VII the insights and understandings arising from the analysis of data are placed in the context of extant literature about policy studies. The findings are presented in a manner that allows for a comparison between this study's findings and the reflections and conclusions contained in scholarly work found in public policy literature.

Chapter VIII reviews the five themes which supported the conceptual framework for the study. In examining these conceptual themes, conclusions are developed and brought forward for consideration. Also included are possible implications for the practice of educational administration and for theoretical perspectives on policy study.

Chapter IX contains personal reflections of the study. Several findings are selected for further discussion along with the researcher's personal comments. A suggestion for further policy research concludes the thesis.

## Chapter II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides a theoretical context for the study and elaborates the study's conceptual framework. Significant literature is drawn from three main areas of scholarly works. The areas are policy sciences, political sciences, and organizational studies. Information selected from each of these extensive fields of study was done according to its relevance to public policy making. Of greatest value was literature that provided research findings and explanations of human activity related to the policy processes. Insights are gleaned from comparing these works within each area.

The first area of literature comes from policy sciences. Particular emphasis was placed on work that focused on participants and processes associated with the initial stages of policy formulation. Of special interest are those studies and reports related to the following: how organizational conditions impact decision making; how policy problems are defined; why certain policy issues surface and others do not; which individuals and groups are involved in these initial stages of policy making; and what factors in the organization and in its environment mitigate these activities.

The literature review also draws upon information dealing with the political activity of policy initiation. Included are areas of study dealing with how individuals and groups work to present their special issues and how they attempt to influence others in giving recognition to these issues. Information is included on how competing interests among groups are resolved and the importance of the interactions between the formal and

informal power structures associated with an organization (Berry, 1989; Kimbrough, 1964; Locke, 1974).

The final area of literature applicable to the study relates to organizational theory with specific attention paid to the open systems perspective. A useful facet of open systems theory is that it examines relationships inside the organization as well as the organization s interactions with its external environment (Cohen, March & Olson, 1972; Daft, 1989; Weick, 1976). This approach is particularly applicable to the educational setting. In public education the clients, resources, and overall support originate in the immediate and external environment. Though there exists a hierarchical structure to educational organizations, the operating elements are more often linked together in "loosely tied" associations rather than through "dense and tight" linkages. This feature typifies open systems (Weick, 1976). However, being an open system does not preclude some measure of interdependence of the parts. The fact is that changes in one system area may affect other areas in some fashion (Almond & Powell, 1978). Other features that define educational organizations as open systems are: an independent professional membership; no specifically defined technology nor methodology; goals that are often ambiguous and changing; and work units or sub-systems that are not overly dependent upon each other (Daft, 1989; Johns, 1988). A crucial element of open systems, and one that applies directly to public education, is that such organizations cannot operate at a distance from those they serve. As one writer summarized, "This type of focus sensitizes us to understand the need of organizations to cope with the demands of their environment

at both the input and output side of the system" (Johns, 1988, p. 538). Such demands do not go unnoticed in public education since they directly affect its operations.

## The Policy Sciences

In the policy science literature there are available various models and conceptual frameworks representing philosophical and theoretical studies of policy. Dye (1978) v'v. .e that these models and concepts were useful because they give us opportunities to "examine, unravel, explore and thereby better understand" policy. Each model offers a different way of viewing policy or perhaps provides a different focus on the process. Dror (1983) saw policy making as such a complex phenomenon that in his view, models, conceptual frames, and theories in no way did justice to the study of policy making. It was his feeling that such presentations oversimplified the study of policy.

In this study, the complexity of the phenomenon is recognized. The following conceptual areas are presented, not as an attempt to distill the phenomenon to its simplest form, but rather to acknowledge the wealth of perspectives on the topic.

### Policy Making as a Rational Activity

The rational model of policy development is baseo on the belief that people act in a sensible and reasoned manner and that their decisions are made logically in a step-by-step progression. Rationalism, or policy making as goal achievement, was discussed by Dye (1978). He presented the rational model as one that highlights efficiency--efficiency meaning the organization understands what it wishes to achieve, how much of its

resources will be needed for achieving the goal and that the goals will represent a net gain for the organization. But Dye (1978) did qualify this depiction of decision making by saying that it was possible only when such factors as societal values, alternative consequences, and organizational capacities are clearly understood and further, that the organization supports a purely rational decision-making approach. Levitt (1980), who also wrote on the rational perspective, delineated policy making according to technical and administrative factors. Knowing the technical factors meant recognizing the nature of the problem, the severity of it, what was known about the problem, and the technology needed for its solution. Administrative factors to be considered were those related to the mandate of the policy, necessary instruments for enactment, the policy's timing, its resource costs, and strategies for enforcement.

The usefulness of such a rationally-based frame relates to its ability to identify and describe the features of policy making. However, in a practical sense, such a model may be considered too inclusive. For example, Levitt (1980) noted the shortcomings in this depiction when he wrote, "A lot of detail cannot be accurately represented here and therefore the frame should not be expected to do more than aid thought about a given policy area and system" (p. 159). Others also expressed skepticism regarding the extent to which the rational model reflected what actually occurred in policy development. Kingdon (1984) wrote, "Comprehensive, rational policy making is portrayed as impractical for the most part, although there are occasions where it is found" (p. 20). Kingdon observed that much as people like to see themselves acting in a logical manner--that is first clarifying goals, then seeking alternatives and canvassing for support--there was little evidence that

such was normal behavior. He stated, "The ability of human beings to process information is more limited than such a comprehensive approach would prescribe" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 82). He also noted the rational approach to policy making was especially difficult to maintain when large numbers of people were involved in a process. Dye (1978) warned that the rational approach to decision making assumed, perhaps unwisely, that all relevant values are known; that society is indifferent to some values over others; that one value can be sacrificed for another; and that policy makers can therefore proceed with certainty.

<u>Policy Making as an Incremental Activity</u>

A second area of policy discourse presents policy development as incremental in nature. Incrementalism describes a process that moves forward by adding to, and modifying, current practice. Information gained from past experiences tends to guide change and policies are developed by building upon what has previously been accomplished. "Decision makers take what they are currently doing as given, and make small, incremental, and marginal adjustments in that current behavior" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 83). Some writers believe this evolutionary process or incremental activity occurs in policy development, but, do not see incrementalism as an explanation for the entire policy-making process. Sabatier (1986), while writing of policy formulation and policy implementation, considered how incrementalism affected the distinction he saw between these two stages. He agreed in part with the notion of incrementalism. His response was, "Where there is no discernible policy decision but rather a series of very incremental steps over time, policy can be seen as evolutionary" (Sabatier, 1986, p. 31). Baumgartner and Jones (1993), in writing of agenda setting, noted that when the general principle of policy

direction was in place and remained unchallenged, then policy making was seen to be incremental. When new principles were considered, then policy making became volatile. This connection of present policy decisions to past practice was also noted by Pressman and Wildavsky (1979), who stated, "We do not always decide what to do and succeed or fail at it; rather, we observe what we have done and try to make it consistent in retrospect" (p. 186). Dye (1978) made a similar observation pointing out that conservatism and incrementalism were companions. He explained that the conservative element in an organization finds it easier to make policy decisions if current decisions are based on the legitimacy of established programs. But Dror (1983) saw decision making more as a compromise between two approaches. He observed, "Most policy decisions are made somewhere between deliberate choice and cumulative involvement" (p. xvi).

Yet many of these scholars went on to say that in reality, policy development was far more dynamic, inter-related and less logical than the rational or incremental approaches were capable of explaining (Dror, 1983; Dye, 1978; Sabatier, 1986; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). They found this to be especially so in public policy. As Dye (1978) stated, "There are so many barriers to rational decision making that it rarely takes place at all in government" (p. 31).

## Policy Making and Organizational Anarchy

Anarchy is defined as "a lack of political authority, a state of disorder, and an absence of common purpose or goal" (Webster, 1984, p. 27). The idea that some organizations, or more accurately their decision-making activities, could be likened to anarchy, was presented by Cohen, March and Olson (1972) in their Garbage Can Model of

Organizational Choice. Features of organizations that might display this decision-making behavior are described as follows. Such organizations do not have clearly defined operational preferences or goals. They have fragmented or disconnected units within the broader organization and have a fluctuating or changing membership. Because of these features, conflicts arise over goals and objectives; organizational progress is often due to trial and error rather than planned actions; and the boundaries of the organization become unclear because of a fluid membership. Further, such organizations seldom problem solve by sequentially selecting the problem, investigating the alternatives, and then searching for solutions. Rather, Cohen, March and Olson (1972) referred to the existence of what they labelled as "garbage cans," or the organization's collective memory, where problems and solutions are "thrown" from time to time by various organizational members. During the ebb and flow of organizational activity, a long dormant problem may be recognized by an individual or group as needing attention, because there seems to be an available solution for it already in place. Problem recognition may also be due to media focusing attention on a particular issue, portraying it as needing closer attention, and thus creating necessary public interest. Prevailing conditions such as the level of public interest, timing in relation to other events, and the availability of people and financial resources also set the stage for policy formulation.

There is a degree of unpredictability to policy development because of these many inter-related factors that play a part in starting the process. For example, Kingdon (1984), working in the realm of government policy, noted, "The unpredictability and inability to control events once they are set in motion creates a dilemma for the participants in the

process" (p. 186). Kingdon (1984) utilized the model presented by Cohen, March and Olson (1972) since he felt it most closely described how public-service organizations operate in the policy area. "It [policy formulation] can be described better as a loose collection of ideas than as a coherent structure; it discovers preferences through action more than it acts on the basis of preference" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 90). On the other hand, Kingdon did not see policy formation in the public sector arena as a process of total anarchy. He felt that as long as there were various constraints to policy--constraints such as those of budgets, public acceptance and resource allocation--the structure of policy development would still possess a good measure of predictability. Pressman and Wildavsky (1979) also noted the fluidity of the policy process and referred to the continual transformation of policy as it developed. "A policy may come into being still lacking a doctrine capable of explaining it, and yet, gaining support and finding an ecological niche in a crowded policy space" (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1979, p. 187). Such organized confusion seemed, in their view, an accurate way to characterize how policy decisions are made in public organizations.

## Locus of Policy Activity

Another aspect of policy study deals with where, in the organization, the impetus for policy action originates. In organizations with hierarchical structures, do issues gain recognition at one level of the organization more consistently than another? Does the defining of policy problems and issue debate occur more consistently at one level than another? In an effort to clarify where policy decisions are made in organizations and to gauge what effect this has on polices, Sabatier (1986) presented two models of policy

analysis when examining policy implementation. In his top-down model, issues, policy problems and alternatives were closely monitored by the central administrative unit. Sabatier (1986) stated, "The essential features of a top-down approach are that it starts with a policy decision by governmental (often central government) officials and then asks about legally mandated goals, objectives, and their adherence over time" (p. 22). Of six "generally necessary conditions" to successful policy implementation in the top-down policy setting, three are totally controlled by the initial policy decision (p. 25).

In contrast, Sabatier's second model sought to better understand the impact on policy by examining the policy activities at the bottom, or grass roots of the organization, where the organization's membership has an opportunity to be part of issue selection. Though such an examination afforded greater insight into the network of participants at this level, and their interactions, Sabatier did conclude that such an approach "may underestimate the Center's indirect influence over those goals and strategies through its ability to affect the institutional structure in which individuals operate" (p. 34). Thus, the work of Sabatier was especially valuable to scholars who argued that whoever formulates policy at its initial stage will, in effect, shape the eventual policy.

In relation to this the question of where, in an organization, decisions regarding policy formulation are made, becomes important. As Dye (1978) pointed out, "Understanding the decisions made during these preliminary activities in policy development, that is to examine which issues the organization chose to consider for policy making and which it did not, is to understand a great deal about who is influencing the agenda setting of the organization" (p. 3). Other authors saw public policy resulting from

a combination of activities drawn from both top-down and bottom-up conceptual models (Berry, 1989; Kimbrough, 1964; Locke, 1974). They argued that policy decisions were made through a process of consensus seeking and bargaining where the organization's administration worked to gain policy agreement in a way that avoided political controversy and conflict. Such a process draws in varying stakeholder and interest groups at various times and in various ways. This type of policy process is complex and ever changing and best described as exhibiting a combination of both formal and informal decision-making activities.

## Political Systems

Of what importance are political systems concepts to the world of policy development and public education? Do they apply? Dahl (1984) stated that a political system was "any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority" (p. 10). Some researchers pointed out that, though educators recognized such relationships occurred in other public service organizations, they were reluctant to recognize such political activity as part of their own pattern of relationships. Drawing upon a folk history that denies the existence of political behavior in education, educators often express the view that education is, and should remain, in the hands of professionals and not politicians (Scribner & Englert, 1977). Locke (1974) pointed out that such a view did not reflect reality. He wrote, "Politics should be kept out of education and education kept out of politics. This represents a widely accepted view but neither is accurate nor possible" (p. 7). Political scholars like

Locke felt it was naive to deny the existence of politics in education. He explained that policy development in education--or in any public service organization--was not immune to political interplay because the interplay of power and influence was present in all human interaction. For him the issue was one of how political behavior occurred rather than whether it occurred. Locke (1974) felt it was more important to examine the distribution of power in an organization and how this power was exercised. Such knowledge gave one a better understanding of the decision-making process. In support of this view, Scribner and Englert (1977) noted, "Political expertise within school districts was an important variable in responding to demands of the community and of the school system" (p. 6).

## Describing Politics

"Because we are social, we develop political systems; that is we enter into relationships of influence" (Dahl, 1984, p. 94). Whenever there is a collection of people organized to meet certain goals, interplay between individuals and groups will inevitably take place, and it is this interplay that has to do with the exercise of power and influence. The view that political activity was an integral part of an organization's social interaction was recognized by political systems theorists. They sought to explain the concepts of power and influence as well as draw attention to the purpose behind the exercise of power and influence. Related to this, the process of organizational goal selection was also viewed as a crucial activity. Scribner and Englert (1977) wrote about politics as having to do with how people within a social system go about selecting values that govern their behavior. The authors stated, "Political behavior has to do with trying to influence the authoritative allocation of values" (p. 22). The setting of organizational values underpins

the setting of organizational goals, which in turn, affect the allocation of resources. As an organization defines its purpose [values], it selects appropriate goals and objectives [policies], and directs the majority of available resources toward fulfillment of these goals and objectives [implementation]. Since effective resource use is at the centre of organizational survival, becoming directly involved with decision making at the policy level is deemed as imperative for the politically astute members of the organization. The greater the ability to influence policy decisions, the greater is the accrued power to that individual or group since policy directs the organization.

The concepts of influence and power are important elements in describing political activity. Power was a particular focus of some theorists (Dahl, 1984; Kimbrough, 1964, Lasswell & Kaplan, 1969). Lasswell and Kaplan (1969) wrote, "The concept of power is perhaps the most fundamental in the whole of political science: the political process is the shaping, distribution, and exercise of power" (p. 75). In the political context, power was a valued commodity for it allowed the possessor an effective means by which to manage and control the decision-making behavior of other organizational members. The crucial difference between the exercise of one's influence on peoples' behavior as opposed to the exercise of power had to do with what Lasswell and Kaplan (1969) saw as the availability of sanctions. They stated, "It is the threat of sanctions which differentiates power from influence when the intended effects [of decisions] are not forthcoming" (p. 76). Political systems were therefore described as structures that "allow for the rightful power to punish, enforce, and compel" (Almond & Powell, 1978, p. 4).

This authoritarian definition of power, that is the formal or legally sanctioned allocation of power, was seen by some theorists as explaining why a chosen few were selected to govern in the best interest of the many (Dewey, 1972; Kimbrough, 1964). For example, Kimbrough (1964), in writing of the interactive phenomena of politics, policy and authoritative power, felt that such a view depicted "men of power working toward the common good of the community" (p. 214). Further, it was through the judicious use of power that policy decisions were made--policies that advanced and improved society.

Burbules (1986), on the other hand, presented a theory of power that moved away from the notion of "individual power wielded to meet particular intended outcomes" (p. 96). He saw power as a commodity and "the consequence of underlying conflicts between human interests" (p. 95). It was a commodity because it could be shared between the people who possess power and those who are influenced by it. Burbules (1986) wrote, "Power within social systems can thus be treated as involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction. Power relations are reciprocal even if the power of one actor or party in a social relation is minimal compared to another" (p. 97). This perspective holds that even the person with formal power may, at times, assume a submissive role as the ebb and flow of political activity in an organization takes place. Of particular note is that this explanation did not embrace the traditional view of power. Burbules (1986) described the traditional view of power as "a property of individual persons, wielded instrumentally as a means to particular intended outcomes" (p. 96). In contrast, he spoke of power as situational and something that was evident when circumstances gave rise to conflicting interests amongst people. When some type of

compliance is expected, power will be used but it will be used by more than just the power elite.

<div align="center">Political Theories</div>

Scribner and Englert (1977) used two theoretical approaches to categorize and explain the influences affecting policy mak g. They were the Political Systems Theory; dealing with the process of politics, and Allocation Theory, focusing on the roles and interactions of political actors. Other scholars, such as Almond and Powell (1978), also studied political systems. Their work is of interest because they delineated three, interconnected levels of political behavior in organizations. This model is of value because it provides an orderly method of examining organizational decision-making. The first level is the systems level. It is used to analyze decision making according to behaviors related to socialization, communication and role allocation. The second or process level deals with the input, conversion and output functions of organizational activity. The third or policy level centres on rules and rule enforcement in an organization.

The following discussion of political theories has been organized using concepts related to the work of both Scribner and Englert (1977) and Almond and Powell (1978). The result is a discussion of the important ideas in three areas. They are process, participants, and policy.

The Process. By applying Political Systems Theory (Scribner & Englert, 1977), an explanation is found for the political activities of organizational members and associated members as they pursue institutional goals. This entails an examination of the organization's institutions (governing and service units); the roles allocated to its

members; how the roles interact; and the structures or activities that make up the system (Almond & Powell, 1978). Systems theory applied as a process draws attention to the interdependence of the organization with its environment, and how the environment affects the political functioning of the organization. More specifically, "Political systems theory views policy making as a process through which inputs (in the form of demands) are converted (through a political system) into outputs, which in turn, feed into the system as new demands" (Scribner & Englert, 1977, p. 27). In this process, influence and the power to influence are important forces since they affect the recognition of social values, the setting of goals, and the subsequent allocation of resources (Arnez, 1981). In speaking to the political process and the role of power, Bolman and Deal (1991) stated, "Organizations are arenas in which different interest groups compete for power and scarce resources and therefore conflict is inevitable because of differences in needs" (p. 15).

This interplay of power and influence occurs in the organization, in the organization's environment, and ultimately in contacts between the organization and its environment. Interactions occur between formal and informal power structures in these settings. Berry (1989), in studying interest groups, not only recognized the importance of informal power groups outside the organization, but also saw their interaction as a legitimate and necessary part of the political process. He saw this as "legitimate, because it adhered to the precepts of our democratic society where people have the right to become involved; and it was necessary, because the plurality of interest-seeking activity prevented any one group from dominating the decisions of an organization" (p. 14). It is of interest to note that Locke (1974) and Campbell (1978) expressed the view that of the

two sources of pressure on an organization--that is internal and external--external pressure tended to be especially powerful in its potential to influence policy-issue selection and its shaping.

The Participants. Though Political Systems Theory is useful in explaining the process of politics Dahl (1984) pointed out that, "It does not deal with human motives and it does not refer to it as a public activity that involves public purposes, interests or the public good" (p. 10). A number of theories are available to help explain this aspect of politics. For example, Dahl (1984) presented the Pluralistic Theory, Scribner and Englert (1977) developed the Allocation Theory, Bryden (1982) a Representation Model, and Berry (1989), Kimbrough (1964), and Pross (1986) drew upon Interest Group Theory. These theories hold in common the premise that political activity, on the part of a system's participants, will affect the prioritizing of goals and objectives, and the subsequent allocation of organizational resources. Here the focus of an examination must be on the relationships and interactions of the participants as they seek to influence organizational decision making. When members of an organization feel certain matters of importance to them are not being dealt with, or if they perceive a scarcity of resources, their political interactions become more pronounced. Such interactions are marked by competition, conflict and coalition building. Dahl (1984) explained, "Loosely formed coalition groups and politicians become active on issues they care about" (p. 24).

Participatory theories hold that the political outcome of these interactions is a balancing of power and influence. Though the political elite of an organization may have the authority and resources needed to set policy and direct resources toward its

implementation, such unilateral actions are kept in check by the political activities of coalitions, pressure groups, and the administrative unit of the organization. It must be noted however, that other authors did not dismiss the power of an organization's elite quite so readily (Baldridge, 1971; Campbell, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979). It was their view that the influence of this group of participants was not easily countered since the power elite was in the most advantageous position to control the very process of policy making. Controlling the process was often accomplished by having control over policy-making structures, limiting access to the policy process, and by maintaining a flow of powerful supporting ideas for one's stance (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). All of these avenues of control were readily available to the organization's elite. The goal of such activity is to establish one political stance on a policy issue and to have the opposition retreat from its stance. Dye (1978) concluded, "Policy does not reflect demands of the masses but rather the prevai ing values of the elite" (p. 26).

Policy. A number of perspectives dealing with policy as a political activity are available in literature on political science. Dye (1978) wrote of policy making as a political process because it was accomplished through the inter-related activities of individuals and groups. Easton (1979) stated that policy was concerned with creating rules that govern the allocation of resources, and thus by its very nature involved political activity. Kimbrough (1964) defined policy development as a process of bargaining and consensus seeking both of which were political activities. In specific terms, issue selection and agenda setting were viewed as highly political activities in themselves. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) described studies on the power of the elite and spoke of this group's

effective use of political rhetoric and symbolism. Such techniques w c used to mobilize

interest for a desired issue and effectively derail discussion related to unwanted policy

issues. But, in the area of public policy Baumgartner and Jones (1993) indicated that it

was not always the organization's bureaucratic elite who are behind such tactics. The

label "policy entrepreneurs" was used in reference to a crucial group of participants in

policy decision making. The policy entrepreneurs were the elected politicians. If policy

entrepreneurs sense enthusiasm for a certain issue, and one that happens to fit their goals

and objectives, they will move quickly in order to manipulate the elite and mass opinion to

continue pursuing the favoured issue. Through financial support, creation of the

appropriate venues, and by installing the right experts to drive the chosen issue, policy

entrepreneurs adeptly control agenda setting (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Pressman and

Wildavsky (1979) also spoke of policy making as essentially a political process because it

allowed decision makers to influence and control the policy agenda of the organization.

As well, Almond and Powell (1978) defined policy activity as one of the three levels that

defined a political system. They stated, "In the policy-making stage, the authoritative

goals of the political system are enacted according to those rules" (p. 15).


## Politic and Decision Making

As has been noted earlier, education is not immune to politics. Dahl (1984)

expressed the view that educators need to stop thinking of public education as being

apolitical in nature and accept the fact that education has its own political system as do

other public service organizations. In education decisions are constant made pertaining

to goal setting and resource allocation. Such decision making inevitably produces periods

of conflict and competition and with conflict and competition come the political activities

of influencing and the exercise of power.

## The Power Structures

In educational policy making, who makes the important decisions? Kimbrough

(1964) found that in some school jurisdictions, it was rarely the educational leaders who

made such decisions. After studying the policy activities of a number of school districts,

Kimbrough (1964) observed, "Of significance is the fact that not a single educational

leader (school superintendent, school board member, principal, teacher) appeared in the

upper limits or top policy-making level of the power structure" (p. 30). In matters of

policy, Kimbrough also relegated interest groups to the same subordinate role as that of

educational leaders. His data indicated that though interest groups served important

functions in the decision-making process--such as providing forums for discussion; by

being valued information sources; and by disseminating information on policy issues--they

did not make the actual policy decisions. What Kimbrough (1964) did find was that the

formal power-elite from within an organization and informal power-elite from its

environment, exerted the strongest influence upon policy decision making. They were

seen to be the crucial decision makers. "A small number of first-rate leaders at the top of

the power pyramid determined the direction of public policy and decided when the time

was right to initiate major projects" (Kimbrough, 1964, p. 29). As individuals, they hold

official status, but their decision-making activities concerning policy issues are conducted

in informal settings. As Kimbrough (1964) explained, "The policy-making leaders make

the big decisions far removed from the noisy board meetings and legislative sessions. The power to make policy decisions was largely at the discretion of a few big men at the apex of hierarchical power-structures" (p. 32). It was also noted that these leaders were not influenced by the activities of interest or lobby groups. Rather, the power elite negotiated among themselves and came to an understanding on the direction to be taken on surfacing issues. They would then turn to their administration and expect it to work with the many stakeholders to settle matters of detail.

Later, other authors also depicted the decision-making process as very much elite driven. They felt that the elite worked to create the perception that others, such as the organization's membership and interest groups, were involved (Baldridge, 1971; Berry, 1989; Campbell, 1978). With this in mind, leaders of external or informal power structures expend their resources in ways that might influence or put pressure on this power elite. In turn, the power elite strives to counter these external pressures in an effort to maintain control over the policy process and thus ensure that emerging policies will achieve the organization's goals and objectives. In writing about this control seeking process Mintzberg (1979) delineated five stages of decision making. They were: "collecting information for decision makers; processing information to present advice to the decision makers; determining what is best; authorizing what is to be done; and executing the action" (p. 187). He then stated that the individual or group who maintained control over all five stages would dominate the type of decisions made. Mintzberg further clarified that of the five activities, having control over the information input and information processing activities was by far the most important. Mintzberg's

(1979) pronouncement was that "when information is filtered extensively, such control can be tantamount to control over the choice itself" (p. 188). Those who hold top positions in a bureaucratic hierarchy are able to exercise a great deal of control over Mintzberg's five areas. It was also argued that the power elite tended to move to a compromising mode only when it saw that it did not possess enough power to control decision-making events at that time. This stance depicts the power elite compromising out of necessity.

## The Pluralistic Model

The view that a power elite is central to policy decision making is countered by others who hold with the Pluralistic and Representational Models of political activity (Berry, 1989; Bryden, 1982; Dahl, 1984; Locke, 1974). They argue that the power elite's influence is kept in check due to the political activities of interest groups. As Bryden (1982) commented, "It is a matter of knowing how to harmonize bureaucracy with democracy" (p. 81). For Bryden this meant ensuring public input into policy through elected representatives. For those referencing the Pluralistic Model, it was not a matter of harmonizing but rather that of countering the dominance of the power elite. Berry (1989), Dahl (1984) and Locke (1974) pointed out that the power elite's influence must be countered by the actions of coalitions, interest groups and lobby groups. Only by working through a variety of venues can the public exert the necessary amount of influence needed for central decision makers to pay attention to alternative views on policy. The underlying assumption was that through democratic action, as set within an open system, effective policy balances can be reached. As Dahl (1961) noted, "To a remarkable degree, the existence of democratic ceremonials that give rise to the rules of combat has insured that

few social elements have been neglected for long by one party or the other" (p. 114). In the field of education Locke (1974) also felt the power elite had to be challenged. In this setting Locke saw the role of parents and community members as central. More specifically, advocates felt some measure of power diffusion needed to occur through political actions at the community level in order to maintain a balance in policy influences. This was because propor~ ! the pluralistic model see both the strengths and weaknesses of representati... .nocracy. The pluralists state that in order to keep policies as relevant as possible to those they were meant to serve, political counteractions were essential. Toward this end, interest groups activity is seen as a legitimate counteraction. "Lobbies want to ensure that their set of facts defines the issue at hand and not those of adversaries" (Berry, 1989, p. 99). This is necessary since there are times when the public finds that their own representatives act in opposition to public wishes. Robinson and Wood (1987) commented that the reason citizens opt for such political action is that they no longer have a sense of efficacy or trust in their elected representatives.

Why does this occur? A democratic system should offer the public some measure of control over the activities of the governing body. The answer lies in the very arguments that support a participatory process of decision making. Bryden (1982) stated, "There is abundant empirical evidence in western democracy that a wide variety of groups are regularly excluded from the political process and that this applies as much to interest group activity as to other activities" (p. 87). Though Locke (1974) saw participatory decision making in education succeeding because it was based on consultation and the availability of various checks and balances of power, he did concede that "most

discussions about objectives are conducted in terms chosen by people within the system. There tends to be a single framework of ideas, assumptions" (p. 26). Locke pointed out that because of this bureaucratic consensus, it was difficult for outsiders to introduce new ideas and even more difficult to find who was responsible for existing decisions.

Berry (1989), on the other hand, felt that organized interest and lobby groups were certainly capable of finding the decision makers and influencing decisions made at this point. It was also his opinion that interest group action could in itself became a problem unless there was a number of sectors from an organization actively involved. "What is needed is more participation to balance the system of interest groups that skew policy making toward organizational goals that are unrepresentative of the people" (Berry, 1989, p. 14). Perhaps reference back to Dahl (1984) is appropriate at this time. Dahl did not see democratic politics as merely a quantitative process reflected in a majority vote. He believed the essence of the democratic process was in its ability to offer both legitimate interest groups and the political elite opportunities to interact and influence decisions made on different issues. It was this interaction that was most valuable to a democratic society. Dahl was quoted as saying, "Policy making through group interaction is a positive virtue, not a threat to democracy" (Berry, 1989, p. 10).

The debate regarding source of significant influence continues, but most scholars in the field of political study agree with Campbell's (1978) observation that "political life can be seen as a system of interrelated activities and their relatedness derives from the fact that they all influence the way decisions are formulated and implemented" (p. 2). It is here however, that critics of the pluralistic approach point to limitations of the model with

respect to who in fact does, or can, exert political influence on policy decision making. Though local political activity may be a significant factor in balancing policy-making influences, this avenue is open only to those within the "system", that is those who have the resources to enter such discussions, and further, only to those who find the particular issue of importance to them. Gaventa (1980), writing about power and powerlessness as a result of his research, critiqued pluralism as follows. "The pluralist methodology assumes a consistency between the benefits reflected in the decisions of the organization and the recognition of those benefits by the potential actors whose interests are affected" (p. 169). Upon completing his study of the political activities between the Appalachian coal miners and the mine owners, Gaventa (1980) postulated that the phenomenon of quiescence or non participation was not seriously considered when studying power and influence. He went on to relate his findings to the traditional pluralistic model. Since participation is an essential element in the pluralistic approach, those individuals and groups who do not take part in the interactions are not considered nor studied. Yet, this "silent majority" does have much to tell the public policy researcher. It was Gaventa's view that the traditional pluralist model, though essentially valid, needed to be extended in order to explore further those facets of organizational interaction that better uncover and bring to life the "hidden faces" of power and influence that result in the "silencing" and "isolation" of some members in an organization.

## Organizational Theory

An organizational theory is a way of thinking about organizations, or a description that explains how they function (Daft, 1989). Theories can be represented in terms of models depicting patterns by which phenomena can be explained. Some of the more recent model depiction of organizational activity use such labels as the structural model, human resources model, and the cultural model (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Morgan, 1986). Each theory has its own distinctive premise supported by a defining set of assumptions. Each strives to best describe the workings of organizations. When selecting literature from an earlier era of organizational study, similar theoretical presentations are found. Similarities in both title and content are noted. Descriptors such as bureaucratic, human relations, structural, open systems, and social systems models speak to correlated works (Campbell, 1978; Weick, 1976).

For the purposes of this study, two theoretical presentations on organizations have been selected. They are the open systems and social systems theories. The open systems perspective draws attention to an organization's interaction and interdependency with its environment. Social systems theory complements open systems theory by citing dimensions of human interaction as an important factor in understanding how organizations function (Daft, 1989). Such dimensions as the structure or pattern of relations exhibited, the system's activity, and its purpose are found to be important attributes to consider when examining any system (Holsapple & Moskowitz, 1980).

Open systems theory depicts an organization as a complex entity comprised of various subsystems or units. Units operate as part of the larger organizational whole, and

as such, must work in accordance with overall organizational goals. But within the large organizational structure, subsystems are able to operate as independent units in charge of their own particular field of work. Of importance is the reality that what affects the organization as a whole, affects the individual systems as well. Thus, when open systems theory is used to analyze an organization, two specific dimensions need to be examined. One level of analysis examines the characteristics and state of the organization itself. For example, how do the various sub units function, how do they relate and interact, and how do they respond to organizational needs? The second analytical dimension focuses attention on how the organization, as a total unit, is affected by its external environment.

The external environment becomes a crucial factor in open systems theory since the environment is seen as containing the resources necessary for the organization to achieve its goals. In striving to better understand the organization, the analyst examines how the organization acquires these resources from the external environment, how it uses them, and how it transforms them into products and services that are sent back into the environment (Johns, 1988). Likewise, the state of the environment is also of importance in such an examination. Many factors, existing in the environment, directly affect the organization. For example, factors such as the state of the economy, consumer activity, existing social/political issues, technology and interest group activity may act in ways that create uncertainty for the organization. Segments of the environment may also seek to deliberately influence the organizational centre or certain units of the organization. This in turn creates dilemmas for the entire organization. Such interactions must be handled with due consideration since an open systems organization is dependent on its environment for

resources, information, and for general support and affirmation. The challenge for the organization becomes one of formulating policy problems and selecting policy issues in a manner that recognizes and reflects these outer influences yet remains true to its own internally stated goals and objectives. As Pugh & Hickson (1989) commented when writing about organizational life, "Management must make strategic choices in order to adapt to the environmental pressures that are faced" (p. 52). The level of uncertainty in the organization's environment will affect how readily organizational leaders make these decisions and how secure the decisions are seen to be.

At times of environmental uncertainty, an organization may experience difficulty in setting priorities and planning because of its closely felt dependency on the environment. Security of resource supply may be threatened. Communication linkages may be weakened and information flow interrupted. If there is a great deal of change or disruption in the environment, the behavior of the power elite in both arenas is marked with uncertainty. Policy issues become unclear and the shaping of policy problems decidedly risky (Johns, 1988). A retrenchment of positions may take place as a form of protection. In a healthy organization, however, the above scenario need not be realized. Strong open systems organizations continually work to develop their sub systems into units with differentiated expertise. One purpose for this expertise is to deal with the organization's environment. "In order to cope effectively with their external environments, organizations must develop segmented units, each having as its task the problem of dealing with some aspect of a condition outside the firm" (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1989, p. 58). In turn, the organization works to define its environment in

segmented terms in order to match its sub units to sub units in the environment. The goal is to enable the organization to quickly, and efficiently, adjust to any changes in the environment while still maintaining its own pursuit of goals and objectives

The above depiction of open systems activity highlights the two main aspects of the theory. Another group of scholars presented a different way of examining and explaining organizational activity and one they saw as a valuable adjunct to the open systems model. Mayo, Likert, McGregor, Blake and Mouton, Argyris, Schein, Herzberg, and Salancik and Pfeffer are but a few of the researchers whose work focused on the "people factor" in organizational life (Pugh & Hickson, 1989). The social systems perspective was applied rather than an examination of structures. "The plain and simple fact is that organizations are, by definition, social inventions or contrivances. That is, they basically require the coordinated presence of people not things" (Johns, 1988, p. 10).

The premise that organizational behavior was "pervasive" and that its study was necessary in understanding how organizations operate, underpins the social theorists' position (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Johns, 1988). The open systems analyst sees important organizational resources being derived from its environment, whereas the social theorist sees "that the people's skills, insights, ideas, energy, and commitment are an organization's most critical resources" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 120). Further, the social theorist focuses attention on studying group behavior, rather than the behavior of individuals, since much of the work of organizations is done by groups. Group behavior is seen as affecting the structure of the organization, its governing style, its method of productivity, and its formal and informal culture. In this regard, organizations are

described as being comprised of formal groups, "established by the organization to achieve organizational goals," and informal groups, "that emerge naturally in response to common interests of organizational members" (Johns, 1988, p. 233).

Though group behavior affects individuals in the organization through its socialization process, groups and individuals are also affected by the organization's structure. For example, how management views its workers says much of how the organization functions. Are workers seen as "cogs" in the "machinery" of the organization? Are they viewed as active participants in the life of the organization or are they seen as "children" needing paternal guidance and authority? For the social scientist, the importance of analyzing an organization from the human perspective rests with the assumption that people, not only work for an organization, they are the organization (Pugh & Hickson, 1989). For example, when an organization is forced into change or its existence threatened, it is the people of the organization, both management and workers, who ultimately guide the organization through to success or see to its failure. Thus, to understanding how an organization functions means to understand how the people within it function.

## Organizational Decision Making

When examining the interaction of politics and policy making, Dye's (1978) four conceptual models of decision making might be considered. Such delineation of organizational decision making is useful since it assists in formulating an understanding of the theoretical perspectives available to those interested in this area. Holsapple and

Moskowitz (1980) in studying decision-making processes, noted that some researchers argue for classifying decision-making models as those that either take a process approach or a c tent approach. Process models examine the phases or stages of decision making while the content approach models deal with characteristics of resulting decisions or the nature of the decision maker (p. 84). Dye's (1978) organization of concepts has been selected for discussion since it corresponds to the content focus of decision making in this study. The four m resented by Dye (1978) were: the Institutional Model; the Groups Model; the Mass Model; and the Systems Model.

The traditional decision-making process of government would be an example of Dye's (1978) Institutional Model. The centre of policy activity is seen as occurring with those in the organization's central bureaucracy. The bureaucracy, using its mandated authority, is able to formulate policy in a relatively independent manner. The process is depicted as controlled by powerful bureaucrats. Information on policy issues is channelled through various levels of this bureaucracy with the result that policy problems are defined, shaped, and structured in a manner amenable to the bureaucrats. Only then is it presented to a political leader for approval and placement on the agenda. The strength of the bureaucracy comes from a number of sources. One results from its adept use of communication as a means of instilling in its membership a unified sense of understanding and desired action (Donnellon, Gray & Bougon, 1986). In a strongly controlled bureaucracy, a shared code or repertoire of acceptable actions is recognized and responded to quickly (Weick, 1976). But, having a "buy-in" to the code is not seen as essential nor necessary to initiate action. As long as a policy issue relates to the

established mission of the organization--the mission that drives the bureaucracy--then

work commences as a matter of course and the issue is readied for policy consideration. If

the issue is not compatible with organizational goals then the bureaucracy may choose to

stall action in preparing the issue for consideration, or, it may alter the intent of the issue

as it passes through various departments in its preparation. The bureaucracy is well

positioned to collect, shape, and take control of the information flow having to do with an

issue. Institutional structures are in place for bureaucrats to take advantage of this power

source.

The second of Dye's (1978) decision-making models is the Group Model. The

underlying premise here is that organizational decisions are influenced by the interactions

between various interest and pressure groups. Interest group activity remains disengaged

until something occurs in the organization that is perceived as disturbing the status quo.

Political activity then begins. Groups mobilize and compete against each other and try to

marshall enough resources to present their views to the organization, and to the public, in

the strongest way possible. Often this leads to the formation of loosely connected

coalitions between some groups who, together, feel they can operate from a stronger base

of influence. They work to inundate the formal decision makers with information that

supports one policy stance over another. Formal lobbying is also an action that may occur

at this time (Pross, 1986).

The third model is the Elite Mass Model. Here the decision-making elite of an

organization works with the coalitions, pressure groups and lobbyists in a "give-and-take"

setting. Some note that this bargaining phase occurs only at those times when the

organization's elite finds itself without a power advantage and is not seen as a regular part of the decision-making process (Berry, 1989; Pross, 1986). The aim of the elite's behavior in such circumstance is to reach consensus on an issue while still maintaining control of the over-all process. Much informal "deal making" occurs before the policy makers formally declare their decision. However, "failure to maintain consensus causes leaders to redouble efforts to routinize public policy and organize out of politics discussions of issues that most concern them" (Pross, 1986, p. 237).

Dye's (1978) fourth conceptual model is the Systems Model. Here the direction of policy formulation is influenced by the circumstances or prevailing conditions that exist in an organization's environment. This model is based on the premise that the attainment of organizational goals is dependent on resources in its environment. Though decision makers in the organization may have policy issues they wish to pursue, they must ensure that the influentials in their organization's environment agree with and will support the pursuit of these issues. Misjudging the level of this support leads to many political and practical problems. For example, as long as the public sees the policy community dealing with policies issues it agrees with, it takes no action. But, if the policy group strikes off in a direction not sanctioned by its public, dissident groups will begin to circumvent the decision makers in an effort to promote public unease on the issue (Pross, 1986). Acquiring the ideas and support of these informal leaders in the environment becomes an important political task for the power elite.

## Levels of Involvement.

Dahl (1984) and Robinson and Wood (1987) noted that system participants were part of the political arena whether they chose to be or not. It was felt that by virtue of living in a social system one becomes involved, to some measure, in political activity. The level of involvement--specifically with regard to policy decision making--will depend upon the participants' motives, desires and behavior. Most organizational members exhibit a low level of political involvement and tend to transfer decision-making authority to representatives who act for them. A few in the social system consciously work to place themselves in positions, either formal or informal, to gain power and thus affect organizational decision-making. These participants, labelled power seekers, ultimately want to become part of a power elite (Dahl, 1984; Kimbrough, 1964; Kingdon, 1984). Their wish is to be in positions where they can directly influence the selection of system goals, the allocation of system resources, and the creation of formal rules that govern the system. However, even within this small group of power seekers, political motives will vary. Some may feel they have the skills and knowledge needed in leading the organization and are guided by the ethic of the common good. At the other end of the spectrum are individuals who act from a strong self-interest perspective. They seek power and sovereignty over important organizational matters for personal benefit. They believe first, that political influence is not shared in an equal manner by members of any system, and second, that there are opportunities for gaining personal advantages for those who do have power and the authority to use it. These power seekers would agree with Easton's definition of politics where he stated, "Politics is the authoritarian allocation of values and

resources" (Sroufe, 1977, p. 294). For power seekers, greater power brings greater

authority and greater authority means enhanced opportunities for direct influence, control

and personal gain.

Whose values dominate if the public transfers authority to representatives and

these representatives are not driven by the common good? For some scholars, Interest

Group Theory answered the question. An interest group is defined as "an organized body

of individuals who share goals and who try to influence public policy" (Berry, 1989, p. 4).

Pross (1986) distinguished between interest group and pressure group activity in his study

of public policy. It was his view that pressure groups organized and acted politically on

behalf of interest groups. To balance the power of the elite, external pressure is brought

to bear on decision makers to consider alternative directions for action (Locke, 1974).

Asking that alternatives be considered is a way of saying to the decision makers that their

interpretation of society's standards is not correct or perhaps no longer suitable. "The

public challenges conventional wisdom and questions issues that have been treated

routinely and kept out of politics" (Pross, 1986, p. 238). Berry (1989) pointed out that

when a system's power elite are perceived as making decisions not representative of the

people, the citizens look more and more to interest groups to speak for them. "No matter

how much government is reformed, government itself is inherently incapable of protecting

the common good" (Berry, 1989, p. 31). In such situations it becomes necessary to give

people a way to influence organizational decisions in a manner that will more closely

reflect society's values at that time. Interest group activity is presented as one important

way of maintaining this balance in a democratic society. Lobbying is associated with

interest group behavior. Here individuals are hired to direct their time and efforts into gaining access to, and influencing, decision makers. Effective utilization of the media also plays a significant role in the balancing process. Pross (1986) found that, "politicians respond to what the media reveals" (p. 303). Interest group activity, pressure group intervention and lobbying tactics are used to influence politicians before they seriously think about policy options.

To balance any examination of participant involvement in organizational decision making, the phenomena of quiescence or participant non-involvement should be noted. Some scholars point to this area of discussion as a necessary component in better understanding organizational decision making and an area not fully explored. Gaventa (1980), in his research on power and the powerlessness of organizational members, wrote, "Scholars, more on the left, point to the gap between their theory of social change 'from below' and the fact of working-class quiescence" p. 40. In the context of Appalachia and its coal miners, Gaventa (1980) described quiescence as a product of "apathy, hopelessness about change, and hopelessness about making life different or better" (p. 40). He went on to speak about the type of organizational activity that leads to, and maintains, the quiescence of the poor and weak members of an organization. Without strong leaders to speak on their behalf, the weak members of an organization too often become the "isolated" mass not only because of their initial inaction, but more importantly, because of an orchestrated process of organizational socialization and organizational practices that reinforce this status. Bachrach and Baratz (1970) had, previous to Gaventa, written about what they termed "mobilization of bias" where the values, beliefs, rituals and rules of the

game were used by some in an organization in such a manner as to benefit themselves and isolate others. A type of mental and structural control begins to take hold of the weaker organizational members which leads to their withdrawal from decision-making activities. Feeling vulnerable and powerless, they are effectively "organized out of the political milieu" of the organization (Gaventa, 1980, p. 161).

## The Common Good: Who Decides?

In an organization, whose values are preeminent? Berry (1989) felt that decisions of policy are guided by prevailing public values and selection of policy issues by the power elite must adhere to these values. Kingdon (1984), when defining the common good, saw the prevailing values arising from what he termed "mainstream ideology." He felt that though there may be a perceived diversity of beliefs in society, the accepted national ideology of the day and the desire for equity and efficiency in public policy are still the commonly held values of society. Of interest is to question whether the power elite follow the directions of a publicly held common good? Kimbrough (1964) noted, "Though men of power may be driven by laudable goals, such as building the best town or best government, the definition of what was best was governed very much by their own beliefs which are noted as their operational values" (p. 136). To the extent that the public retains a sense of efficacy and trust in their government, unilateral actions by the power elite will go unchallenged (Robinson & Wood, 1987). If, on the other hand, the public feels that officials are not responsive to the public, or, if there is a feeling that the government's interpretation of the common good is no longer a benefit to society, then political action is taken. As was previously noted, this action comes in the form of interest group activity

and pressure exerted by lobby groups. "Though societal values are constantly evolving,

when there is an attempt to shape or reshape values, an opposing group will go into

action" (Berry, 1989, p. 105). Swaying opinion to accept a new idea or a new approach

to doing things is not an easy task. As Kingdon (1984) explained, "Getting people to see

new problems, or to see old problems in one way rather than another, is a major

conceptual and political accomplishment" (p. 121). Some writers felt that this was as true

in matters of public education as it was for any other area. Mann, who worked in the area

of school governance, was quoted as saying, "Trustees make deci ions based on their own

values and judgments even though the people they represent might disagree" (Scribner &

Englert, 1977, p. 26).

Values. Some scholars felt that middle-class values were reflected in the political

actions of all three major participant groups: the power elite, administrators and interest

groups. Locke (1974) found that membership in lobby groups was, "very much a middle-

class affair, although individual associations may conscientiously work to broaden their

base" (p. 40). Further, Pross (1986) found that, "People involved in interest groups,

particularly leadership roles, tend to belong to more affluent classes of society" (p. 235).

Donagan (1977) and Thom and Klassen (1986) noted that political leaders, especially

those in education, tend to reflect the traditional Judeo-Christian values of society.

Kimbrough (1964) acknowledged that influential leaders usually represented groups that

follow the common beliefs of society, which in turn are based on middle-class values.

Almond and Powell (1978) wrote, "The social backgrounds of the administrative elites are

at least as upper-status as that of the political leaders" (p. 124). Gaventa (1980) also

spoke to this aspect of values perpetuation. He pointed out how social myths, sanctions, rules, and what he termed as the "mobilization of bias" by the power elite, all worked to shape accepted values. From his research he concluded, "There may be a tendency among the local elite to adopt the prevailing values of the powerholders" (p. 43). Therefore, with the politically active members of the organization exhibiting a homogeneity of values, was there anyone speaking for the more diverse members of society? Even interest groups were criticized by some for dealing with issues in a manner that did not challenge the status quo values of the power elite. Berry (1989) wrote, "Only issues that do not fundamentally alter the position of the elite enter the political agenda and become subject of interest group politics" (p. 11). Pross (1986) commented, "Leaders of interest groups steer the group's concern toward issues that affect themselves [the leaders] and toward alternatives that favour themselves" (p. 235). And finally, as was mentioned previously, the non-participants' views and beliefs are seldom reflected in policy activities. Not only do they lack the necessary information upon which to make their own reasoned judgements and the means by which to make their judgements known, they are too often the focus of organizational socialization. This process is noted below.

> The sense of powerlessness may also lead to a greater susceptibility to the
> internalization of the values, beliefs, or rules of the game of the powerful as
> a further adaptive response--i.e. as a means of escaping the subjective sense
> of powerlessness, if not its objective condition. (Gaventa, 1980, p. 17)

## Chapter Summary

Items selected for the literature review were chosen so as to provide a theoretical

base for the study's conceptual framework. In turn, the conceptual framework was

developed to guide the collection, examination, analysis and interpretation of research

data. The major themes selected for the literature review were those of policy sciences,

political systems and organizational theory. Theoretical writings on each of these areas

were summarized, compared, and presented in a manner that had application to the study.

From the onset of the study, an assumption had been made that policy making would be

viewed as a complex and multifaceted activity.

In the area of policy sciences, particular interest was paid to scholarly works that

dealt with the decision-making activities associated with policy development. Three

models were selected for inclusion in the literature review. Each depicted the phenomena

using a different perspective of policy decision making. The rational model purported an

efficient and effective process where decisions were made in the traditional, scientific

manner. Incremental decision making activity was an extension of the rational model, with

decisions emanating from past practice and being made in order to move an organization

forward, step-by-step, without a marked departure from the past. Some scholars applied

the "test of reality" to the aforementioned models and found them wanting. That is, for

them such actions did not happen in real situations. To address this area of discussion,

literature was included that depicted policy decision making as a combination of planned

and unplanned behaviors. Of interest, in this section of literature, are the questions asked

as to why and how policy decision making is different depending on the state of affairs in the organization.

The next section of literature dealt with political systems theory. Scholarly works pertaining to dimensions of political behavior were included. Policy development was seen as having to do with human interaction, and where there is a significant degree of human interaction, political behavior is manifested. Further, since policy making involves the interaction of individuals and groups as they set goals and decide on resource expenditure, the concepts of power and influence were introduced. Writers pointed out how influencing others is a more subtle and unpredictable activity while the exercise of power is more direct and has to do with use of authority, compliance and the application of sanctions. To better situate the topic of politics in the realm of policy making, two theories were chosen to explain political behavior. Political Systems Theory was chosen, because it dealt with the process of politics, while Allocation Theory was selected because it focused attention on the roles and interactions of participants. In addition, the work of Almond and Powell (1978) was used to provide an orderly method of examining politics and organizational decision making that spoke to process, participants and policy.

Important insights into policy making were gleaned from this body of literature. Attention was given to the interdependence of the organization and its environment and how pressures emanating from both affected the political functioning of the organization. This in turn, affected policy making. A comparison of formal and informal power structures underlined this discussion noting the strength of the informal power brokers to influence organizational policy direction. In connection with this theme, literature dealing

with the activities of the political elite, the bureaucracy, and interest groups was included in order to examine the issue of greatest control over important policy processes. To counter the response that policy was elitist driven, some writers presented the Pluralistic Theory as proof that an equitable distribution of stakeholder input into policy development was possible. This section of the literature review concluded with a summary of writings that depict policy making as heavily laden with a variety of political behavior, but all essential to a democratic society. Activities amongst participants such as consensus building, coalition building, lobbying and policy advocacy were used to illustrate this premise.

In the last section of the chapter, literature on organizational theory was provided. For purposes of better understanding how organizations function in policy decision making, two contemporary theories were discussed that are applicable to the study of educational organizations. They were open systems theory and the social systems model. Open systems theory depicts organizations as complex structures comprised of subsystems that operate as part of the organization and as independent units. This model also examines the interdependent relationship between the organization and its environment. Since such organizations rely on their environment for resources, information and support, they are faced with dilemmas over the influences that assail them because of this dependency. One organizational response to this is to have the organization's subsystems specialize in their ability to react to environmental needs and pressures. This helps the organization maintain some measure of independence and integrity apart from its environment. The social systems model was also included in this section of literature

because it highlighted the importance of the "people" factor in examining how organizations function. Importance was placed on how the interactions of organizational membership, in both formal and informal arenas, shaped the organization, and in turn, how membership activity was shaped by the structuring of the organization.

Continuing with the examination of organizational activity, the theme of decision making was used in order to bring together valuable policy-making perspectives applicable to public organizations. Important questions addressed were where, in an organization policy decisions are made, and who is engaged in making these decisions. This information brought into focus the role of the central bureaucracy, the power elite, and the stakeholders in an organization's environment. The level of involvement of each faction was seen to be influenced by a number of factors. Held values, personal motives, public pressure and hierarchical status were but some of the factors. The exercise of power was depicted as a significant element in policy decision making, but consensus building was also noted as having a place in the process given the appropriate organizational circumstances. The chapter concluded with a discussion of values and beliefs related to public-policy development. It was pointed out that middle-class, Judaic-Christian values still dominate policy decisions in North America. This was due to the type of people who are able to position themselves in places of influence and power in the formal and informal settings of an organization.

# CHAPTER III

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted within the naturalistic or interpretive paradigm. It was descriptive and analytical in nature and utilized qualitative research methodology. The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of organizational decision-making activity specific to the initial stages of policy formulation. Data collection was centred on the individual and group activities at those times when prospective policy issues were being discussed. The setting was that of a public school district and the focus was on the activity of its school board members. Though it is recognized that the members of the board are the final decision makers for policy-oriented issues at the district level, this study also included the superintendent of schools as a source of data. The following explanation illustrates the reasoning fc this.

> In school districts he legal decision-making unit is the school board. As the superintenden lakes decisions that effectively operationalize policy and sometimes mo fy it, and participates in school board policy-making, the office of the sup ntendent will usually be included. (Lutz & Iannoccone, 1969, p. 8)

Primary data were gathered through a series of individual interviews with these central participants. During the interviews they were asked to share their perceptions of school district problems and issues under discussion at that time. These data were clarified and extended by observations and careful study of available district documentation related to the school district's activities. This juxtaposition of information

helped to explain the conditions and factors that contributed to how educational issues were being dealt with by the board of education.

## Theoretical Perspective

A research activity that undertakes to follow the decision-making activities of a social system--a social system with politically derived power--can draw from a broad and diverse arena of human activity. To ensure valid and meaningful results, the intent of the study must be clear and the data collection methods used must be in accord with the study's theoretical stance. As Berg (1989) pointed out, "Data-gathering techniques are intentionally coupled with various theoretical perspectives, linking method to theory. Data gathering is not distinct from theoretical orientations" (p. 3). The following theory-related perspectives indicate the parameters set for the study.

1. The aim of research is to consider and to investigate problems by means of specific and systematic procedures.

2. Interpretive research explores how people relate and function within a setting and how they make sense of their surroundings.

3. It is important that the researcher enter the setting of the study in order to properly examine the phenomena under study. The researcher must gather data that will reflect the phenomena through the perceptions of the participants in the setting.

4. The researcher must assume a neutral (non-judgmental) posture while gathering data.

5. A case study approach affords the researcher a more focused view by dealing with a smaller sample of people in a defined setting.

6. Though much useful knowledge and understandings are gained by studying policy in retrospect, an ongoing examination of the process will provide further insights into the process.

7. Policy formulation is a multi-faceted process and the research methods employed should be multi-faceted as well.

8. Though research methodology must be soundly based and carefully planned, it must also be adaptable and flexible enough to take advantage of any emerging issues relevant to the policy process under study.

## Assumptions of the Naturalistic Paradigm

Qualitative methodologies include research strategies that fit comfortably with the naturalistic or interpretive paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin (1989) stated that, "The study, expression, and interpretation of subjective human experience are better served by using a holistic, inductive, evolving and researcher-immersed approach to data collection and analysis" (p. 24). A number of important assumptions related to interpretive research must be understood and adhered to in order to have the subsequent findings seen as credible. First, the researcher must believe that in order to better understand the world of human interaction, many perspectives of the interactions must be sought and examined. The purpose of such a study is not to seek the one "right" view of reality, but rather to effectively uncover the many "different realities" that are being constructed by people as they interact (Berg, 1989). Second, the researcher must hold to the belief that the world is complex and ever changing, and that it must be viewed

holistically. Bogdan and Biklen, (1982) wrote, "Qualitative researchers tend to believe

that situations are complex so they attempt to portray many dimensions rather than to

narrow the field" (p. 42). The methods used to acquire data for analysis must correspond

with this philosophy. Third, there is an assumption that meaningful and insightful

interpretations of human interactions are best derived from the subjects or participants

themselves. Their perspectives are important. "The [researcher] attempts to see the

world and its problems as they are seen by the people who live inside them" (Denzin,

1989, p. 42). In order to accomplish this, the researcher must look at the subjects and

their context with equal interest. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) stated, "We unlock a

more comprehensive understanding of what is being done and how people negotiate

meaning" (p. 28). Everything has meaning and nothing can be taken for granted by the

research - ... role, the ideas expressed, the body language, the reactions of others,

and what is .... a the setting, are data gathered by the researcher. "In collecting

data, quali... ...searchers approach the world in a nit-picking way. Everything has the

potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding" (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1982, p. 28).

Finally, though interpretive research may strive for depth in meaningful

interpretation, it cannot purport generalizability. Interpretive research is not concerned

with representing study findings that are directly applicable to other situations. Rather, its

purpose and value lie in its ability to provide meaningful insights into the human

experience as observed in one selected situation. Its purpose is "not to make judgments

on the outcomes of the lived experiences, nor does qualitative research suggest that there

would be a consistency of action in other situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 49).

Strauss and Corbin (1990), in writing about the interpretive paradigm stated, "It is research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon and to gain a novel and fresh slant about something known" (p. 19). Its value is in offering the reader an opportunity to inductively come to an understanding that "what occurred in one situation, may have something of significance to say about similar phenomena in another situation" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 40).

## Rigour in Qualitative Research Strategies

Sandelowski (1986) pointed out that one of the problems with establishing the rigour of qualitative methodology is that there is a tendency to evaluate it against conventional scientific criteria of rigour. In such a comparison, qualitative methods are seen as "failing to achieve or to make explicit rules for achieving reliability, validity, and objectivity" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 27). In response to such criticism, qualitative researchers point to a set of criteria that can be used to establish the necessary level of scientific rigour in qualitative research designs. Guba and Lincoln (1981) listed four test points for rigour. They were: credibility or truth of findings and context of inquiry; applicability to other contexts with other subjects; consistency with similar study situations; and neutrality in researcher motives and perspective. First, credibility of the study is maintained by the following: drawing upon multiple data sources; using various research methods, employing prolonged observational sessions; testing the findings and interpretations with the sources of the data; and specifying researcher involvement. "A qualitative study is credible when it presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of

a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 30). Second, since qualitative research deals with smaller numbers of participants and their selection is not on a representative basis, applicability to other contexts is measured by fittingness rather than generalizability. It is the task of the researcher to select, describe and interpret the experiences of subjects in a manner, "That will produce findings that fit into contexts outside the study situation and will have the audience view the findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 116). These research techniques, termed as "slice of life" and "thick descriptions," help to ensure applicability. Third, research consistency is maintained by providing a very clear decision trail so that another researcher would be able to retrace the strategies employed and activities undertaken. This is accomplished by using overlapping research strategies, providing evidence of stepwise replication, and utilizing team cross-checking and cross-auditing procedures (Sandelowski, 1986). The researcher must describe, justify, and have evidence of what was done at all stages of the study. Fourth, the standards of researcher neutrality are confirmed when there is a perceived objectivity of the researcher with regard to the study's findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The study must provide enough information for the reader to make judgments about how the data were collected, analyzed and interpreted. It must also lead the reader to accurately judge the level of the researcher's involvement with the study's subjects (Sandelowski, 1986). These judgments must conclude that the researcher based her or his findings on factual and confirmable data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

## Instrument Development

The initial work of instrument development occurred during the literature review

stage of proposal writing. Studying the published works of researchers in the area of

public policy was of great benefit. Their interview formats and the questions they used

were considered and ideas gleaned during this process served as a starting point for

creating the pilot for this study. Next, much attention and reflective thought was given to

the role of the researcher when engaged in interpretive methodology. Since the researcher

becomes an instrument for data collection when using such an approach, it was important

that the beliefs and assumptions inherent in the interpretive paradigm were internalized.

To this end, discussions with instructors and colleagues proved invaluable. Critical

feedback was also gained by participating in a Researchers' Forum. Here practical and

theoretical dimensions of interpretive methodology were shared and an examination of the

pilot questions undertaken by others. Finally, time was spent in thinking about how the

journal and field notes were to be managed. Time was also allocated to practicing both

interview and journal techniques.

## Pilot Study

The interview format and specific questions were initially piloted with graduate

students enrolled in the Department of Educational Administration. This was especially

useful for ensuring that both the format and questions were in keeping with the basic

beliefs underpinning the study design and methodology. For the formal phase of the pilot,

the researcher enlisted the assistance of a school board trustee. The individual was a currently serving board member in a school district similar in size, and some defining characteristics, to the district selected for study. An interview was conducted with this trustee. The resulting feedback gained through piloting of the interview questions plus the general comments and advice shared with the researcher, proved to be invaluable. Discussed were the type and quality of interview questions, the pacing and length of the interview, and the general approach and demeanor of the interviewer. Suitable changes were made to the interview questions and the overall plan for the interviews.

## Role of the Researcher

When qualitative strategies are employed within an interpretive paradigm, the role of the researcher is twofold. First, the res- - 1- - - - serve the subjects of the research as they deal with the phenomena under study. Observances should be sufficiently intensive, prolonged, and varied to provide data that will help disclose the many facets of social interactions under study. Second, the researcher must directly interact with the subjects in a manner that will elicit from them both verbal and non-verbal responses that will best explain their experiences. It was noted that maintaining the stance of the distant, impartial and objective scientist is not feasible in a qualitative study (Wolcott, 1973). Since the goal of such a study is to acquire an understanding and a sense of meaning from human interactions, the researcher must become "immersed" in the study's setting and become "part" of the ongoing interactions. However, the degree to which immersion occurs may vary from that of a full participant; where the researcher takes part in the

ongoing activities as a member of the group being studied, to that of unobtrusive observer; often described as "the fly on the wall" posture (Berg, 1989; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Van Manen, 1990). Merriam and Simpson (1984) define the difference between the two observer roles as follows. "Unobtrusive observation measures are those techniques not inducing response or reaction from participants while participant observation is a characterized by a period of tense social interaction between researcher and subjects" (p. 139). It was also noted that some researchers find it best to operate somewhere between these two positions.

Given the purpose of this study and the selection of research site, the role of researcher as non-participant observer was selected. This was due to the fact that no organizational-defined role could be assumed by the researcher during the study, nor was it seen as necessary to "work" in the organization in order to collect data. An interpretive perspective requires that the researcher not assume a critical or correctional attitude while collecting study data but rather one that shows an interest in, and appreciation of the existing setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Therefore, time was spent with the participants to ensure they understood the purpose of the study, the type of data being sought, how the data would be used, and how they would be able to proof the resulting information. The researcher consciously worked to maintain an open, friendly, and scholarly posture throughout the study.

## Data Collection

Though data were accumulated from three sources, the primary source was a series of interviews held with five members of the board of education and the school superintendent A semi-structured interview format was used. The interview format was such that the initial question was specific enough to focus the respondents' attention on current educational issues, yet open enough to allow them to speak about prevailing conditions, interesting interactions, and other factors they perceived as impinging upon the decision-making process. Secondary questions were used for clarification and to verify data gained during previous interviews and researcher observations. Secondary questions were also used if an entire section of the study's research questions was not being addressed by the interviewer. The same interview format was used for each of the three main series of interviews. It is to be noted that the secondary questions gained in importance with each round of contacts made with the participants. As the study proceeded it was important to clarify factors such as the changes regarding issue priorities, the contextual influences surrounding the issues under discussions, and the people and people relationships involved. Prior to an interview, a careful study of that person's previous interviews was done. This was to ensure appropriate supplementary questions would be used in order to establish a meaningful link to thoughts and insights shared by the person in previous discussions. The purpose of such routines in data collection was to enhance the probability for a clear declaration as to which policy issues were being recognized; their changing status over the time of the study; and an indication of the

advocates and promoters of the issues. The interviews took place over a ten month time period.

A document study was conducted to gather pertinent background information on the decision-making process of the school board, and to better acquaint the researcher with the context and culture of the school district selected for study. Documentation included school board minutes, minutes of policy meetings, policy reports, action plans, available correspondence, media reports, and other suitable written sources of information. These were reviewed to gain an understanding of the type of matters--past and present--deemed of importance to the board of education and the community. Through the careful study of the documents, an indication of the values and beliefs held by the board of education and parents could be gleaned. For example, this was done by studying the type of policies passed, noting the goals and objectives set for the policies, analyzing the mission statement prefacing annual reports, and by reviewing parent evaluations on the system and of their individual schools.

Other data came through direct observations. It was necessary to observe as many decision-making activities of the board of education as possible. Though official board minutes can supply final decisions and voting patterns, they do not indicate the emotional responses of board members, nor the body language that provides an insight into how individuals feel about topics under discussion and their reactions to other board members. Field notes, recorded as near to each observation as possible, and the accumulated comments, questions and insights contained in an ongoing project diary were also used to provide the needed descriptive reconstruction of the study for presentation in the final report. Of equal import was the consistent recording of researcher reflections during the

entire study. The successes, frustrations, surprises, and enforced changes made regarding practical and philosophical matters were recorded. This is seen as a vital exercise in any interpretive work of research. For the purposes of this study, such procedures were especially important since the study used a "real-time" format. This meant that unexpected and evolving phenomena had to be annotated in a consistent manner for purposes of research rigour.

## Data Analysis

Content analysis was applied to the data gained from the interview transcripts, field notes and document reviews. The purpose of content analysis was to gain an understanding of what was seen, heard, and read in order for the researcher to make considered inferences based on these understandings. Interpretive researchers do not rely on statistical methods to give meaning to data, but rather, they work to construct meaning by "reading between the lines" and by the "layering of information and impressions" (Borg & Gall, 1983). In the study, this process occurred while data collection was underway and upon its completion. For example, while in the field, the researcher was alert to the appropriate use and adaptation of research questions. Periodically a review was made as to how fruitful particular secondary questions were and if changes needed to be made. The researcher took time to reflect upon what was being discovered as the study proceeded and speculated on what other possible paths of inquiry might be taken. The researcher also remained up-to-date with all necessary transcript work and with field notes and journal entries.

More specifically, a data file was created for each participant and after each interview or significant contact, relevant data were entered. The data entries were according to categories tentatively established as the study proceeded. Some revision to the categories took place as events unfolded. This data file was not a direct replication of the transcripts but rather a highlighting of items that corresponded to the three areas of research questions. This process proved invaluable since it ensured the researcher was continually working with the data and, at the end of the study, it facilitated tracing the rise and fall of issues.

A second data file was also established. It contained data attained from media reporting. The major source of data came from the print media as supplied by newspapers in the major centres of the province. The local newspaper at the study site was a key source of media reporting as well. The purpose of maintaining this data base was to gather background information on the type of public discussions and debates regarding education that were occurring as the study was being conducted. Topics of interest were such matters as pronouncements from the provincial government, proposed plans for re-structuring education, fiscal equity, and the changing role of school boards. Of particular use were featured interviews with politicians, academics, consultants, educators, and visiting lecturers as they spoke to topics of educational change. The comments and views of stakeholder representatives, parents and citizens were also studied. The analysis of the data contained in this file is reported in the latter portion of Chapter IV.

Data analysis procedures undertaken after most data were collected adhered to more formal and structured methods of analysis. The goal of the analysis was to: (a) delineate issues being discussed; (b) indicate the level of importance attributed to each

issue at a specific time; (c) annotate the major actors who impacted issue selection; and (d) trace the rise and fall of issue priorities over the period of the study. Coding categories were established by first returning to the conceptual framework set for ᵕ ᵢe study and charting the crucial elements it contained. Then these were compared to the categories already in use in the data base established for each intervie᷾ ᷾e. Considerable time was then spent in reading and rereading the interview transcripts and transcripts of meetings observed.

Four roun ls of data analysis took place. Each round occurred after a new portion of data had been collected. The new data were carefully studied, entered into the data base, and the entire field of data once again reviewed a number of times. During each round of analysis, units of meaning were identified that referred to issues, participants, decision-making processes, and circumstance. Each was colour coded. Also labelled were descriptive passages related to participant thought, behavior and interactions. Next, significant time was spent in reviewing these colour coded and labelled units of meaning. Through a process of repeated reviews, broader categories began to emerge. The coding categories consisted of suitable words and phrases that best described the contacts, influences, reflections and decision-making activities of the participants. Other categories considered in the analysis were the time periods or stages observed during the study; the events that occurred during data collection; the type of relationships observed; and any other phenomena deemed important to policy initiation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Both manual and computerized procedures were used for content analysis.

A third party, not associated with the research but with computer-programming expertise, was employed to review and check the data bases used by the researcher. The

efficacy of the methodology used in data entry and the structure of the data bases were discussed. For example, comparisons were made between the full transcripts of individual interviews and the information contained in the data base.

## Rigour in the Study

The following information is provided to indicate how standards of rigour for interpretive research were maintained. The methodology for the study was selected and executed in a manner that would comply with four elements of rigour. These were credibility, applicability, auditability and confirmability.

To enhance study credibility an number of strategies were used. First, data collection occurred over a prolonged period of ten months. Data comparisons were made between interviews, observations, and documents on an ongoing basis. A draft copy of the study's finding was sent to the interviewees. They were asked to make necessary corrections in order for the report to portray the reality of the situations as perceived by the participants. They were also asked for comments and reflections on how the findings were presented. Only minor changes were needed as a result of this editing, but the process added a necessary dimension of research rigour.

For purposes of applicability, the language used for reporting the study findings was selected to be sufficiently descriptive and detailed to enable readers to envision the phenomena as close as possible to what occurred in reality. Debates, conversations and discussions were carefully selected for inclusion in the report to illustrate a universal theme found in the data, to define a theoretical concept, depict a process, or to highlight a

social interaction specific to organizational life. Readers were given the opportunity to use these presentations to help explain phenomena that might be common to other sites similar to that of the study.

Research rigour pertaining to auditability was maintained by employing a number of strategies. The "decision trail" for the study's methodology can be followed through the researcher's field notes and journal reflections. The field notes detailed situations, people and circumstances in a factual manner. The journal, on the other hand, was a candid discourse on how the researcher was coping with the demands of the study and her interactions with the participants at the study site. It spoke to timelines, changes to the study's procedures, successes with interviews, and frustrations when interviewees were not available. The field notes and the journal were kept up-to-date with entries made during, or shortly after, data were collected. With regard to data, the amount of related information and the volume and variety of available data increased steadily as the study proceeded.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which objectivity of the researcher has been maintained. Though total objectivity is not attainable, nor really desirable in interpretive studies, the methodology used must still be such so that the data of the study is "confirmed" by others as being as close to reality as possible. This was done in a number of ways. First, a considerable amount of time was spent in the study site interacting with people. Second, a sufficient number of interviews were gathered to give the researcher rich data from which to draw. Third, a prolonged period of observation and an extensive document review served to confirm and shed greater light on information gained during

the interviews. Finally, interpretive integrity was maintained by asking the participants to check the reported findings presented in a chapter draft.

## Reflections on the Methodology

Two considered choices were made regarding methodology for the study. The first was to employ qualitative research strategies and the second to use a "real-time" format. Utilizing qualitative research strategies seemed appropriate since policy decision making at a school district level is an involved and multi 'eveled phenomena and requires a methodology that can best reveal this complexity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Policy decision making is a phenomenon that needs to be interpreted as it is encountered by a variety of participants, over a period of time, and in changing environmental circumstances. In order to do this, it is essential to use a methodology that will allow for the researcher to comprehend and interpret how people relate, function, and interact as they engage in decision making activities (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It must be a methodology that allows the researcher to gather data which are rich and varied and have potential to offer insights into how people build their perceptions of the world around them (Berg, 1989). Studying such a phenomenon in a holistic manner is necessary and qualitative research strategies allow for this (Denzin, 1989). Finally, qualitative strategies were an appropriate choice for this study because, though the study was carefully thought out and planned, there had to be left a measure of flexibility within its methodological plans. This in order to allow the researcher to follow unexpected developments that inevitably occur in "real-time" studies.

The selection of a "real-time" format for the study also proved to be a wise choice. When the study was conceived (a year prior to enactment), the researcher had no idea that local school governance would be scheduled for such changes. While setting out a possible research plan, the real-time format was considered as one method by which the rise and fall of polic' issues might be traced. Following a set of issues over a period of time seemed a reasonable way to study this area of policy activity. When it came time to begin the actual study, it was evident that the real-time format would allow for an examination of how government mandated changes to local school governance also affected policy activity. Any feelings the researcher had that the study might turn out to be a rather unexciting view of school board governance soon vanished.

There are however, both advantages and disadvantages to real-time studies. The advantages relate to being able to observe phenomena over a period of time as things actually occur. not rely on re-constructed views of what happened, but examine th appening. Since participants are caught-up in the impor e less likely to express a "revisionist" version of what is happen t. There is also the excitement of watching the phenom ve in one direction and then in another, all of which add a rich variety of data for analysis. Unexpected happenings can be of benefit to a real-time study because they give the observer an opportunity to capture "first" reactions to the happenings. In such circumstances participants are more likely to question why certain procedures have been followed or not followed. Such points of reflection add much to the richness of data collected.

There are drawbacks to using a real-time format. Though the unpredictability of the structure has positive aspects, it can also be a source of ongoing challenges for the researcher. Research questions may need revision as the study proceeds. The literature review may not cover adequately all of the issues that arise. The researcher must be open to utilizing different data collecting opportunities than perhaps were decided upon at the beginning of the study. A more consistent level of researcher alertness is needed regarding happenings at the site. It also becomes essential for the researcher to be immersed in the data already collected. Being prepared for participants to withdraw or be less forthcoming due to unanticipated events is to be expected (though dreaded). And finally, to be prepared for the fact that, as the study draws to an end, (and often delayed for as long as possible), there will occur some event that the researcher fears is "the" defining factor that will shed light on much of what has gone one before. Does the study stop or proceed?

In spite of the many drawbacks to a real-time format, if applied to a suitable research problem and study situation, it can be a most rewarding strategy. At the very least, such studies provide a useful complement to the many "post-hoc" policy studies.

## Chapter Summary

The naturalistic paradigm and qualitative research strategies have been noted as being suitable for studying human society and culture and thus were selected for this study. The study focused on the activities of a board of education as the members interacted with each other and with people in their immediate context and broader environments. Literature on interpretive research indicates that this form of inquiry takes

into account the participants and their context in a holistic manner and was another reason

this approach was selected. The intent of the study was to gather enough meaningful data

to gain a better understanding of the various elements of the board's decision-making

process. Since the goal of the study was to expand understanding and insight into a

socially-dynamic phenomena, quantitative strategies seemed less useful than the strategies

selected. The problem seemed better suited to examination from within the naturalistic

paradigm. For example, the intent of interpretive studies is not to test theories or

hypotheses but rather to clarify concepts and uncover important meanings resulting from

human interactions (Merriam & Simpson, 1984). Finally, though interpretive research

does not rely on quantifiable data, which can be more easily assessed for validity and

reliability, it must adhere to standards of rigour suitable to its form and intent. These

standards of rigour were considered during the research design and followed carefully as

the methodology unfolded.

# CHAPTER IV

## SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE

The purpose of Chapter IV is to set a broader context for the study. The approach taken is one utilizing both historical data and current information relevant to local-school governance in the Province of Alberta. Information pertaining to Alberta school boards serves as the primary focus of this chapter. In the opening section of the chapter, the purpose of school boards, their role, and their legislated responsibilities are de cribed. The strengths and weaknesses of local school board governance are presented using available literature on the topic. To complete this section of the chapter, an historical perspective of school-board governance in Alberta, from the late 1800's to the present, is outlined.

Since the research format taken for this thesis was "real-time" study, it was necessary to provide an indication of context-relevant events and social phenomena occurring during the span of the study. Such events and phenomena are included in the second portion of the chapter. They depict the broader environmental activities that affected school-board deliberations at this time and thus affected the type of data collected for the study. Included is such information as: current issues surrounding school-board governance; debates over proposed changes to local-school governance annotated; and examples of the change process employed by the provincial government for its restructuring of education. Stakeholder comments are used to convey perceptions held during this time. It was also judged that by providing a comprehensive description of

prevailing circumstances and interactions amongst stakeholders, adherence to interpretative research methodology would be maintained.

## The Alberta School Boards

In Canada, local school boards exist as agents of their provincial government. Provincial school acts delegate authority to boards thus allowing them to govern at the local level in areas of public education. As agents of the legislature, school boards assume obligations and responsibilities set by provincial legislated statutes. They are seen as corporate entities with board trustees serving as corporate members. A corporation is defined as "an association of individuals creating by law and existing as an entity with powers and liabilities" (Webster's, 1984, p. 204). Webster extends the definition by writing that a corporation is "a body created for political purposes and to act as a government agency." Historically, education in Alberta has been provided by public and separate school systems operating as corporations under provincial government mandate.

### Purpose, Roles and Responsibilities

Though in general terms, a school board exists to benefit children, the board's role can be more specifically defined as having to do with two areas of responsibility. One area defines the board as the executive agency of the provincial legislature with limited powers and discretionary action, and with obligations to follow the goals of education as decreed by the provincial government. The second role area defines the board as the legislative agency for the local community, enacting policies and legal directives that affect schools in a manner that reflects community wishes (School Act, 1988). Both areas of

responsibilities call upon board members to act as adept decision makers with expertise in matters of policy. The advantages of the local school board system reside in the system's representative function, and in the expertise of its board members on matters of local significance. Board members enter the decision-making arena with knowledge of their community, knowledge of local educational needs, and with the ability to communicate information both to the government and to their local public (Coleman, 1973; Musella, 1991; Rebore, 1984). Further, they can exert considerable influence through their ongoing access to, and interaction with, community opinion setters, business leaders, and professionals. "By focusing issues of lay control through their committee involvement in the community; board members work to assure their responsiveness to their public" (Coleman, 1973, p. 329).

## School Boards and Decision-Making Authority

Much as school trustees wish to be seen as operating within a flattened organizational hierarchy at the district level, the reality is that they are still part of the pyramidal line of authority that exists in provincial education. School boards must operate within this hierarchy and though they may see themselves situated closer to the apex of the pyramid than its base, school boards are by no means the final authority in matters of overall educational governance (Bergen, 1980; Hodgson, 1980). As agents of the provincial government, board authority and their decision-making powers are defined by provincial government rules and regulations. School boards operate under legislated powers that enable them to make decisions pertaining to the "externa" of education. Externa means they operate in such areas as policies, personnel selection, facilities and

salaries, and far less in areas pertaining to instruction (Bergen, 1980; Coleman, 1973). Their authority is specified in legislation and they are subject to decisions of provincial advisory bodies and boards of reference (Bergen, 1980). However, the established limits of school board authority can and have been changed through legislated amendments to a provincial school act. For example, in 1970 the changes in the new School Act of Alberta gave school boards a greater measure of discretionary authority in some areas while decreasing decision-making powers in others. The government, while allowing school boards to establish teacher duties, also included provisions in the act to increased its own control over the dollars school boards could requisitioned through local, supplementary taxation. These periodic legislative amendments, whether expanding the authority of boards or diminishing it, serve to remind school boards that they exist due to the pleasure of the Legislature (Hodgson, 1980). The amount of authority allocated school boards and their relative prominence in the educational hierarchy are defined by such factors as the philosophical beliefs of the government in power, events in other provinces, and the financial realities of the times (Bergen, 1980; Bryce, 1980; Coleman, 1973; Collins, 1958).

## Local School Board Governance

Locally elected school boards, as a form of educational governance, have been lauded by some writers and depicted as flawed by others. The following is a review of literature specific to the strengths and weaknesses of school board governance.

## Strengths of Local Governance

Some of the positive aspects of the school board structure of educational

governance are as follows. It is a system that is close to its public; it provides for strong

local representation; it keeps in tune with local needs; and is highly cost effective and

efficient due to its smaller size (Coleman, 1973; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1969; Rebore, 1984).

Legislation also allows school boards to raise money at the local level and this gives then

a greater degree of independent action and less of a political dependency on prevailing

politics outside the district. Lutz and Iannaccone (1969) saw this as supported by the fact

that the school-board electorate, in most cases, was "uniquely" it's own and therefore not

a subject to influence from wider politics. Rebore (1984), who studied the structural

framework of public education, stated, "School districts are perhaps the most

democratically controlled agency of government. The citizens of a local community elect

school board members who see to the adoption of policies" (p. 16). Democratic action

and local control were seen as important elements for healthy school governance. The

benefits from these two interconnected elements placed school boards in a favourable

position for making the best decisions on educational services. As Coleman (1973)

observed, "Because of the competing value of local autonomy, provincial authorities may

tolerate some inequality of educational opportunities, if it is an outcome of informed

cision making at the local level" (p. 123). Rebore (1984) also wrote that school board

members, when exercising their authority in governing schools, could not act as

individuals nor could they make decisions outside of legally posted board meetings. He

saw this as ensuring the efficacy of both the legal and democratic processes under which

school boards operate. Musella (1991), in studying the role of the chief education officer

(CEO), found school boards of the day were seen by their CEO's as taking a more active

role in decision making, spending more time involved in administrative matters, demanding

to be kept well informed, and asking for more ongoing accountability checks on the part

of the district's administration. The explanation for this was given as follows.

> Societal changes have put immense pressure on provincial government.
> This pressure has been passed on to local governments, school boards
> which in turn has led to changes in the way all segments of formal
> schooling operate. (Musella, 1991, p. 11)

The amount of work undertaken by trustees was increasing as was the quality of

candidates who ran for board positions. Such developments were seen to translate into

better local governance and an affirmation of the school board system.

## Weaknesses to the School Board System

The drawbacks of local governance were annotated in literature as well. For

example Collins (1958), who examined the provincial appointed superintendent role, and

Coleman (1973), who wrote about the administration of education, both discussed the

recurring dilemma facing provincial governments. The dilemma was whether to

decentralize educational governance in order to allow for greater public choice, or

centralize authority and resources to ensure equity of educational opportunities and

finances. Coleman (1973) noted that local autonomy might be seen as an effective form of

governance if simplicity of structure was a main criterion. But it was not effective if

equity became a criterion. He felt that since school districts differed in their ability to

garner tax dollars, resulting educational services were bound to vary as well. To attain

equity across a province, a broader more stable financial base was needed along with a

leadership that was removed from the pressu·· ·s of local politics (Coleman, 1973; Collins,

1958). Such arguments questioned whether school boards, simply by virtue of being

smaller governing units, were indeed more attuned to their public, and whether they were

as "politically unfettered" as depicted. Skeptics felt too often the decision-making power

in a school district rested with the superintendent and the established administration, and

not with the school board (Coleman, 1973; Stevens & Wood, 1987). As well, some

trustees were perceived as being ill-prepared for their duties. They were seen ·· lacking

the knowledge needed to make quality decisions; as being more rather than le·· subject to

interest group tactics; and displaying in their decision-making patterns that they were

"one issue trustees" rather than stewards of public education (Coleman, 1973; Lutz &

Iannaccone, 1969).

Another line of inquiry in examining the negative aspects of school-board structure

used democracy as a measure. Do locally elected boards enhance the democratic process

for the public? According to some writers, this was not always the case. John Dewey

(1972) argued that education was so heavily bureaucratized that there existed little true

democratic involvement for the major stakeholders. Dewey felt school boards had to be

far more diligent in advocating the basic values of democracy. It was pointed out that

Dewey spoke about the need to promote greater public participation in education and the

need to alter the existing top-down, decision-making model. Further, it was Dewey's view

that because of the political activity associated with education, access to school

governance was often limited to the economic and political elite. However, Stevens and

Wood (1987), in writing on Dewey's views, cited studies that noted public malaise as

partially responsible for a low level of democratic action in educational governance. They

wrote:

> The decline of local lay control may have less to do with political
> aggrandizement by bureaucrats and professionals than with social and
> economic changes that make it easy for parents and communities to cede
> authority and control to professionals. (Stevens & Wood, 1987, p. 268)

Goodlad (1988; 1990) also spoke to the value of democratic action in education.

Goodlad noted that the size of the governing unit was not as important as how the unit

functioned. For those who aligned their view       authority and control with Dahl's (1984)

pluralistic description of politics, democratic participation within the governing unit was

assured. But for those who saw the school board as part of a hierarchical structure with

its own protected lines of authority, local impact on decision making was not assured.

Added to this, the growing independence of school boards was also seen as a problem for

democratic accountability. In a study on the changing role of the superintendent, Musella

(1991) reported, "The corporate role of the Board is no longer recognized or valued by

some trustees and [trustees] have no respect for lines of authority in the system" (p. 11).

Though this study presented data that indicated trustees were trying to take a more active

role in decision making, it also found that trustees were not spending enough time with

their general constituents. Rather, board activity was found to be overly occupied with

pressure group interaction and union militancy. "Decisions affect many in a community

yet are often made by a small minority who are in only a very limited way subject to public

control" (Stevens & Wood, 1987, p. 269).

## Alberta School Board Governance: An Historical Review

In 1861 the responsibility for formal public schooling in the province of Alberta was invested in a Territorial Council. The first territory schools were in place by 1871. Public schools were overseen by the Territorial Council but local taxation was used to pay for their operation. Though the Public Schools Act of 1846 established local control as a major principle of school administration in Upper Canada, other areas in the Dominion were slow in adopting it in practice. The transition to this model did eventually take place in Alberta. By 1892 local school governance was assured in spite of the wishes of the Territorial Council who wanted a more centralized model of educational governance. By the early 1900's there were many small, rural school districts operating under local control though still within a provincial bureaucratic and its hierarchical structure. A provincial Department of Education was in existence. However, by the 1920's and 1930's these small jurisdictions began to experience some major problems such as the growing need for secondary schooling and the lack of revenue from local taxation. Droughts and the ongoing depression meant money was not readily available for maintaining existing educational services let alone expanding them. As a result, some consolidation of smaller districts took place. But, such moves still did not address the fact that some districts could afford to offer a wider range of educational opportunities to their students than could others. In 1935, with a provincial election in the offing, the equity issue found its way on to the political agenda.

The Social Credit Government won the election in 1935 and quickly addressed the problem of equity through legislation. The School Division Act of 1936 was one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the new government. Its purpose was to see to the

organized amalgamation of rural school districts into large regional units to be operated by divisional boards. School districts were still allowed to elect their own school boards but these boards had little power other than to act in an advisory capacity to divisional boards (Alberta School Trustee Association [ASTA] Handbook, 1973). The government's move to centralize educational services and educational governance occurred amid strong school-board protestation. "In spite of the economic difficulties faced by most rural boards in the province, the school trustees fought to retain the small district as the basic unit of school administration" (Collins, 1958, p. 52). The government was not deterred. It enacted the legislation "since the government felt it had received, through the recent election, a mandate from the people to deal with the problems in education" (p. 54).

Throughout the 1940's and 1950's the government carefully managed the number of school jurisdictions that operated in Alberta and kept control of educational services through their own provincial appointed superintendents (Collins, 1958). In the educational hierarchy, the position of superintendent was placed parallel to that of a school board. Authority was vested in the position to ensure the government's educational goals and objectives were being followed. The parsimonious use of local school administrators was carried forward even as the province allowed for a county structure to be established (County Act, 1951). This act allowed that where co-terminus boundaries existed between the municipality and school district, the administration of both school and municipal affairs could become the responsibility of one elected body. The total number of school divisions in existence at this time was sixty-three (ASTA Handbook, 1973).

In the 1971 provincial election the Conservative Party defeated the long serving Social Credit government. It did not take long for the new government to embark on a

course of educational change. Its vision for education was one denoting the need for greater decentralization of educational control and one that emphasized more local involvement. By 1972 school boards were able to hire their own superintendents and new school jurisdictions were formed by a simplified process of resident application. Under this altered educational hierarchy, the superintendent was no longer in a parallel position to school trustees but rather became their employee and accountable to them. The number of school jurisdictions dramatically increased over the next decade to number 160 by the end of the 1980's. The philosophical stance of the government was one of allowing smaller jurisdictions to exist in order to enhance citizen participation in education. The government felt that with greater public involvement there would result greater public commitment and a greater degree of school board accountability.

By the mid 1980's the School Act (1976) was once again under scrutiny. In 1984 the Education Minister issued a press release outlining a proposed review. In the review consideration was be given to the mandate of public education, the rights, responsibilities and roles of individuals and groups in education, and the control of policy making, management and governance of education. Upon completion of the review, Alberta Education published a resulting document title, "Partners in Education: Principles For A New School Act" (Alberta Education, 1985). In the document the governance of education was specifically addressed with the roles of the province and school boards defined at great length. In the opening paragraph of the section pertaining to the role of school boards, the following was written.

> The Province supports the concept of locally elected, accountable school boards charged with the provision of educational services within the community. Within the concept of more flexibility in decision-making at the

local level, a number of submissions recommend an increase in the
delegation of authority from the Province to school boards. (p. 23)

The language of this publication was in keeping with that of a school act. Certain role dimensions when discussed were prefaced with "school boards must," others with "school boards shall," and still others with "the school boards have a responsibility." School boards were given the prime responsibility and made accountable for the administration and provision of educational services to students. They were to continue in their role of local policy developers as well as continue contributing to provincial policy discussions. School boards were also directed to recognize and highlight the roles of parents, students, and the community, and to encourage their participation in matter of schooling. Of particular interest in this section was the fact that school boards were to retain the authority to raise tax dollars locally for educational services (Alberta Education, 1985, p. 23). By 1987, the Minister of Education felt enough consultation had occurred and the government could go forward with legislation. Bill 59 (1987) was presented to the Legislature. In an address the Minister stated, "This legislation sets out the government's plans for laying a firm new foundation for Alberta's school system now and as we approach the 21st Century" (Alberta Education 1987, p. 1). Bill 59 was a precursor to a new School Act and as such it presented the government's beliefs, values and vision with regard to the purpose of education and related roles of schools, students, parents, school boards, school personnel, the community and the province. In 1988, with few changes to the overall mandate of school boards, the new School Act (1988) became law.

## Issues of the Nineties: Equity, Accountability, and Local Governance

As was noted previously, local educational governance expanded throughout the Province of Alberta in the 1980's. Over one hundred and forty school jurisdictions were in operation. During this period, school boards were given freer reign to gather additional money from local tax payers through supplemental requisitions. But, with rising demands for a plethora of educational services, some jurisdictions began to experience financial difficulties. Others, as yet untroubled with such concerns, could see that in the future, they too would face similar problems. Since the province's portion of educational funding was steadily decreasing, and tax payers less and less amenable to regular tax increases, smaller school districts began to grow uneasy. At the same time, large school jurisdictions, and those who could draw upon a strong commercial tax base, continued to expand their services. Second language instruction and programs that assisted in the integration of special needs students were but two examples of this expansion. Throughout the province smaller districts were finding it difficult to keep pace with such demands and began to discuss their plight with provincial authorities. The focus of their concern was the growing inequities found across the province regarding educational opportunities for Alberta children. After much lobbying--and what was perceived as fruitless discussions with the government--a number of jurisdictions decided to seek legal assistance. As a result, in 1992 twenty-nine districts banned together and filed a lawsuit against the government citing it with failing to fulfill its responsibility in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all Alberta school children. Since the province was facing a Fall election, this matter was set aside until the new government was in place.

The Alberta provincial election of 1993 saw the re-election of the Conservative

Party with a new premier at the helm. From the beginning of its new mandate, the

government notified the public that the elimination of the provincial deficit, listed as $14.3

billion, was its top priority. It warned that every sector of public service would be

affected by huge cuts in public spending. Health care services and education were not to

be spared. Preceding the Speech From the Throne, the Premier gave a televised address

to the citizens of Alberta outlining the government's plan in reducing the deficit. In a

published copy of his address, the following statement was made with regard to proposed

restructuring of educational governance and finance.

> At the end of the day, funding will follow the child in the public school
> system, so that parents, teachers and principals will have more say in their
> kids' education and how their schools are run. We'll see less administration
> as part of a major overhaul of how our schools are managed. We'll aim for
> 60 school boards rather than the 140 we have now. And we'll have a new
> way of funding our schools. (Klein, 1994)

Until the reading of the Provincial Budget on February 24, 1994, there was a

period of continual questioning of government members regarding the proposed re-

structuring of educational governance. School boards, the teachers' association, interest

groups, and members of the public at large sought clarification on the intent and extent of

the re-structuring mentioned by the Premier. During this period of time the media played

a major role as information gatherer and disseminator. The Legislature was not in session

and therefore few official paper pronouncements were forthcoming. Rather, news items

based on interviews, speeches, and government memos were reported in the daily papers,

on radio and on television. A plethora of direct quotations, explanation, interpretations,

and editorial judgments on the government's plans for education were shared with the

public. Comments and explanations from government members were sought along with

reactions from concerned stakeholders. The media noted that the Premier's plan for

education could only mean that school boards would not only be reduced in number but

would lose the right to requisition local tax money (McConnell, January 19, 1994). In

subsequent government reports the issue of provincial appointed superintendents was

addressed. In reaction, public and stakeholder comments ranged from those labelling the

changes as a "power and tax grab" to those that agreed with the need to dramatically

down-size a top heavy public service (McConnell, January 20, 1994).

The provincial budget brought down on February 24, 1994 confirmed these much

discussed changes in educational governance. Bill 41 (1993) and the subsequent Bill 19,

The School Amendment Act (1994), set out the specifics for regional division boards.

During a provincial meeting with school boards in March, 1994, the Minister of Education

took the opportunity to remind school trustees that legislated authority needed in altering

the boundaries of school districts, divisions and counties was vested solely with him

(Alberta Education, 1994). Therefore, the formation of large regional boards would go

ahead as planned by the government despite protests from school boards. The Minister

presented school board representatives with a document suggesting three options to

possible divisional amalgamation choices. He also encouraged boards to voluntarily form

partnerships on their own and then approach him for final approval. The Premier had

previously spoken of reducing the 142 boards to 60 but a study of the three options set

out by the Minister of Education showed that an end result of 32 to 35 regional divisions

was actually wanted (Alberta Education, 1994). In a concluding statement in the

document the Minister explained, "The concept of Regional Division Boards is an

amalgamation of school governance, administration and services" (Alberta Education, 1994, p. 9). Further, superintendents would be appointed by the province and the government would collect and redistribute all school taxes. The government also placed an emphasis on the need for more direct control over schools by parents, and saw placing regional boards at a distance from schools as one way to achieve this. Distancing the regional board would give parents and school-based educators room to work toward greater collaboration and shared accountability. Finally, the government set in place provisions for the creation of School Councils operated by parents. Each school would have a School Council responsible for working with the school principal in matters of educational services for that school.

### Educational Restructuring in the Nineties: The Change Process

In October 1993 the Department of Education published an Alberta Education workbook, *Meeting the Challenge* (1993), to be used in roundtable talks with stakeholder groups. The workbook outlined targets for expenditure reduction while at the same time leading its readers through a series of exercises meant to help clarify the meaning of basic education. It set out options for spending reductions including reference to teacher salaries, and the elimination of funding to such programs as kindergarten, physical education and fine arts. A series of public forums and roundtable meetings--at the government's invitation--were held using the workbooks. Though some general public discussions on changes to education took place informally, and in the media, it was not until the Premier's televised address to the province in mid January 1994, that open public

debate began on issues of educational governance and financing. In a published copy of

the speech, the Premier indicated funding would follow the student, more parental input

was to be ensured, and a reduction of school boards from 140 [142] to 60 was to be

sought (Klein, January 18, 1994).

### Changes to School Board Authority

Under the government's proposed restructuring of the educational system, changes

that affected the authority and power of school boards were to be significant. Boards

were not only to be reduced in number as a result of district amalgamation, but according

to a Department of Education spokesperson, the province would set a uniform mill rate

for education across the province. Municipalities would be expected to collect

educational tax dollars and send them to the province who would then redistribute the

money across the province on an equitable basis (Crockatt, 1994). The Premier defended

this action by saying, "We have some school districts in this province that are spending

about $4,000 per student. We have others that are able to spend up to $27,000 per

student. That is hardly equitable" (McConnell, January 20, 1994). Along with the loss of

taxation privileges, the province, not the school divisions, would appoint divisional

superintendents. As a result, the line of superintendent accountability would be altered.

Reactions to the changing status of school boards were varied. A county reeve

was relieved that the province would be assuming one hundred per cent of educational

costs. She was quoted in a newspaper as saying, "We prayed for and asked for more

provincial funding and we got it. We asked for equal opportunity for funding pupil

education and we got it" (Thomas, 1994). An educational reformer and an advocate of

alternate schools, expressed pleasure at the inclusion of the charter school concept in the

government's restructuring plan. "There is an increasing perception that academic

outcomes are slipping, that standards don't match those of our strongest internatio..al

competitors, and that some reorganization of the public system should occur" (Lord,

1994). A director of communications from the Department of Education indicated that

charter schools would give more decision-making autonomy to parents, teachers, and the

school principal. A spokesperson for the Edmonton School Council also spoke in favour

of the proposed changes in education. "J hink that it's important to recognize that we all

benefit if all the children in the province receive equitable funding and equitable education"

(Thomas, January 20, 1994). With reference to the loss in school board control, the

president of the Edmonton branch of the Provincial Home and School Association stated,

"I don't feel very well represented [by the boards]. So if you ask me if trustees could be

eliminated, I would say yes because they're not serving me well" (Panzeri, January 29,

1994).

Many voices were raised opposing the government's proposed changes to

educational governance. One board chair labelled the changes as a "power grab" and an

act of a "dictatorship." He felt boards would lose much of their autonomy if not their

actual existence, and that such changes were not discussed with boards prior to the

government's news release January 19th. "Of all the talk we heard at the [educational]

roundtable discussions, this is a real departure" (Pavlin, January 21, 1994). The president

of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) expressed concern with the effect such

proposals had on teacher bargaining, the impact on students in the classroom with staff

reductions, and the loss of so called optional programs such as kindergarten. She warned,

"If programs are tied to fees, the result will be an elitist system which could destroy the

province's cultural base" (McConnell, January 20, 1994). The Premier's figures, on per

student costs to boards, made during his speech were questioned as well. A

superintendent from a small rural district replied, "Why they [government] insist on

calculating it this way, I wouldn't even want tu guess. But they're terribly misinterpreting

the real cost" (McConnell, January 20, 1994). The Catholic boards in both Edmonton and

Calgary were extremely concerned over their loss of decision-making authority. They

cited proposed taxation restriction and the inability to hire their own superintendent as

crucial issues. Such loss of local autonomy for separate schools was seen as a direct

contradiction to Catholic rights assured under the Sections 93(3) and (4) of the

Constitution Act (1867). A loss of democratic rights was also an argument put forward

by some opponents. The executive director of the Trustees Association wrote, "In

Alberta we have long cherished the principle that ordinary people can decide locally what's

best for their community and the education of their children (Tymko, 1994). He went on

to question how new regional boards could be accountable for matters over which they

had no authority since their new role would be that of administrators not decision makers.

The board chair of a large urban district added, "It's not possible for boards to be

accountable to their electorate if the deputy minister [of Education] is going to direct the

activities" (Johnson, March 23, 1994).

Between the time of the Premier's speech to the presentation of the Provincial

Budget five weeks later, much discussion, debate, and verbal sparring between all

stakeholders took place. As has been noted, this occurred mainly via press releases and

media interviews since the Provincial Legislature was not in session. During this time the

Premier, the Minister of Education, and the Treasurer responded to a barrage of questions on restructuring educational services addressed by interest groups, lobby groups, parents, public and media. Through these verbal exchanges new proposals came to light. For example, the Minister of Education indicated that the province would bargain with the teachers in matters of contract (a proposal later withdrawn); the Premier stated that elected trustees would be replaced with government-appointed advisory boards (a proposal later withdrawn); and the Treasurer explained to his riding members that authority and responsibility for education would be vested at the school level in the hands of parents and principal (clarification later demanded on role of regional boards). React ig to concerns that tax dollars marked for education would disappear, the Premier assured the public that the tax collected for education would not go into general revenue but be "held in trust" for the schools. A Member of the Legislature, chairing the Policy Committee on Finance, told reporters that there was no question that the government's prime concern was controlling spiraling education costs, and that, centralization of governance was the answer to this problem (Moysa, February 25, 1994). Reacting to this statement, the Premier hastened to clarify that a lack of responsiveness and low accountability were also important reasons cited by the public for unhappiness with the present school boards and thus it became the government's responsibility to address the issue of local school governance.

Though many saw such arguments as striking at the very reason school boards existed--that is to respond to local concerns--others were more philosophical about these views. One school trustee commented on such criticism by saying, "I think [boards] are responsible for their own problems and I think that's part of the reason Klein has support.

They've been too slow to react to problems" (Panzeri, January 29, 1994). In the same

article, a highly profiled critic of the public school system cautioned against eliminating

boards as some were suggesting.

> I think it's quite reckless to do without them as Chicago has done [replaced
> by a parent/teacher council]. It seems more logical to keep them, reduce
> their number, create conditions which make them more accountable for
> performance. (Panzeri, June 1, 1994)

He suggested setting stringent conditions to ensure board accountability but at the

same time did not dismiss the possibility, that in the future, boards might be eliminated. A

parent, commenting on his school board's level of accountability stated, "Perhaps a

provincially appointed superintendent would make choices based on educational needs

rather than on bureaucratic comfort" (Bates, 1994).

## External Influences on Alberta's Restructuring Process

During all the speeches, discussions, arguments and counter arguments, little

research or considered evidence was brought forward for public scrutiny in order to show

how other provinces, states or countries had fared when they had centralized school

governance. Several articles did appear in the print media providing brief descriptions of

how other areas managed after regionalization. One article noted that British Columbia [a

neighbouring province] amended its school act in 1990 to allow the government to collect

the education portion of residential taxes previously in hands of local school boards. In

this article the president of the British Columbia School Trustees Association commented,

"This move by the government effectively neutralized the 75 school boards and killed their

ability to meet local needs" (McConnell, January 20, 1994). In the same article, the

president of the British Columbia School Superintendents' Association stated that after the

school act amendments, school boards lost their autonomy; were turned into nothing more than complaint bureaus; were made accountable for programs but not for the money to fund them; and were in danger of being dissolved in the near future.

A subsequent article in the same newspaper focused on the charter school concept included in the Alberta government's vision of a restructured school governance. Though official guidelines for charter schools had as yet not been provided by the Alberta government, the newspaper presented a picture of such schools based on comments, interviews and speeches made by government members. Charter schools were to be operated by parents and teachers, and monitored by a public body seen as either a school board or Alberta Education. Such schools would be publicly funded and open to all students without tuition fee charges Tanner, 1994). In this article reference was made to the fact that the charter school concept in the United States was gaining popularity because it was seen as a "back-to-basics" movement; as a counter to the "intransigence of established educational bureaucracy"; and as a system that would ensure parents would be listened to. Minnesota was noted as the first state to draft charter school legislation, have it approved, and begin its implementation. 1990 saw Minnesota open its first charter school. The Representatives' Member who initiated the legislation stated she did so in order to give parents and students more choice. "The public school bureaucracy in Minnesota moves so slowly it's difficult to do something new" (Tanner, 1994). With a requirement that the charter schools be organized by parents, the President of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers questioned how long parents would stay with the difficult, and time-consuming task of operating these schools. "There's a lot of work in running a school, and most parents will quickly tire of the responsibility" (Tanner, 1994).

She went on to comment that the biggest problem was finding a way to monitor what was being taught in charter schools. A spokesperson for the Education Commission of the United States did not share such fears. His view was that charter schools offered flexibility and a choice to parents and therefore were here to stay.

The lack of comprehensive information from the Alberta government regarding the introduction of charter schools, and the lack of specifics for the proposed changes to the role of school boards, caused difficulties for those most directly affected by such proposed changes. The president of the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) said they were looking forward to the tabling of legislation in mid-March so that the School Act amendments could finally be studied properly. The ASBA had many questions related to such talked of issues as: incentives to schools for recognition of student performance; the guidelines for the open boundary concept; and the future of second language programs (Moysa, February 25, 1994). In the same article the board chair of an Alberta urban school jurisdiction pointed out that the government had yet to demonstrate that cuts to administration alone would make up for the huge reductions needed in funding to public education.

> It's a misrepresentation. It's offensive to me that they're saying school
> jurisdictions in this province are so top-heavy that they can accommodate
> these cuts without affecting classrooms. It's not going to happen. (Moysa,
> January 25, 1994)

Repeated concerns were voiced regarding the government's failure to present a clear plan for educational restructuring. There was speculation as to the government's theoretical and political base for its reform movement. The media noted that some ideas specific to education came from the American states of Minnesota and Colorado where

experimentation with charter school legislation had occurred. In the newsprint and on

television, stories were featured on a newly established charter school in Colorado (CBC

Television News, 19: .; Dempster, 1994; Johnson, March 23, 1994). Interviews with

parents, a teacher, the teachers' organization, and the superintendent of the district were

featured.

At the same time, others noted that the broader more encompassing process of

change pursued by the government, had more to do with political and economic forces

than with educational initiatives. Parallels were being drawn between Alberta's course of

restructuring and that used by the government of New Zealand in the late 1980's when it

too faced economic difficulties. The media cited New Zealand's past minister of finance

Roger Douglas as the source of muc' , ˜ Alberta's action plan. A highly profiled visit to

Alberta by Douglas, and the highlighting of his book titled, Unfinished Business (Douglas,

1993) were seen as confirmation of this. The ATA NEWS featured a review of the book.

The reviewer stated:

> If you ever wondered where the ideas for economic reform originated, part
> of the answer lies in the book by Roger Douglas. He presents an economic
> Utopia. All the state needs to do is follow his direction for reform and the
> outcome will be an economic miracle. (Flower, 1994, p. 5)

In a letter to the editor of a large urban paper a provincial cabinet minister referred

to New Zealand as an object lesson for Alberta. He wrote, "It is economics not politics

that drives our government. Simply put, because New Zealand refused to live within its

means it was forced to do so by others" (Kowalski, 1994). Several months later, another

New Zealand resident was invited to visit Alberta. Joanna Beresford, assistant secretary

of the New Zealand Educational Institute also made headlines as she spoke to labour

groups and the media with her interpretation of the aftermath of severe government

centralization and privatization. In one presentation she stated, "Alberta faces economic

disaster and the collapse of its social system if it continues following a political 'hoax'

imported from New Zealand" (McConnell, May 1, 1994). In a radio interview Beresford

did note--in reference to questions on changes to education--that the downsizing of

education's administration and the moves which saw parents having greater control at the

local level, were seen as positives moves by the public and her union.

A further theoretical source for the government's change process was noted as a

book titled Reinventing Government (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). A school

superintendent, writing in the ASBA Newsletter offered this review of the book.

> The book has received     .siderable attention from cabinet ministers in
> provincial governments ..ross Canada. It is important because it appears
> to be the blueprint for Alberta's government policy direction. Public school
> officials would be well advised to read it in order to understand and foresee
> the implications of government initiatives. (Brownlee, 1994, p. 7)

The reviewer went on to indicate that though the authors presented some excellent

ideas, they failed to deal effectively with the issue of equity. In the opinion of the

reviewer, such a flawed economic restructuring plan would result in a "user-pay

approach" and a "two-tiered system" of education.

In response to the Minister's article stating that economics not politics was driving

the government's restructuring plans, a newspaper commentator wrote, "If they're

[governments] looking for a road map, they could do worse than to return to the old

economics. The Americans are starting to" (Das, 1994). He went on to say that key

economists in the American administration were once again taking note of ideas presented

by the economist John Galbraith four decades past. Galbraith promoted a theory of

economic recovery devised by J. M. Keynes, a British economist of the 1950's. Keynes

advocated positive government intervention during economic downturns to bring the

economy back to prosperity, and the i ِed for significant government efforts in promoting

the concept of a "good society." The commentator's interpretation was, "In policy terms,

it means giving direction to the economy, promoting a notion of the common good and

the common wealth" (Das, 1994). He concluded the article by stating the need of

governments to provide equality of opportunity for citizens by investing in public

institutions such as social services, health, and education.

## Local School Governance in the Nineties: An Issue of Authority

On May 28, 1994, after third reading Bill 19, the School Amendment Act (1994)

was passed into law. In it the provincial government reclaimed the right to set and re-

distribute school taxes, approved the charter school concept, set out provisions to replace

local school boards with appointed regional boards, installed parent councils as decision

makers at the school level, and made superintendents accountable to the provincial

government. The passing of this legislation was not easily accomplished. The debate over

individual provisions within Bill 19, as well as its overall philosophical stance, continued

on the part of the Opposition in the Legislature and in public discussions. The

government, anxious to move forward, invoked Closure during the third Reading and had

Bill 19 passed into law. They proclaimed it was a "necessary and worthy" piece of

legislation. It would see the control of schools return to parents plus would ensure greater

accountability on the part of educators.

However, even as the government announced that it was now time to move on and stop debating Bill 19, School Amendment Act (1994), a real-life problem related to one of the provisions in the Act--that of school governance and parental input--was unfolding. A school trustee of a rural jurisdiction had recently made a decision on kindergarten hours. Parents of the community not only voiced their displeasure with the decision, but also questioned the right of the person to make the decision. Of note is the history of this school jurisdiction. One year previous, the Minister of Education appointed this school trustee--the only government-appointed trustee in the province--to replace the entire elected board due to unresolved legal problems. In light of this, some parents reacted to the appointed trustee's decision on kindergarten by saying, "We didn't elect this person yet he's making a decision that doesn't reflect what we want for our kids" (Moysa, May 25, 1994).

While the debate--concerning who speaks for parents--was being reported, a reeve in another school jurisdiction was highlighted in the media for advocating that the election of all school trustees should come to an end. He was quoted as explaining, "The current system has evolved into a predictable recipe for confrontation, exploitation by interest groups and imprudent stewardship of resources. This change would deter individuals with narrow agendas from again standing for election" (Schuler, May 28, 1994). The reeve felt that government appointees would be neutral and therefore more effective spokespersons for the citizens of a school jurisdiction. Earlier comments from parent groups would seem to support this view regarding the ability of parents to have an impact on decision making under the present school board structure. For example, a parent group when speaking to

its own board of trustees stated, "Edmonton parents have not been adequately represented or had a voice with their school board" (Pavlin, October 15, 1994).

A third element regarding who had the authority to speak and make decisions on behalf of children, arose from a provision in Bill 19, School Act Amendments (1994) which set in place parent councils. Each school was to have a group of parents who were to work with the principal and make decisions pertaining to educational services. In the Act, there were no defining role responsibilities set for these parent councils. This was a source of concern for some stakeholders. Under the parent council system, what decisions would parents be making? What level of authority would they have? A representative from one county's existing School Advisory Council stated:

> Parents have no business making policy or administrative decisions s h as hiring and firing of principals, nor being involved in the daily operation of schools. Parents should remain as advisers with some influence over policy. (Panzeri, June 1, 1994)

A board chair of an urban jurisdiction cautioned, "I think we want to ensure the government is careful about who they give authority to for making decisions" (Moysa, May 25, 1994). The president of a Home and School Association--and one who had supported moves for greater parental involvement in schools--also had cautionary advice for the government. "Strong regulations are needed to ensure parent councils don't become special-interest lobby groups" (Moysa, May 25, 1994). Yet other interested participants saw parent councils as a good idea in principle, though perhaps somewhat unrealistic in practice. They wondered whether there would be enough parents willing, and having the necessary time, to become involved with their school in the way council membership required? As one parent representative commented, "Some parents have

expressed concern ab ut finding more time in their already busy schedules to make more decisions about what goes on in their local school" (Moysa, 1994).

In an article reviewing Sir Douglas' book Unfinished Business, the reviewer noted, "Although Douglas mentions how people should be manipulated [for the government to reach its objectives], he forgets the perversity of humans" (Flower, 1994). This would seem a fitting place to conclude this section of the chapter. The many quotations included in the preceding portion of the chapter were provided to indicate the variety of perceptions, opinions, and beliefs held by politicians, citizens, parents and school trustees as the government restructures educational governance. Such discourse helps to place in context the changes present impacted the role of local school boards and the type of issues and decisions board of education faced at this time.

## Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to give a broader environmental context for the study. First, information on the legislated role and responsibilities of school boards was shared along with perceived strengths and weaknesses of this form of local school governance. School boards, which serve as agencies for both the provincial legislature and the local community, were noted as enacting policies and legal directives affecting the operation of schools in their jurisdiction. Though they have some measure of discretionary power, school boards operate under the authority of the legislature and direction of the Minister of Education. The strength of local school board governance was pointed out as being in its ability to accommodate greater understanding and more

appropriate action regarding local needs. However, critics questioned whether school boards were any more open to public involvement and less "politicized" than are any of the more distant governing structures.

A second area of discourse included in the chapter dealt with the role of school boards specific to the successive governments of Alberta. Their role, both past and present, was reviewed. Included in this review was specific information outlining the rise and fall of school board authority during this time. Since the turn of the century, Alberta has seen the total number of school districts increase, then decrease, increase once again, and, at the time of this study, drastically decrease. Though the political beliefs of the government were seen to influence the level of authority and the number of school boards allowed to operate, economic factors at the local and provincial levels were also seen to shape the role of school boards.

Also provided in the chapter was an examination of the Government of Alberta's present restructuring process of public education as seen through the eyes of various stakeholders. This was accomplished by drawing upon media coverage--extensively the print media--in order to portray a sense of the climate, feelings and temperament of the people involved in, and affected by, the changes to educational services. Positions, and arguments for and arguments against these positions were shared representing the views of school trustees, parents, spokespersons for special interest groups, politicians and educators. Issues such as funding equity, local accountability and the role of parents were examined.

Finally, the chapter concluded by focusing on how these changes are seen to affect the present school board structure of governance. Concerns were voiced related to who

would, in reality, have the authority to make decisions and represent student interests.

Would parents, through the new parent councils, be in the best position to do so? The

practical aspect of participatory democracy was questioned by those stakeholders who felt

the representative aspect of democracy--found in the present form of school governance--

should not be totally abandoned.

# CHAPTER V

## DESCRIBING THE STUDY SITE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide descriptive information related to the site of the study and salient features that define its context. Presented here is a portrait of the town, the school district and its associated structures of governance. The intent of this chapter is to give the reader a sense of the study site by providing information on its immediate environment. This is done to create a meaningful context in order to enhance understanding regarding data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

## The Town Site

The town of Beaton (a pseudonym) is located less than an hour's drive from several large urban centres. It has a population of 4,000 residents and was described by the interviewees as being a middle-class community. In the 1950's the town rose to prominence due to oil field activity in the area. The families of the oil workers were housed in the town and over several decades a growing sense of permanence and community developed. In recent years, despite the abatement of oil exploration and related industrial development, Beaton continues to grow in population with residents working in the town itself or commuting to work sites in adjacent urban centres. The Superintendent of Schools joins municipal representatives to travel and recruit families for the town. A Chamber of Commerce for Beaton and District actively works to promote Beaton. In the town job opportunities are found with many small, and a few large, public

and private organizations. The large businesses are those of a grocery store outlet and a hotel. Small businesses such as the newspaper, florist, insurance agency, bakery, and liquor outlet also provide employment. In the public sector, the municipality, the hospital, and the school district are major providers of permanent employment. A local newspaper employs a small staff. It publishes once a week and provides home delivery.

The town has a range of homes from older starter houses to large, modern residences located in newly developed sub-divisions. A hospital was constructed ten years ago and is viewed with much civic pride. An all-purpose ice arena is the centre of year-long activities. It is the home of sporting events and a yearly Trade Show. The town of Beaton also boasts a golf course that is patronized by residents and guests from neighbouring centres. A swimming pool is located in the town. The administrative offices for police, social welfare, and other social services are situated in a nearby municipality. Beaton has a Fire Hall whose services are shared with a neighbouring county.

Three public schools serve the town with a total school population of just over 1,000 students in kindergarten to grade twelve. There are no Catholic separate schools in the town though a small Christian School is in operation serving fewer than 50 students, grades one to nine. This school is in its second year of service with the majority of students coming from outside the Beaton school jurisdiction. The local high school is spoken of with particular pride. It attracts students from a neighboring school jurisdiction due to its strong programming in such areas as career and technology, music, and sports. Beaton's students who require specialized programs or wish to receive French Immersion instruction are sent to an adjacent school jurisdiction under a reciprocal tuition agreement. Over the past number of years the school district's central administration has steadily

decreased in numbers and now consists of only the superintendent of schools and one

associate superintendent. School board members have long held the view that in times of

financial restraint, the majority of budgetary dollars must go directly to the schools. Thus,

the reduction in central office services was put in policy. At the school level, each school

is still able to have two administrators.

## Local Governance

The municipality is under the jurisdiction of a municipal council comprised of

seven elected members. Elections are held every three years. The town has been

designated as a county by the provincial government. Provincial legislation enables the

town to have its school jurisdiction designated as a "district" with a governing board of

trustees. As a county, Beaton's School Board is coterminous with the municipality's

governing body. Members elected to the municipal council automatically become

members of the school board. Thus, the mayor of the town is also a school trustee and the

chair of the school board is a town councillor. In 1992, with the retirement of the school

board's secretary treasurer, a decision was made to have the town's secretary treasurer

take over these duties. School board meetings are held once per month with town council

meetings held twice a month. Interviewees spoke of the many advantages to this type of

joint school-municipal governance. They felt that past practice illustrated a reasonable

balance in the decisions made pertaining to both school and town needs. It was also

pointed out that educational matters were better understood and more favourably dealt

with by the seven governing officials because of their dual roles. Municipal and school

priorities were balanced against the fiscal constraints of local tax payers and much give and take and compromise was spoken of. For example, when educational needs are particularly high during a budgetary year then adjustments are made to municipal priorities. The following year's budget would then ensure that municipal needs were met.

## School District Beliefs and Values

The school district's Mission Statement indicates an emphasis on maintaining a partnership between home, school and the community. A quality educational experience for children is defined as: promoting good citizenship; encouraging students to strive for excellence in all endeavors; providing a student-centered learning environment; maintaining a disciplined atmosphere; and developing a mastery of basic skills, critical thinking, and problem solving. Though not directly labelled as such in the Mission Statement, the concept of neighbourhood schools was spoken of by those interviewed for the study. A close association between the school, parents, and community was valued and seen as an "understood" part of the Mission Statement.

A Parent Advisory Council operates in each school and works with the school's administration on behalf of the parents. An active parent-volunteer service is also in place in all three schools. A Work Experience Program for adolescents is well-established and continues to bring schools into contact with their surrounding community. A newly established project linking an oil company with the high school is seen as a positive example of a school-business partnership. Environmental awareness is promoted as

evidenced in the board supported participation of all three schools in an Energy

Conservation Project.

## Parental Views of the School District

Parents in the town have a number of venues where they are able to voice opinions

and give suggestions on matters of education. In use are traditional lines of

communication such as direct contact with the school administration, formal and informal

interaction with the teachers, and on-site interactions of parent volunteers as they work

with the school staff. Also available to parents are the more formal structures such as

Parent Advisory Councils, board presentations, district parent-surveys, and direct contacts

with the superintendent of schools. Since Beaton is a small community, the school

trustees can be approached in both formal and informal circumstances.

In a Parent Survey published June 1993, the following parental responses were

noted. Responses on surveys received from elementary school parents showed their areas

of concern as being (in descending order of importance) curriculum, discipline, extra-

curricular activities, and class size. The intermediate school parents listed progress

reporting, having a voice in school decision making, and the district's use of tax dollars as

important issues. In the high school the parents listed some specific programs as needing

attention. These parents also stated that they wanted a greater voice in decision making,

and expressed concerns over discipline and counselling services. Overall parental

satisfaction with the three schools ranged from 84% to 95% in support of the schools.

Students responded to the same questions with levels of satisfaction ranging from 86% to

92%. In a review of the 1993-94 school board minutes, no parent delegations appeared at

any of the board meetings expressing unhappiness with schools services. It must be noted that two parent committees did come before the board but this was at the board's invitation as part of a board-parent collaboration on matters of bussing costs and kindergarten hours of instruction. Board members spoke of the need to confer with the parents and public on matters that affect them. Such parent committees were seen as one way to do this.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Major School Board Initiatives and Actions</h2>

In the spring of 1991, the Beaton School Board approached the School Business Administration Services of Alberta Education and asked for a viability study to be done on its behalf. The major question driving the study was whether local tax payers could continue to support the type of school services they enjoyed at that time, and whether they could respond adequately to new funding demands that would arise in the future. School Trustees feared that if the costs of maintaining a quality school system continued to escalate, there would come a time in the near future when the citizens of Beaton would not be able to pay the amount of taxes required to cover these costs. Placing an unrealistic tax burden on the community was to be avoided. It was this concern, rooted in fiscal responsibility and long-term financial commitments to quality educational services, that prompted a call for a School District Viability Study. As the Board Chair stated, "We were driven forward financially."

The broad purpose of the Viability Study was to gather information and make recommendations. More specifically, the study was to focus on: (a) the merits of the school board remaining within the existing merged municipal and school governance

structure; and (b) the benefits of pursuing a partnership with another school jurisdiction. The report was completed and made available to the School Board in November of 1991. The report not only confirmed the extent of the fiscal challenges facing the school district, but it also cast doubt on the school district's ability to survive financially within its present municipal structure. As well, the report validated an action that had already been contemplated by the trustees--that of seeking a partnership with another school jurisdiction. In keeping with the mandate of the report, a number of alternatives worthy of consideration were listed along with the advantages and disadvantages of each. The alternatives open to the school district were: (a) to retain the status quo; (b) become an independent school district [through the dissolution of the present urban-county status]; or (c) amalgamate with one of two neighbouring counties. The report also indicated that each alternative would be significantly affected if the provincial government did eventually implement a plan for equitable funding of education across the province. But, if such equity did not occur, the school district would have little recourse but to join one of the neighbouring school jurisdictions.

The School Board shared the Viability Study with its stakeholders and began discussions with the school jurisdiction noted in the report as being the best potential partner. In the meantime, the provincial government, feeling increased pressure from man, eas of the province on the issue of equity of educational funding, began discussing possible changes to the current funding system. Though Beaton was actively searching for a partner, it still joined other school jurisdictions in continued lobbying of the government for fiscal equity. Beaton hoped that if the government relented and gave small districts a secured and equitable portion of provincial funding, then perhaps merging with another

jurisdiction could be avoideu. Under the existing financing structure, the total school district revenues were made up of approximately 60% government grants, 30% from local taxation, with the remainder from such sources as tuition fees, text rentals and minor investment income. Over the previous several years, producing a balanced budget was become a growing problem for Beaton. For example, during the 1990/91 school year the district incurred a deficit of slightly over $100,000. The provincial government stepped in and eliminated most of this debt through a special grant. For the following budgetary year the deficit was only $17,000 but this was due to reduced expenditures and provincial government intervention. In 1992/93 the District balanced the budget but again only because the provincial government came forward with special lottery money.

As was previously noted, such financial concerns laid the foundation for Beaton's School Board to not only initiate a viability study, but to join other districts in lobbying the provincial government to consider a more equitable system of education funding for school jurisdictions. The main argument used by the lobbyists was to illustrate how school jurisdictions with strong resource-based economies were able to finance extended educational services with ease while smaller school jurisdictions, without a similar economic tax-base, were experiencing great difficulty in providing basic educational services. As a result, Beaton School District joined twenty-eight other school jurisdictions who wanted two things from the government. They wanted per student funding and taxpayer equity. They named themselves The Equity for Students--4.07 Group and became a committed coalition whose aim was to pressure the provincial government into action. Fearing that the provincial government would remain inactive on the matter of funding equity in spite of their coalition, the twenty-nine boards filed a legal Statement of

Claim against the provincial government and vowed to continue their fight to the Supreme Court of Canada if necessary. As an indication of the stakes in such a move, it is noteworthy that for Beaton equitable funding, of the type they were demanding, would mean an additional $540,000 per year in revenue.

## The Provincial Government Gathers Opinions

In the Fall of 1993, the provincial government held a regional meeting with its stakeholders to discuss education grants and capital expenditures. Twenty-three school districts sent representatives to the two day meeting. Along with school district representatives, invitations were sent to: Alberta School Boards' Association, Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, Alberta Architects' Association, Catholic School Trustees', Home Education, Municipal Affairs, Urban Municipalities, Association of Independent Schools and Colleges, Public School Boards' Association, and the Rural and Improvement Districts Association. Beaton was represented by its superintendent of schools, the school board chair and the sub local teachers' union representative. Three sessions were held at which ideas were garnered from the delegates through a series of questions posed by Alberta Education representatives. The questions were set out in a workbook format and were dealt with in small and large group discussions. The first section of questions referred to such matters as: how Alberta Education should deal with declining resources; how it could be more effective and efficient in dealing with jurisdictions; how capital projects now under consideration should be prioritized; and who should be held accountable for grant

expenditures? The second section of questions focused on capital expenditure plans for the future. What type of priorities should be set and what should be listed under the new facility planning program? The final section of questions dealt with the funding of special programs; handling differentiated grants; an examination of transportation funding; and per pupil funding.

It is of interest to consider some of the statements made by the stakeholders as they discussed the series of questions in the workbook. It is of special interest to note the comments in areas related to regionalization, equity, and educational governance. Given the subsequent and rapid legislative actions taken by the provincial government within months of the meeting (see Chapter IV), many of the comments give pause for thought. The following quotations are contained in the document Alberta Education's Regional Meeting with Stakeholders (Alberta Education, 1993).

1. With regard to questions related to the *funding of education*, a sampling of comments and ideas presented by those in attendance were as follows.

"Define what is basic education and charge user fees for anything that does not fall into this basic definition" (p. 1).

"Albertans are saying education must be given top priority. Tax payers can't pay more. Dollars must come from other departments" (p. 1).

"Have Alberta Education take over full funding" (p. 1).

"Instead of finding ways to cut, look at ways to redistribute and use funds" (p. 1).

"Suggest provincial sales tax as a means of increasing revenue" (p. 1).

"Look at regionalization and knock down jurisdictional boundaries for capital funding" (p. 1).

"Home schooling should be targeted as well as ECS [Early Childhood Services]
and private schools" (p. 1).

2. Responses pertaining to the *equity* dilemma were as follows.

"Equity should be addressed with some compensation for regional differences" (p.
6).

"Equity is different in each jurisdiction. Some have unique problems to deal with
i.e. distance education" (p. 5).

"Privatize some educational components" (p. 1).

3. When the question of *declining resources* and increasing demands was
discussed, the concept of regionalization was put forward as a possible solution.

"Regionalization: fewer boards, fewer officials" (p. 2).

"Regionalization would mean fewer boards for government officials to deal with
and this be more efficient and save time" (p. 2).

"Regionalization i.e. amalgamate small boards" (p. 2).

4. Responses to the question of whether *school boards* should continue to be held
accountable for grants expenditures were as follows.

"School boards must be fully accountable to governments. . . " " (p. 4).

"Ultimately boards are accountable to parents and employers" (p. 4).

"Allow boards to explore amalgamation, before the government intervenes" (p. 4).

5. Here are samples of the responses on the possibility of collapsing various
*grants* into a single grant.

"Get away from ear-marked grants with local board autonomy" (p. 4).

"If we simplify grants they are easier to cut, so leave them alone" (p. 4).

"Let the province be the taxing authority and allocate dollars to systems equally.

Autonomy would then be with the spending" (p. 4).

"Attach the dollars to student outcomes or results" (p. 4).

6. On the question of dealing with *"voluntary"* educational services such as

kindergarten, the comments were:

"Privatize ECS (stop funding totally) " (p. 1).

"Let those who want ECS pay" (p. 1).

"Don't fund home schoolers. Zero" (p. 1).

"ECS should not be cut. The more money you spend in lower grades, the higher

the return in higher grades" (p. 11).

"Cut transportation grant (door-to-door service) " (p. 11).

"Home schooling should be targeted as well as ECS and private schools" (p. 11).

7. A final area of interest to be noted contained the responses to the question of

whether the province should fund according to *"per student served"* rather than a

"resident student" basis. Here are some comments and suggestions.

"Other than with special education, the student served basis could lead to a

voucher system, which boards do not want" (p. 11).

"Residency by religion becomes an issues on a per student basis because of

problem with tax assignment" (p. 11).

"Competition noted as healthy in attracting students to schools but there is concern

with the uncontrolled student exodus because of geographic proximity to systems

offering full comprehensive programs" (p. 11).

## Determining the Future of the District

In the Fall of 1993, the provincial government began speaking about its

commitment to initiating vast and far-reaching changes to education. These changes were

to include a massive restructuring affecting both the funding and governance of education.

As the months went by, more information on this restructuring came forward. Though

equity in school funding was in the government's proposal, so too was a plan for reducing

the number of school jurisdictions in the province. Beaton's school board was pleased

that its prime concern, that of fiscal equity, was finally to be addressed but now wondered

whether there was any possibility the district could remain on its own. Upon contacting

the Minister of Education, the Board was told that remaining alone was not an option.

The school district had to choose a partner or one would be chosen for it. As a result, the

School Board requested that the 1991 Viability Study be updated to see if the original

options were still valid ones. An updated report noted that prevailing circumstances had

not changed and the original options were still the best ones for consideration. The

second report did caution that time was of the essence since other school districts were

working quickly to secure their future partners before the government's deadline.

Beaton School Board once again resumed its discussions with two neighbouring

school jurisdictions who were still willing to accept a partner. In order to have a proper

method of comparing the two potential partners, a set of questions were used during

meetings held with each. The questions sought to clarify positions regarding such issues

as maximum class size, new building priorities, the number and future of small schools in

the jurisdiction, existing policies on teacher transfers, views on contracting caretaking services, and the movement of high school students.

In mid-May, at an public school-board meeting, the fate of Beaton School District with regard to regionalization was to be discussed. The School Board publicized the meeting and sent out letters to representatives of various stakeholder groups. The Kindergarten Parent Group, the School Councils, local ATA representatives, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, and school administrators were specifically invited to attend. The School Board Chair began the meeting by reviewing the history behind the drive for fiscal equity and the resulting sequence of events leading to the district's present position. Individual board members spoke to issues and concerns each saw as important. Members of the public asked questions and also expressed their own views on various issues. At the end of the meeting, a School Board Motion indicating which school jurisdiction Beaton sought to join was read aloud and a vote taken. Though the Motion passed, it was not a unanimous decision. Two Board Members were absent and of the remaining five, one voted against the motion. Those in the public gallery were told that the Motion, upon gaining ratification by the town's Municipal Council, would then be sent to the Minister of Education for approval.

For the present members of the school board, this action foretold of their impending termination. They would continue to serve only until the regional board was established. When that occurred they would no longer possess the authority to speak for Beaton's parents and students on matters of education. The Board Chair spoke about their eminent demise with some nostalgia tainted with regret, but several Board members

hastened to remind everyone that this was what they had been working toward for the past

three years. Now was a time to be happy.

Within two weeks time of the Motion being made, a public forum was held

protesting the choice of partner. The rally was organized by the Beaton and District

Chamber of Commerce.

## Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide some descriptive characteristics

regarding the site selected for research. The history of the town and information on local

school governance were provided. Items and comments gleaned from official documents

served to exemplify how parents from the community felt about their schools. Some

parental issues and concerns were listed. District documents were also used to illustrate

the values and beliefs underpinning policy direction. Initiatives undertaken by the school

district were presented along with a description of significant decision-making events.

It was noted that the events resulting from the District's interface with the

provincial government and the government's activities in the field of education

provincially, had a significant impact on the study. The central focus of the study was to

examine how a school board recognized and dealt with policy issues. The intention was to

follow the "normal" happenings in a district. However, during the study the Alberta

government announced, and began to enact, sweeping changes to the structure of

education. This included significant changes to local school governance. The matter of

issue identification at the school board level became constrained by the actions by the

government. Thus, one of the purposes of this chapter was to provide the necessary

background information for understanding this constraint.

# CHAPTER VI

## REPORTING THE FINDINGS

"This is a book about the social and political context in which problems of educational policy occur and in which solutions to those problems are pursued" (Mann, 1975, p. vii). Mann used this statement as an introduction to his book on policy decision making in education. It seems appropriate to borrow these words in order to introduce this chapter of the study. The purpose of the study was to collect data and analyze it in a manner that would give rise to discussions, interpretations, and insights into how a public school board recognized and dealt with policy issues. Since school jurisdictions are formal organizations, the study also considered dimensions of social and political activity which occur in the organization, in its immediate context, and in its broader environment. The research questions guiding the study took these various elements into consideration and investigated the phenomena using the categories of issues, participants and setting.

For purposes of reporting the data in this chapter, the process of decision making has been kept as the central theme. By using the theme of the decision-making process, a more cogent and meaningful presentation of research findings is achieved. First, from the theoretical perspective, policy was defined as a sequence of decision-making activities resulting from the interaction of individuals and groups. Second, as even s unfolded in this "real-time" study, it became apparent many decisions made outside the school district had a major impact on how the policy process unfolded within the district. This "story" of one school board's process of policy formulation was the result of a ten months long study. By telling this story as an evolving process occurring over time, the findings are

placed into a holistic context and addressed with greater clarity and relevance. In so

doing, each section of research questions which guided the study--issues, participants, and

environment--is addressed.

The analysis of the data presented in this chapter has been organized into three

categories. Each category presents a different phase of organizational policy activity.

Since one of the purposes of this "real-time" study was to trace the rise and fall of issues,

data reported in this chapter have been separated into time frames, in each of which are

reported data collected specific to issues that interviewees cited as those under discussion

at that particular time. The study occurred over a period of ten months. The policy

problems and issues, as identified by board members and the superintendent, are discussed.

## Organizational Stability: Fall 1993

"What are some of the important matters that are being dealt with by the Board at

this time?" With this simple question the study of school board decision making started.

For the superintendent and five school board members, who agreed to take part in the

study, the question seemed a straightforward one. What was not known to the researcher,

nor to the participants, was that this district was on the brink of a decision-making process

that was to have far reaching and historic consequences. As the study began, participants

were anxious to share important background knowledge on previous policy decisions in

order for the researcher to understand better the reasons behind the Board's current

activities. When Trustees shared information on problems and issues they were careful to

set the information in the context of past circumstances. These were seen as having led

the board to the current issues. The analysis in the first time-frame is presented in a

manner that reflects this past and present orientation.

## Beaton School Board Defines Its Problem

> The formal political agenda includes matters brought before government
> for serious consideration. When a problem accesses the formal agenda,
> governmental bodies are scheduling the event for discussion and possible
> action. (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, p. 130)

Though the legislated mandate for an elected board of trustees does involve a

variety of roles and responsibilities (as presented in Chapter V), for the "average" person,

expectations placed on the local school board seem to be decidedly straightforward. For

example, local businesses and home owners want to pay school taxes according to

reasonable mill rates. Parents want quality programs for their children with good teachers

employed to present instruction. The employees want a board that will enact fair and

reasonable policies by means of employee involvement or, at the very least, consultation.

For the school board, fulfilling such expectations calls for the effective and efficient use of

those resources over which it has direct control and, if need be, lobbying for resources

over which it has only indirect control. It is therefore not surprising that a large part of

school board discussion and deliberation has to do with budgets and finance.

This was very much the case for the Beaton Board of Education. It was this area

of fiscal responsibility that gave rise to the Board's realization that the District was fast

approaching the time when its yearly revenues, even with periodic government assistance,

would no longer cover the cost of educational services residents were expecting.

Government grants plus local tax dollars would not be sufficient. Indeed, deficit budgets

were already in evidence by the early 1990's. Thus, educational funding was recognized

as the central problem for the Beaton Board of Education. At the onset of the study, each

participant identified this fiscal state of affairs as the main problem facing the school

district. There was a need to find additional education dollars without calling upon local

residents. Comments such as these illustrate the dilemma of the Board:

> Back in 1991, our district was concerned about its viability. We were
> concerned over dollars and would we be able to continue providing the
> services our students need. We shared these concerns with [a neighbouring
> school jurisdiction].

> Last year the schools needed lots of things so the municipality suffered.
> We would take away from the municipal knowing that people can't take
> too much in taxes. You did the best for both but sometimes one had to
> wait. You know the situation.

> We believe, and I guess know in our hearts, that we'll be experiencing
> increasing pressures on financing the needs of our community. Needs in
> both the municipal and school areas.

The Board took seriously its responsibility of providing quality educational

services while at the same time being financially accountable to the public. It foresaw the

growing educational needs of its community and looked for ways to ensure that these

needs would be met. The concept of equity funding in public education was discussed by

each Board member as well.

> Without money we can't do all the things we'd like to do. It's our major
> concern. We're in a fight with the government for equity funding. We
> took it upon ourselves to sue the government.

For Beaton School Board, its financial difficulties were a central problem. Board

members spoke candidly about the bleak future for the jurisdiction without additional

money. The Board did not feel that it could ask its citizens to accept any further local tax

burdens in order to attain the needed revenues for educational purposes. The problem

was defined in terms of it being one of inequity in educational funding at the provincial

level.

## Alternative Solutions to a Problem

> The obvious essence of a decision is that it is an event of choice, to select a
> specific course of action from among a number of alternatives. (Mann,
> 1975, p. 20)

As the Superintendent and Board members spoke of the major problem ahead for

the District, it was clear that two possible alternatives had already been identified and were

in the process of clarification. The first alternative for Beaton was to form a partnership

with a neighbouring jurisdiction that was fiscally sound. Such a move was seen as

affording each jurisdiction the benefits of resource pooling while ensuring the survival of

Beaton School Distri .. ces. Members of the Board perceived that the citizens of

Beaton were not oppc ·' ., such a union. In fact, they felt many wanted Beaton's Board

of Education to move on this alternative as quickly as possible. For some Board members,

this move was not as simple as those in the public envisioned. Though the two school

districts shared much in common regarding education and were on friendly terms,

accepting a "poor cousin" had not, to this point in time, been enthusiastically pursued by

the neighbouring school board. As one Trustee from Beaton commented in response to

constituent complaints:

> I didn't say anything. It's hard because if you say anything they say you
> just want to save your job. But it's okay to say let's go with [neighbouring
> jurisdiction] but the neighbour has to want us. So far they [neighbour]
> haven't said anything so how can we go join them.

Another Trustee describing this period of partner searching said, "We've been trying to join with [neighbouring district] for four years now and they've always given us the cold shoulder."

While the Board of Education continued to work through the scenario described above as one possible answer to the District's problem, a second alternative was also being pursued. This alternative focused on the provincial government. The Board of Education felt that since the province held the "purse strings" connected to the largest portion of educational funding, the Minister of Education had to be convinced that long asked for changes to provincial funding of education must now become a priority. The Board saw their problem as a financial one and the dominate issue that of fiscal equity in provincial funding of education. Under the existing structures, school jurisdictions with broad local tax bases were, with little financial difficulty, able to provide a variety of educational services to students. But jurisdictions lacking such tax sources were having trouble meeting their commitments. During the first round of interviews, this issue was brought forward and explained by each participant. It was an issue they, as district representatives, had been working on for a considerable period of time without wavering. Board members spoke of it as "being our priority right now." These are some of their comments:

> A lot on financial matters came out. The impact of proposal. We also spoke to the 407 group. These are the Fiscal Equity people that we dealt with before so we keeping in touch with them.

> The equity funding issue first comes to mind. Beaton has led twenty-nine boards in a lawsuit against the Province for better equity funding.

Thus, the difficulties arising from what many smaller districts defined as a lack of

equitable funding on the part of the province created a long standing policy problem for

many school boards. From this problem came the issue of equitable funding.

### Placing an Issue on The Government's Policy Agenda

> Sometimes, the recognition of a pressing problem is sufficient to gain a
> subject a prominent place on the policy agenda. But just as often, problem
> recognition is not sufficient by itself to place an item on the agenda.
> Problems abound out there in the government's environment, and officials
> pay serious attention to only a fraction of them. (Kingdon, 1984, p. 120)

In a province comprised of one hundred forty school jurisdictions, how does one

jurisdiction go about getting the government to pay attention to its particular concern?

This was the task that faced Beaton School Board. Beaton's Board of Education used

several strategies to gain "the government's ear." (It must be noted that these activities

occurred prior to the study and were shared in retrospect.) First, the Board approached

the Department of Education and discussed the basic problem facing the School District--

that of continuing deficit budgets. It discussed the District's financial difficulties and its

inability to garner more tax dollars for educational purposes. The Board asked the

Department to assist in gathering necessary information upon which to make some

decisions for Beaton's future. The Department responded by doing a Viability Study for

the school jurisdiction in 1991 and subsequently doing an updated Viability Study, three

years later. Second, the Superintendent of Schools and Board members took the

opportunity to speak to the issue of equity as a priority concern whenever possible. For

example, the equity issue began to appear consistently on the agenda of Beaton's School

Board meetings, comments on the issue were shared with the local newspaper, and the

issue was brought forward as an agenda item during the School District Zone Meetings of which Beaton was a member. Letters were also written to the Minister of Education presenting Beaton's concern regarding equitable funding for educational services in the province. The public was engaged by various means. Beside having access to the monthly School Board meetings and being kept informed through the local newspaper, Beaton's School Board held a "Citizens' Forum" where information was shared with the parents and the general public. People attending the meeting were asked to write letters to the government regarding the need for more equitable funding for education. In addition, Beaton's School Board organized a special meeting on equity, inviting various school boards who might be in the same financial difficulties as was Beaton, or who were simply interested in the issue of equitable funding. Twenty-five boards chose to attend. They sent representatives and also sent their solicitors in order to ensure that accurate legal information was available for consideration.

## The Process of Coalition Building

> How does an interest group get things to happen? A basic strategy is to try to pyramid its resources. If it can find willing partners around, a group will seek to form a coalition with other interest groups. (Berry, 1989, p. 164)

As a result of the many contacts made by Beaton's Superintendent and Board members during this exploratory time, it was evident that Beaton was not alone in facing financial difficulties. Concern over the issue of equity funding began to find a common voice. A local newspaper article noted that more districts were showing support for Beaton in its fight against the government. Board member and citizen comments regarding equity funding appeared in the print media. It was to be expected that soon a

number of like-minded jurisdictions would join Beaton to form an organized coalition.

This coalition began to lobby the provincial government on the equity funding issue in a

consistent manner. The lobbying efforts culminated in a formal lawsuit being drawn up,

citing the provincial government as not providing all citizens of Alberta with equal

educational opportunities regardless of resident location in the province. It took this issue

approximately eleven months, from January, 1991 to November, 1991, to become a

priority issue for Beaton School Board and its collaborating school jurisdictions. With the

aggressive action of these boards, the issue of equity in educational funding rose higher on

the government's agenda.

## A Solution to a Problem: The Province Responds

> Items are sometimes found on a governmental agenda without a solution
> attached to them. People worry about a particular problem without having
> a solution to it. The availability of a viable alternative is not a sufficient
> condition for a high position on a decision agenda, since many good
> proposals kick around the system for a long time before the lightning
> strikes. But the chances for a problem to rise on the *governmental* agenda
> increase if a solution is attached to the problem. The chances for a
> problem to rise on the decision agenda are *dramatically* increased if a
> solution is attached. (Kingdon, 1984, p. 150)

Though this study's purpose is to focus on the decision-making activities of a

particular school board and not those of the provincial government, as information

presented in Chapter IV suggests, those two levels of government are closely linked.

Prior to this study, records show that the problem of equity funding for education was a

long standing one for the Government of Alberta. The problem would re-appear

periodically, especially during times of economic down turn. The dilemma was that

though most "have not" jurisdictions did indeed want a greater share of funding from the

provincial coffers, they did not want the province to tamper with the established commercial tax structure. This structure enabled local school jurisdictions to receive tax dollars directly from commercial operations within their jurisdiction's boundaries. For the provincial government, an easy response to the call for equity from school boards--and a financially beneficial one--would be to collect all business and commercial tax dollars itself and then re-distribute the money on an equ. le sis. But this option was not implemented by any provincial government in the past largely due to political considerations. By allowing school boards the ability to draw upon local tax dollars, and because the provincial coffers were still being replenished with abundant resource money, governments were able to set the issue aside. However, in the 1990's circumstances surrounding issues of equitable funding for education had changed significantly. For example, provincial revenues from natural resources had steadily fallen during the past decade, the province itself was facing a huge budgetary deficit, a group of school boards had embarked on a legal challenge of the provincial government over the issue of school financing, and a provincial election was in the offing. It is speculative, but from such circumstances one could surmise that, for the provincial government, the time was now right to use a long-existing solution and apply it to solving this issue that was being forced to the top of the government's agenda. Decisions had to be made.

## Important Changes in the Broader Environment

People in and around government sense a national mood. They are comfortable discussing its content, and believe that they know when the mood shifts. The idea goes by different names--the national mood, the climate in the country, changes in public opinion, or broad social movements. But common to all of these labels is the notion that a rather large number of people out there are thinking along certain common lines,

that this national mood changes from one time to another in discernible ways, and that these changes in mood or climate have important impacts on policy agendas and policy outcomes. (Kingdon, 1984, p. 153)

On the eve of 1994, the newly elected provincial government announced sweeping budget reductions in all areas of government services. Education was included. Beaton School Board realized that equity funding was soon to be a reality. It felt that all its work over the past four years was to prove fruitful. But, as in many victories, some losses must be faced. Having won on the issue of fiscal equity, the Beaton School Board also learned that the government was proceeding with plans to drastically reduce the number of small school jurisdictions. Beaton was one such jurisdiction. Under the government's plan of regionalization, small school jurisdictions were to come together into clusters and form regional school jurisdictions. Existing debts would be assumed by the province, resources would be pooled in a region, and funding would go directly to the regional boards on a per-student basis. The regional governance structure would be in the form of a council with representatives serving on the council according to each participating jurisdiction's student population. Local school boards would no longer exist.

To an observer, Beaton's aggressive and persistent actions in acquiring equity funding might be likened to the old adage of "winning the battle but losing the war." In interviews with the Superintendent and Board members, this was addressed in supplemental questions. Was the loss of local governing autonomy a surprise and was it now a new issue for Beaton? These are samples of their responses.

> We really . . . we sorted all that out before. You know that our district really went after fiscal equity so that the move was what we wanted. We did say that we preferred to stay on our own but were told no.

Well, yes, the government's move to take over taxation was a surprise but
no, the rest was positive. For most of the "have not" districts this will be
very good. It will give us small areas a lot more money for education.

Not a surprise for us. We had looked into this four years ago. We knew
that financially we'd have to look to joining someone. We couldn't make it
on our own. Now other places, it is different. They may not b. ready.

From such responses, it can be assumed that the Board had anticipated and was

knowledgeable of the government's intentions with regard to school board governance.

Indeed, in later interviews it w uld seem some Board members took pride in being the

originators of the government's move to reduce the number of school boards. However,

at this early stage of the proposed changes, there was at least one Trustee who did express

a measure of concern.

The main one [surprise] was hiring the superintendent. The collecting of
the funds--well our first reaction was that this was okay. They
[government] would give us equal funding but now some of the drawbacks
are appearing. I guess I'm also disappointed in peoples' reactions. They'll
find out the problems when they try to get to the regional board over
something or when they try to talk to an employee who is with the
[regional] board but can't do anything for them.

In voicing this concern, the Trustee spoke to two areas. One area has to do with

the purpose and role of school boards and the other refers to the tenets of representative

democracy, or more specifically, the distance from the centre of governance to the

ordinary citizen in the decision-making process. Another Trustee noted a similar concern

connected to the latter area when he asked the question, "Who will be allowed to speak

for the children?" Generally, however, it must be said that the Board was "cautiously

optimistic" regarding the broad changes proposed by the government.

Issues Being Discussed

Though the issue of equity funding was noted as a priority by the Board, other

issues had merit as well. These issues covered a variety of topics. Some were related to

the teaching and administrative activities at the school level. They had to do with student,

staff, and program matters. For example, they ranged from concerns over student safety

and discipline to issues arising from plans to modernize a facility.

> The lunch-time supervision program was an issue--paying for staying and
> how much and how parents should run it. Now there is a policy in place.
> We had a real delegation of parents concerned with bussing fees.

> And I see that there seem to be issues like the board facing expulsion
> guidelines and termination of teacher guidelines. Another big issue is the
> integration of special needs student. It's causing a variety of problems.
> Another issue is the continual changing of the curriculum. Is it really
> beneficial to children?

A number of Board members also cited issues related to the policy-making process

and participatory democracy. How much of a role in educational decision making did

District parents at present have? How effective were Parent Advisory Councils?

> One I want to get at is the Parent Advisory Councils. I don't think they are
> as effective as they could be. Just from knowing when I was a member of
> one, and we recently went visiting several out-of-district councils. Ours
> are not as good as they could be.

Related to this topic of representation, several issues arose. One had to do with

the Board's role as elected representative for students. The following comment typifies

the concern. "Another issue is of our standing. Do school boards have the right to

represent their students? Are we in the best position to do so?" Trustees also had

concerns regarding their representative role on behalf of District parents and citizens in

matters of educational policy. They speculated on the District's ability to influence policy

direction once the proposed regional board was established. The role of Board members

as duly elected representatives at the local level was important. These are examples of

their comments:

> People aren't thinking things through. They feel that if we get rid of the
> trustees there will be so much money saved. But who will be their voice?
> Our district will have only one representative out of many. What difference
> will one make?

> Another concern comes from the Roundtable talks. I was a partic⁻ ⁻nt.
> There was a lot of talk about the trustees and the money they're p ⸱.
> They want to eliminate trustees and have the parent₃ run the schools.
> There are serious problems with this. The special interest groups that will
> be there. If you have a perfect situation then it will be fine but you know
> we don't have perfect situations.

Some issues spoken of had broader educational connotations. The·' dealt with

wider educational goals and objectives and, in doing so, offered a glimpse into the values

and beliefs of the Trustees. For example, the role of the school and the school-parent-

community partnership was cited as an issue:

> Schools have become all things to all children. Teachers are expected to be
> teachers, parents, counsellors, social workers, referees and on and on.
> There's just too much on the school to raise the children. Not enough on
> the home. We need to go back to the values we had. More community
> focus. Get the community and churches to do their share.

> I hear things from the government that I like. Like the community school
> concept. I believe in this--even the idea that we may be attached to a larger
> district. Still the community will have input through this community school
> concept. I believe in this.

Trustees expressed thoughts regarding the direction and mandate of public education and the issue of equity in educational experiences for all children. This is one such comment:

> Let's work here with our kids and show how to work together. My biggest concern is that we are going to end up with a two-tiered system of education. Somewhere in the province children with less means will be lost. This is not right.

And finally, there was a group of issues that related to the role of knowledge in making decisions. How well did parents understand the role of Trustees? In District meetings some parents expressed views that left Trustees wondering if parents realized the worth of a local structure of governance. Did the community comprehend the proposed changes to educational governance under regionalization? The Board felt it had kept the community in touch with initiatives such as the drive for equity, but did the community realize the changes that would accompany the government's plan for equity funding? Even the level of knowledge possessed by Board members was noted as an issue. For example:

> I'll tell you what causes problems. You know trustees are just ordinary people. We don't have special training. We don't always understand everything. We just don't know sometimes when it comes to deciding on technical things and so on.

Thus, a variety of issues were being discussed by Board members. Though concern with gaining equity in education funding was recognized as the priority issue, others were worthy of note. Board members spoke of two other issues with clarity and conviction and a commitment to bring them to the notice of others. One of these concerned the role of parents in the decision-making process at the school and District

levels and the second took into account the changing role of the Board itself in such

matters. A final issue of interest had to do with the amount and type of knowledge being

utilized by District stakeholders and the Board, in making decisions on matters of

schooling.

## Issue Sources and Issue Identification

At the onset of the study Board members were asked how concerns, or items of

interest, come to their attention and how they knew when a topic brought forward for

discussion was important. Since School Board members are called upon to deal with

many ideas, suggestions, concerns and conflicts in their work as district representatives,

what process do they use to sort items? It was important to gain some understanding of

the perceptions held by individual Board members on the matter of issues. How do

matters come to their attention? What is it that signals to them that this topic was "an

issue" to be noted and another was not? What role do various stakeholders play in issue

selection and presentation?

## How Issues Come Forward

Board members were alerted to potential issues as a result of their informal

interactions with various stakeholders. By living in the community they serve, everyday

"face-to-face" contacts encouraged an ongoing exchange of ideas between Trustees and

parents, students, and the public. Individuals were able to speak with Board members in

informal settings such as in the neighbourhood, out in the wider community, or at school

functions. Board members listened to the questions people asked and had an opportunity

to engage in discussions regarding educational affairs. On the other hand, some issues did

come to the attention of the Board through formal decision-making structures. For example, groups tended to use more formal lines of communication through which to present issues. Staff concerns and issues discussed at Parent Council meetings were sent to the Board by the Superintendent. Issues from the business community rarely came to the Board of Education by way of informal interaction, but rather, were addressed at the formal Municipal Council meetings. The following comments illustrate the informal linkages between Board members and those they serve:

> I listen to people. If someone makes a presentation that will make me
> listen carefully and watch to see if others feel the same.

> People know each other and we have children in the system. My
> interaction with parents like me also gives me ideas. Some may come and
> ask what to do about a problem.

> By being around where parents are. At school functions, on the street--just
> places where we all go.

> We represent a variety of people out there. We bring back little bits of
> what we hear from the neighbourhood. Someone on the street talks to us.

## What Makes it an Issue?

A "concern" became an "issue" based upon a Board member's own informal investigations. Board members called upon intuition, knowledge of the community, and their background work and life experiences when filtering issues for consideration. In so doing, they were careful about "checking out" a supposed issue. They feared accepting an issue too readily as one worthy of Board consideration. This statement illustrates the point:

148

Not every concern is seen as an issue. One of many is a small concern.
You get to know what is important. I've been here thirteen years so you
get to know when to spot a concern that you may want to take on. Issues
tend to come from various areas.

Again, the neces... y checking or filtering of concerns was accomplished primarily

by informal methods. For exa\nple, Board members spoke to other Trustees, to

neighbours, family members, and relatives in the school system. Trustees noted that extra

caution was exercised in this area of their work since the Board could not be seen to

overreact when approached by indi\      or groups. The credibility of their decision-

making abilities had to be maintained.

For me it's an ongoing assessment within your own mind. What is
important and what has to be done. The degree of intensity of a subject is
different [for different trustees]. But that's where I see discussion plays a
great part.

Formal presentations to the Board by delegations also carried a measure of weight.

The view expressed by Trustees was that if a group puts forth the time and effort to come

before the Board, this in itself signals to Board members that the concern has merit. But

here too, being politically sensitive was mentioned as a necessary filter in issue

recognition. Groups were allowed to set their case before the Board, but no "instant"

decisions are made.

When outside committees make presentations or come to you, you listen. I
check it out. At the [Municipal] Council, informal presentations are
allowed. This is very good. I like it. I get a lot of information. But you
have to learn not to react to the presentation or request right away.

As mentioned previously, Board members found that discussing matters amongst

themselves assisted each in better understanding a concern, determining whether it is an

issue, and gaining a sense of its level of importance. The element of time and pace of

events also acted as filters for the Board and drive issue selection. As one Trustee stated,

"We see ahead and must move a little faster than we would otherwise. That drives us a bit

more to decide."

## Who Brings Forward Issues?

A variety of stakeholders brought policy issues to the attention of the Board. In

the formal setting, District staff and administrators were the prime sources for issues. As

one Trustee pointed out, "Parents sometimes, but in the past few years, not much has

come from parents. Mostly the presentations are being made by the staff." Again, in the

formal setting, the business community did not bring issues directly to the Board of

Education but tended to do so when the Board members assumed their second role, that

of Municipal Councillors.

In the informal setting, neighbours and family members were the chief sources of

potential issues. The role of students in this process was also recognized as this comment

indicates:

> I may discuss things with the neighbours. For me the most important way
> of finding out things is through my grandchildren. I get a lot there. This
> raises questions in my mind and I judge whether there is bias or if it needs
> scrutiny. For me, I've had no contact with parents spe fically.

The impressions of family members were also deemed as an important informal

sources of issues. The business community was not identified as a consistent source of

issues through the formal setting but was noted as a source through informal contacts.

For example:

> The business community--well, I work for [local small business] so I listen
> to what people say. In the hair dresser the lady cutting my hair will say

something. I listen and may go back when I'm not so much under fire and talk to them about the problem. It's the personal contact.

## Leadership in Issue Promotion

Inside the District, Board members identified the parents and District staff as significant participants in District issue identification. Leadership, on behalf of parents, came from the school's Parent Council. Generally, leadership in issue promotion was a combined effort of parents and school personnel:

> We have parent advisory councils in every school and they meet once every month. They and the principal work together. They discuss issues that are important. If something comes out that needs to be dealt with, it comes to the board.

Though business has a less active role in issue presentation, its leadership came from the Chamber of Commerce. As mentioned previously, the Chamber used the Municipal Council as a venue for issue presentation rather than the Board of Education. "Business works through the Chamber of Commerce. We are also part of the Municipal part so we deal with things that way."

Formal leadership from outside the District came from the Minister of Education and members of Alberta Education. Board members saw themselves as also showing leadership regarding issue selection in both formal and informal settings in the District. Individually, no Trustee appeared as the opinion-leader. The Board Chair and several other members were very vocal at the meetings. They engaged in all the discussions, gave presentations on various topics and explained their view and stance on each issue considered. However, their influence on others was not clearly defined at this time. It was noteworthy that several Board members seldom spoke at the Board meetings. They

listened carefully to others, voted on issues, but did not offer to explain their actions.

Issues originating as a result of activities beyond the borders of the District were seen as

less amenable to Board control and therefore less subject to its leadership.

## The Environmental Factors

The existence of stress between any living system and its environment is an
axiom of systems analysis that is easy to demonstrate. One particular form
of stress is that generated by political demands from the environment and
necessitates political responses from the system, or, more precisely,
responses in the form of policy decisions as outputs from the board.
(Mann, 1975, p. 64)

Certain factors inside Beaton School District did have an influence on the kind of

problems and issues under discussion. The most dominant factor was school financing.

The main problem--that of continued deficit budgeting--gave rise to various issues for the

Board of Education. "How much longer can we stand alone? Who might we join to

ensure our school system's survival? Is there a possibility of receiving more funds from

the provincial government?" In examining the possible alternatives open to solving the

problem of finances, the Board of Education was very much affected by factors that

existed in its broader environment. Some environmental factors originated due to the

Board's interactions with neighbouring school jurisdictions, and some came as a result of

the provincial government's activities. Which district was open to a partnership? How

might the government's attention be focused on the needs of increased funding? These

matters played a role in determining which issues were given priority by Beaton's Board

of Education. With neighbouring districts not showing an interest in a partnership, Beaton

had to focus attention on the issue of equity funding. With the province promising

equitable funding, the School Board found itself back in its original position of re-

examining the partnership issue. Provincial changes to the structure of school governance meant that Beaton's Board of Education was now setting plans in place to see to its own demise.

The issue of making decisions without adequate information was mentioned repeatedly by participants. The lack of specific guidelines and solid information emanating from the government was an over-riding influence on decisions being made by the Board of Education at this time. Dealing with such uncertainties was a problem. It should also be noted that, at the beginning of the study, most Trustees specifically mentioned the lack of information as an issue. For example, one Trustee pointed out how, at the government Roundtable Meetings, some participants seemed to be speaking with few facts to back up their positions. Another Board member spoke of concerns regarding the "selling" of regionalization by District staff. The Board member made reference to the eloquence of one principal when speaking to parents about pending education changes and how such rhetoric had the power to inhibit people from more seriously investigating what the government was planning. Yet another Trustee said that often the Board was asked to make decisions on matters with respect to which its members did not have expertise, or at times, when they lacked suitable background information. The Superintendent noted there was much detailed information missing from the government on many of its proposed changes. Participants cited lack of information as an issue but not one of priority at this time.

## Summary

The members of the Board of Education saw issues as emanating from Board and stakeholder interaction in both the formal and informal settings of the District. For the most part, Board members saw themselves as gathering ideas and concerns in an informal manner--that is through their daily contacts with the people in their community. Board members with children or grandchildren in the system also utilized the student and parent "network" as a source of possible issues. Informal settings such as school events and recreational activities, provided opportunities for Trustees to listen to, and interact with, parents and students.

Board members cited school staffs and school administrators as having a major role in bringing forward issues through a formal process. This method was also used by the official parent groups operating at each school. The principals of the schools and the Superintendent had major roles to play in ensuring that issues were presented to the Board on behalf of the staff and parents. Most Board members did not perceive the business community as directly presenting issues for School Board consideration. Rather this stakeholder group tended to utilize the Municipal Council arena for its presentations.

Some of the Trustees shared comments and explanations that would indicate their use of "informal issue-filtering" methods. Board members felt that all items brought to their attention were not priority issues, that is, items important enough for initiating a response. Explanations of what raised an "item" to the level of a policy issue varied but all Board members said it was necessary, upon hearing of a particular concern, to cross-check carefully the circumstances related to it. They accomplished this by using intuition and reasoning skills and by knowing their community very well. One Trustee did say that he

found it useful discussing concerns with other Board members during their meetings. By so doing he gained a better understanding of the many arguments attached to an issue. Formal presentations by delegations were a strong filtering tool and did affect issue selection by Board members.

Trustees mentioned a variety of issues. Many of the issues cited related to the daily affairs of the schools with no particular priority attached to them. However, there were other issues spoken of with much conviction and as having priority on the Board's agenda. These issues dealt with broader educational concerns such as the role of parents in educational decision making, the changing rights and responsibilities of school boards, the need to maintain a sense of equity in educational experiences for students, and the difficulties of making decisions without adequate knowledge. Of these, a number of Trustees felt the loss of the present form of local school governance was a significant issue. All identified financial concerns as the overall problem and saw the issue of equity as the priority issue for Board consideration.

Environmental factors, operating in the District's immediate and broader context, affected the recognition of both policy problems and policy issues. At the local level the right of the Board to apply to its supporters for supplementary taxes was an issue. Citizen wishes on matters of increased taxes had a major impact on the Board's policy direction. The activities of neighbouring school districts and the activities of the provincial government also had a direct impact on the Board's agenda regarding policy. The very role of the Board in local school governance became an issue as a result of political activities in the District's broader environment.

No one individual or group within the School District possessed the greatest influence or power over issue recognition. The Board of Education saw itself as being in control of this process. Certain groups were more active in presenting issues to the Board but trustees assumed the responsibility to view all issues in a fair and reasonable manner. However, from a broader perspective, the provincial government had the greatest influence on matters of District policy.

## A Time of Turbulence and Change: Winter 1994

"What are the important issues that the Board is dealing with at this time?" Again, the Board members and the Superintendent were in agreement. Between the time of the first and second round of interviews, the need for equitable funding had been recognized by the provincial government. Beaton's first problem was solved. However, as a result of this solution, a new problem surfaced. The following section reports findings related to district level, policy makers' experiences working with the new problem facing the Beaton Board of Education. The section includes a description of the issues the Board members perceived as arising from the problem and a discussion of their interpretations with respect to who was promoting the various issues.

### A New Policy Problem For Beaton

Changes in regulatory procedures have their impacts not only in the regulatory environment itself, but also in a number of other venues. State and local governments, courts, and others all begin to play a more important role. (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993, p. 69)

With the provincial government's plan to centralize the collection and re-distribution of tax dollars for education equity funding underway, Beaton achieved its prime objective. As the government presented a plan regarding fiscal equity it also presented its plan for restructuring education. In it the government advised school jurisdictions that it wished to see the many small school boards join with others to form large, central regions. For Beaton this directive meant considering, once again, its first alternative, that of finding an appropriate school district as a regional partner. Though the School Board held some small hope that it would receive equity funding and still remain as an independent board, this was not to be the case. At a Board Meeting the Superintendent said, "I was in touch with the Department [of Education] and asked if we could stay as we were. They said definitely no. Finding a partner was now the main priority for the Beaton Board of Education. Every Trustee expressed a sentiment similar to that illustrated in these comments:

> Well, it's the whole process of regionalization that we're looking at. We want to make sure it's fair and equal to everyone. We want to be sure that going with someone is the best for everyone. That's what we're concentrating on right now. The main effort is here.

> Well, you know what the answer is for that--regionalization. We're really busy trying to decide what regional area we will join with.

> Right now we're looking at the school jurisdiction as a whole and sorting ourselves out as to the possible future. The problem is that [the Premier] keeps coming out with something new every time we turn around so it is hard.

Regionalization was their major concern. School Board agendas and Board minutes provided evidence of the importance Trustees placed on solving the problem of

regionalization. This item appeared consistently on Board Meeting agendas. The Superintendent and the Board representative regularly shared the latest information on plans and progress made. Any Board member who attended a special meeting on regionalization, either with other school districts or with the government, also reported back to the Board at this time. The Board Chair and the Superintendent made visits to the schools so as to maintain the necessary interchange of ideas. They attended Parent Advisory Meetings at the schools in order to share their information and to collect the parent views and responses. With a new problem defined, the Board of Education faced a new set of issues.

## Defining the Issues

The main problem for the Board of Education was one of deciding who would be the most suitable partner for their school jurisdiction under the pending regionalization. Having to join with another jurisdiction was now a certainty. For a specified period of time, the choice of a partner would be left to the discretion of districts and this was an option the School Board was eager to exercise. Further, if a board did all the necessary work and selected its own partners, an "Opting-Out Clause" in the government's regulations would allow it to leave the partnership after four years if the situation proved unsatisfactory. This option would not be available to districts who had their partners chosen for them by the Minister of Education.

Given such circumstances, Beaton's Board of Education wanted to move as quickly as possible, yet allow itself enough time to make a considered decision. During the period of stability and calm, there was one main problem facing the Board. And there

were with a variety of issues attached this problem. Some issues under discussion were directly related to the main problem, but many were not. This was not the case during the period of change and turbulence. The issues Trustees dealt with all tended to cluster around the one topic. Few others issues were considered. The issues related to finding a partner under regionalization tended to cluster around, four areas or categories of concern. The categories are: economic viability of the community and its link to the viability of the school district, funding changes and their impact on educational services, district values and beliefs, and administrative and representation issues. Each of these is explained below.

## Issues of Economics

Discussion of economic issues gave rise to heated interactions between Board members, and to some degree, between other stakeholder groups. The question asked was whether a prospective partner's record of past association with Beaton, based primarily on economic and recreational ties, should be used as a criterion when making the choice of a partner. Of the two county areas considered for partnership, one had a history of doing business with the town of Beaton while the other did not. These comments illustrate one view of this issue as expressed by some Trustees:

> Our economic association with [County A] is so evident. People from there come here for work, recreation. One year 46% came here for minor hockey. The fire agreement we have with them. They use our recreation and they use our businesses. That relationship has been there for 20 to 30 years.

> The County A students are a major impact on business in Beaton. We've never had more than half a dozen student from [County B]. County A's adults and students come here.

The cutbacks, the effects on the schools. The concern of communicating this down to the schools in how it will affect them.

Such comments illustrate the perception, strongly voiced by some Trustees, that the most important consideration in selecting a partner must have to do with each prospective partner has contributed, or would contribute, to the economy of Beaton, the town. The accrued financial benefits realized in the community would, first and foremost, help to ensure the future viability of the school district in the form of continued support by out-of-district parents and students. Others on the Board, however, wanted the question of partnership to be decided on matters directly related to education, not community economics. Their argument was that if Beaton's schools continued to offer quality programming, then out-of-district students would continue to attend and continue to contribute to the economy of both the District and town. This comment illustrates this stance, "Let's forget boundaries. Let's take a radius and recreate boundaries for the best of the kids. It's educational issues that matter here."

## Issues Regarding Educational Services

The quotation directly above illustrates how some Board members viewed the decision facing them. For them it was not community economics that mattered, but rather economic factors connected with school services. It was the government's proposed changes to the education funding guidelines that would truly impact the District. With the province stipulating that provincial funded dollars must "follow the student," boards were faced with difficult planning decisions. How could schools make program decisions without being assured of student numbers? The essence of the issue rested here. This is an example of how some Trustees interpreted the issue:

School jurisdictions would no longer set or collect local taxes directly. The dollars effectively will follow the student. There will be no way to hold a student back. Where ever they want to go that's fine. Many students call us to come here. Things are different now. This has tremendous implications for us.

The concern expressed here was with the possible inability of a school jurisdiction to control or anticipate the flow of students in and out of a district, and how this creates instability in program planning. Under such a plan, program continuity, staffing, and resource allocations become serious problems for district administrators. The fear that programs would be lost as students chose to go elsewhere, or that lead-in time for presenting new programs would not be adequate, were voiced. The following is a sample of this view of the issue:

I want to go with County A. They send most of the kids here. The issue isn't really class size. In elementary and junior high you have 25 or so kids in a class. What happens in elementary and junior high has to do with class size. But in high school it's the number of kids who support a program. Like an arts and craft one or music or a special math. Kids who need math 13 or 14. By ignoring County A we're cutting ourselves off 25% of potential high school kids. County B doesn't offer us that.

Nonetheless, other Trustees felt the deciding criteria in partner selection should pertain to the type and quality of programs offered by the prospective partner. The wish was to have a match between what Beaton offered and how the partnership would enhance this offering. As one Trustee pointed out, "I'm not so concerned with the number of boards [we would be with in a regional] but with the quality of educational services. It is more of looking at what would keep us out of a union."

## Issues Reflecting Values and Beliefs

As the Board engaged in discussions on the District's future, several "intangible" or "affective" factors that might influence partnership selection came to the fore. Though it might be said that all issues are perceived in a certain manner depending upon the person's values and beliefs, there were some issues being discussed that more openly reflected what Trustees felt the District should represent. For example, the Board wished to have parents, staff, business, and the general public see the final decision as fair, effective and representative of the citizens.

> We want to make sure it's [process of partner selection] fair and equal to everyone. We want to be sure that going with someone is the best for everyone. That's what we're concentrating on right now.

The role of parents in educational decision making was another issue related to values and beliefs. The Board wanted to ensure parents would have the opportunity to play a meaningful role in setting out the goals and objectives for their local school and in making-decisions affecting the District. This was spoken of during at the beginning of the study and was still of importance at this time.

> More say for parents. Yes, I think so. It will let parents have some say into what happens in their school. School boards often shut out parents and make them feel they don't know what they are talking about. The community school idea, with parent councils, will get parents involved again.

At the same time, some Board members continued to question how local school governance would be enacted without the school-board structure being in place. Who would speak to the common good and work to ensure decision making was an equitable

and inclusive process? Would the upcoming changes allow for a variety of parental views
to be part of decision making in the schools? For example:

> Some parents said it was very depressing--the more they heard about the
> changes. But some others with higher incomes gave a totally different
> reaction. They didn't seem concerned. I told [Superintendent] this is the
> future. These are the people who will be making the decision. They have
> the money and the time and stay at home. They have the attitude that most
> working mothers are just selfish. They don't realize that when you work
> you're not selfish but that's the way it has to be. This group won't give
> much support to the other parents. After the meeting I was really
> depressed.

Other value-related issues had to do with the need for districts to work more
cooperatively for the benefit of all children. Decisions made on the basis of "turf
protection" were seen as unproductive in times of change.

## Administrative Issues

The past several years saw Beaton Board of Education make a number of
important decisions in order to ensure that the largest portion of educational dollars went
directly to schools for purposes of instruction. In order to accomplish this, there had been
a gradual reduction of central office administration and services. How each prospective
partner viewed administration was therefore of particular interest to the Beaton Board.

> It's important to make sure that the dollars are being spent where they are
> really needed. Our focus has always been on the best education that could
> be provided. We started downgrading the administration and putting as
> much money into the classroom as possible. So we have some serious
> concerns about joining someone who does the same as others and hasn't
> cut down on administration.

It was important for the Beaton Board that policy-making directives would be
validated and continued by its future partner. There had to be compatibility regarding the

philosophical stance on educational mission as well as the more specific goals and objectives of education. Here is how another trustee expressed this concern:

> Another important area is finding out what do we have in common with the other district. Where is their focus? Is it diversified enough to weather the rough waters ahead? Flexibility and keeping an open mind to changing things is important. We also have to look at the kind of policies they've developed and will want to keep. Are they compatible with us? How do we see things?

At this time, the Board of Education pondered various issues originating within the context of the District. In order to select a partner for regionalization, the Board was reflecting upon the criteria it saw as affecting the roles and responsibilities of the community, staff, and parents. Essentially, the Board members were sorting out what the District valued and stood for and what it wished to see continued under regionalization. As much as possible, the Board was attempting to ensure the future direction of the District. Quality programs, a broad source of students, and parental involvement were some issues that arose from their examination of values and beliefs. Trustees also discussed issues related to economics and those dealing with administrative matters. The following comment illustrates this:

> We want to know how they [possible partners] feel about certain things. Their belief in class sizes. Buildings . . . Our high school needs to be completed. Is there any way this can be done? If others haven't kept up with their buildings, we'd be dropped low in priority. We also want to know do they share the same type of philosophy and beliefs as we do. That seems important.

The comments shared in this section illustrate the complexity of the issues under discussion during this phase of the study. Of special note is how each Trustee tended to stress the importance of a cluster of concerns associated with one particular issue, and

worked to centre discussion on this issue. For example, the person might highlight the need to examine the economic factors related to partnership selection and then speak consistently to issues that related to this theme. Trustees spoke to other matters during Board and public discussions and it was evident that Board members had an interest in all the issue clusters, but individuals did tend to identify one area in particular as being more important than others. As a result, during the interviews, and while discussions took place at Board meetings, individuals tended to speak to issues pertaining to their area of priority.

## Issue Sources

During the period of organizational calm, Beaton's Board members were approached with issues from a variety of sources. These sources were individuals and groups from both the formal and informal setting of the District and its broader context. Of interest, however, is that at the time of rapid changes, the activities of these stakeholders did not have the same effect on Board members. The following section reports on the sources at this time in the District's activities.

### Parents

Parents were interacting with Board members and discussing matters. However, it was felt that parents, at this time, were more preoccupied with making sense of the proposed government changes as they affected school level activities more directly related to students. Parents were asking such questions as, "What will the changes mean to me and my child?" They were not as concerned with questions related to the District's future. The following comment by a Trustee explains:

The parents are positive for a change. They don't see it affecting them all
that much. So where the dollars are coming from isn't that much of a
concern. They are just concerned with, "Are the kids going to be taught
the basics?" That's what I think this [government moves] will allow for.
I'm happy about it but, no, parents haven't said much.

Parents may have been pleased with the general move toward regionalization but

some did raise issues regarding certain consequences of the move. For parents, issues

such as the government's proposed changes to kindergarten funding and changes to

transportation grants were of great concern and were made known to Board members. As

one Trustee noted:

Many of the school visits we have made since all this came out have been
mainly in the elementary school. We've also visited the Play School. For
them it's the bussing. We're responsible for in-town bussing and the
changes affect them and other parents. The Play School parents didn't say
too much. They're just trying to figure out what is the best time for them.
The Elementary School parents—as they heard more and more of the
changes, some were so upset.

A few Board members felt that parents were not very active in issue selection and

presentation at this time. These Trustees felt that parents were preoccupied with the

"here-and-now" issues and gave little evidence of seeking to explore any broader policy

issues. For example, one Board member commented on parental input:

They say very little. Only the ones that are really interested in their kids are
the elementary parents. Junior high less. [The] high school kids, no one
takes an interest in what's happening there. But most parents are only
interested in what happens today. Why was there no recess? Why were
the police at the school?

Still, the Board continued to garner parental concerns and continued its interaction

with parents even though it had a perception that most parents agreed with the proposed

re-structuring of education and that parent concerns tended to centre on more immediate

issues such as the operational hours of programs and the cost of bussing.

Business Community

The business community was involved in various projects with Beaton's schools.

These relationships were recounted in positive terms with benefits seen as being realized

by all participants. The business community did not complain to the Board in any manner

and was thus seen to be supportive of Board direction. Business was also seen as being

preoccupied with matters of the moment, other than educational matters. This is noted in

the following Board member comments:

> Not much comes from business really. [A Company] has a partnership
> going with the high school and that is going well. Everything seems
> positive. The business community hasn't that much concern toward the
> education end. There's more concern with health. What will happen to the
> hospital. That's more of what they are discussing and are worried about.

> There hasn't been much so far with regard to education. The hospital is
> the main issue for them. Our Chamber of Commerce is very upset with the
> way the hospital is going  They didn't think things would go the way they
> are with regionalization of hospital services. There's a lot simmering there.

As these statements illustrate, the business community, along with the parents,

were not perceived as major sources of policy issues at this time. Trustees saw parents as

being concerned with practical problems and business preoccupied with hospital

regionalization. The Board received few complaints from either parents or business. This

quiescence, on the part of some stakeholders, it took as indicating support for Board

decisions and directions.

<u>The Environment</u>

In Beaton's immediate environment, that of the town, the general public was not found to be a source of issues at this time. Trustees did not identify either formal or informal representations taking place on behalf of the citizens. Though Board members spoke about a number of initiatives undertaken to ensure that the citizens without children in the system would be as informed on regionalization as were District parents, no specific responses from the community were noted either.

In Beaton's broader environment, that is the arena beyond its municipal borders, there was much activity. The major source of change came from here as did the many issues facing the Board. The primary source of the changes was the provincial government. Its decisions and intervention, or lack of intervention, shaped the Board's discussions of issues in significant ways. For example, issues arising from the changing status of the school jurisdiction were being recognized. Issues related to the jurisdiction's future position in a large regional board were now of high priority. These are examples of Trustee comments about these matters:

> Yes, in a sense the government is letting us pick a partner, but not helping us either. In a few weeks we'll try to settle this. But what we've heard is that the smaller boards are just being taken over by the larger ones. That bothers us. It's too bad.

> Just to refer back to the number of people on the regional boards. At the meeting I attended this question came up. Other districts wanted more than two representatives on the board. If we get one, we'll be lucky. I voiced agreement to us having one, but none of the others said anything. I don't think they're happy with only two.

A Regional Task Force, comprised of three government appointees, was also operating in Beaton's broader environment. The purpose of the task force was to assist

school jurisdictions in working out any problems related to regionalization. Members of

the task force were available to answer questions and offer advice on partner selection if

so request d. The Board Chair indicated the need to have a Board representative speak to

the task force on a number of issues.

To conclude, circumstances in Beaton's broader context affected the Board's

decision-making activities significantly. For example, government directives were issued

and these structured much of what Beaton's Board was able to do with regard to its future

status. A Task Force was set in place by the government to assist and guide districts

toward the goal of regionalization. A timeline for partner selection was imposed by the

Minister of Education and incentives provided to those who complied with it. The number

of representatives allowed for each district on the regional board was specified by the

government. Overall, issues competing for Board attention at this time were primarily due

to the activities of major stakeholders in the District's broad ˈ ˈ ˈvironme...

## The Filtering of Issues

One of the most important aspects of power is not to prevail in a struggle
but to pre-determine the agenda of struggle--to determine whether certain
questions ever reach the competition stage. (Gaventa, 1980, p. 10)

How were Board members sorting out the issues during this turbulent time? First,

issue filtering continued primarily on an individual basis, that is, each Board member came

to the discussion table with her or his own view of what was of high priority. The "filter"

the person used in sorting out issues related to the individual's view of the School District

and what she or he saw as the District's defining characteristics. For example, if a Trustee

valued parental involvement in educational decision making, then that person tended to

speak to issues related to local school governance. The Trustee would highlight the importance of parental involvement and measure proposals regarding regionalization against this criterion. If a Trustee viewed program viability as crucial to the District's future, then that person would emphasize issues such as student population and the maintenance of the out-of-district flow of school children. By so doing, each Trustee defined a focus or specific area against which issues were measured. Issues that did not "fit" the focus were seen as having less importance. By defining these parameters for a fit in rational terms, and by referring to this explanation as often as possible during Board discussions, the person signalled to others that this was the filter that should be used. For example, one Trustee kept referring to issues as having high priority only if they related primarily to educational factors. Thus, issues such as district representation on the regional board or questions of economics were deemed, by this individual, as low in priority or as non-issues.

When partaking in such discussions, possessing full and accurate information on issues would seem to be a necessity. During this time of upheaval, Board members repeatedly spoke of problems encountered when being asked to make decisions while lacking dependable information upon which to base them. It concerned them that, first, the school jurisdictions were too often apprised of government direction through the media rather than by formal channels of communication and, second, that information sent out to school jurisdictions was incomplete or subject to unanticipated change. The following comments illustrate these concerns:

> The problem is that [Premier] keeps coming on with something new every
> time we turn around, so it's hard. We suspect that he'll go to

regionalization in one fell swoop, so we've decided to move quickly then at least we'll have choices.

There's a saying that if you make decisions with only half the information you'll only be right half the time. You have to dig all the time for the truth. I've never been lied to so much since I entered government. It's half truths that they tell you. And also the truth changes from one time to another. What's said now may be different a week or a month from now.

Thus, the amount of information the Board possessed, and the validity of the information, also affected issue recognition. In this instance, communication linkages between the provincial government and the Board served as an additional "filter." However, the primary filtering process still came as a result of individual Board member views as to which issues were valid concerns and, of these, which needed attention.

## Prioritizing Issues

At this time the attention of the Superintendent and the Board of Education was focused primarily on the problem of partner selection. Which partner would better assist Beaton in maintaining and improving its present level of educational services? Though all agreed that this was the main problem, Trustees did not agree on which issues related to the problem nor to issue priority. For example, not all felt that the economic state of the town was an important issue in making the decision. Some Trustees felt that the selection of a partner should be made without any consideration being given to economic factors. Others firmly believed that any future expansion of educational services depended very much on how economically viable the town remained. In turn, discussion of this issue led to the examination of the status of out-of-district students. Some Board members saw the supply of out-of-district students as a pivotal factor in the District's future viability. This

was so, first, because these students helped provide enrollment levels necessary for high school programs and, second, because their parents used the services of the town. Other Board members did not agreed with using this as the prime criterion for partner selection. Instead they identified compatibility of policy direction and regional representation as crucial issues.

At this phase of activity it was also evident that phenomena in the District's environment were having a steadily increasing impact on the activities of the Board of Education. Provincial government actions and those of neighbouring counties gave rise to issues for the Board. Enforced timelines, inconsistent lines of communication, changing and conflicting information, and questions related to out-of-district students were factors affecting decisions about priorities among issues.

## Summary

As was noted in the previous section, a variety of issues were discussed by Board members during the period of organizational calm. School-based issues were important as was the cluster of issues having to do with local governance and the role of trustees. Of lesser importance were factors in the District's broader context. The flow of information was not a problem nor was the viability of local school programs seen as a crucial issue. But as the District entered more turbulent times, priorities among issues began to change. Viability of programs and maintaining school services under regionalization were priority issues. The issue of who would be able to control the flow of students in an out of the District was discussed. Having the appropriate information upon which to base decisions was also seen as an issue by all Trustees. Maintaining the District's direction in policy

development was now being closely examined along with the issue of economic viability of the community as tied to school services.

On the other hand, the future of school-board governance faded from the agenda. There was an acceptance that the role of the Board members would be terminated. Other than the issue of modernization, school-site issues were also not found on the policy agenda. Still in evidence were some of the broader issues mentioned in the first phase, such as the values of the District, direction of public education, and fairness of the Board's decision-making process.

Environmental factors were still affecting Board decision making in a direct and major way. These factors were due primarily to the activities of the provincial government. Government directives created issues for the District, as did less than adequate communication links between the Board and the government.

## Decision-Making Activities: Spring 1994

> Ordinary people, officials, and intellectuals all seem to like to assign blame, fault, or responsibility when decisions are made. They consequently ask such questions as who did it? Who made the decision? Whose idea was it? For social problem solving, these are foolish questions, for whatever the outcome, it follows from complex interactions of countless influential participants, most of them at a great distance from the place and hour of decision. (Lindblom, 1990, p. 5)

The time was fast approaching when the Beaton Board of Education would have to make a decision regarding a regional partner. The Minister of Education's deadline was near and a public debate over this question had yet to take place. The Board felt that it and the citizens of Beaton all agreed with the government's plan to equalize funding and

to restructure the governance of local education. Everyone had accepted the need for regionalization and accepted the overall changes that would result. However, through the period of turbulence, the activities of the provincial government had added a number of new dimensions to the question of regionalization. These included: indecision surrounded the proposal of having government appointed school superintendents; districts receiving an education tax levy from the province rather than the expected equity money; public debates across the province over the powers of proposed Parent School Councils; and the student transportation grant system not being clearly defined by the government. Would these factors affect discussions of policy issue?

Meanwhile in Beaton, the Board's decision-making process had entered a more public and formal phase. The special meetings with prospective partners had concluded. Information gathered during these meetings was readied for sharing with the public. Dates for special public meetings were finalized. These meetings, along with the regular School Board meetings, were more widely publicized. Special invitations were sent to stakeholders in order to ensure they attended public meetings and presented their views.

The findings presented in the following section are based on data gathered during the School District's final Budget Meeting with its administrators, a special Public Forum, two regular School Board meetings, and a third round of interviews with the Board members and the Superintendent. The Budget Meeting and the Public Forum had in attendance school administrators, teachers, parent council representatives, parents and the general public. What follows is a discussion of the issues and their priorities as introduced and debated by the stakeholders.

### Making a Decision

As the study began, School Board solidarity was spoken of by all Trustees. The perception of individual Trustees was that all Board members agreed with, and supported, the District's quest for equity funding. Also, all Board members were in agreement with the move toward regionalization and understood that local school-board governance might be sacrificed. The issue of seeking a partner had originally been pursued but was set aside because the issue of fiscal equity was the priority. However, during the second phase of data collection, the reality of government changes were faced. Equity was attained but, as a result, other changes gave rise to new issues for Beaton. The majority of these issues had to do with the government's plans for regionalization and how the changes would be undertaken. Beaton's need of a partner was now a certainty and issues related to making this selection were beginning to surface. To this point, no formal board meeting or public debates had taken place on partner selection. On the contrary, when the topic did come up at Board meetings, Trustees were reminded that special meetings were being arranged for that purpose. Cautions were given such as, "We'll be discussing that at the forum" and "We aren't ready to speak to that right now." Though the issues were "floating out there" during the second phase of data collection, the Board seemed not ready to take part in full discussion on them.

The third phase of the study saw this change. Though the government's timeline was certainly a factor driving the District to make a decision, it was evident the Board was now ready to open public debate on issues related to partner selection. For example, background information had been collected on the possible partners, the public meetings

were arranged, stakeholder representatives were asked to attend the meetings, and advanced publicity for the special meetings was set in motion.

At each of the public meetings, either the Superintendent or the Board Chair, provided background information for the audience on the past circumstances that had brought the school district to the present point of issue discussion. This is one such introduction:

> In the Spring of 1991, it was clear to the Board of Education that there was a lack of funding facing us. We needed to take a look at what we could do in down-loading. We approached Alberta Education and had a Viability Study done for us. We were thinking of looking for partners-- someone to merge with. The report clearly stated our best course of action was to merge with Partner B. We had many meetings on this. The Board agreed to enter with Partner B. Since then, the government went ahead with equity but we still have to find a partner.

As the public discussions regarding regionalization took place, a pattern emerged in the debates of the issues. Following is a discussion of the issues, their priorities, and the various stakeholders who took part in the public meetings.

## Issues Presented By Parents

The Board tried consistently to keep parents apprised of the changes occurring in educational services. For example, at a budget meeting the Superintendent spoke about program changes:

> Kindergarten is in the budget and there is a major change here. Funding has been cut by the government by 50%. No transportation dollars are there. At the last Board meeting, it was presented to offer 215 hours of kindergarten instruction with a certified teacher. Today you may want to raise this issue in your discussions.

Parents did go on to raise programming issues but they also spoke to the link between maintaining quality program services in order to support the level of student enrolment needed for viable schools. The following parent comment illustrates this concern:

> My point is that if we can keep our schools full it would be the best. Is there any chance that we wouldn't have our schools if kids go elsewhere? If there's no one here then there will be no schools.

Another parent asked, "If we want to attract students to our District, which partnership would be best?" Still another wanted to know which partner afforded "the best source of school-age children." Thus, keeping the present student count and attracting new students was a priority for many parents. They feared losing their schools through loss of a strong student base.

Along with issues of program services, economic factors to be considered when making a decision were noted by many parents. They spoke of the economic connection between the school district and the business community of Beaton. One parent asked the question, "Well, the economic base [for us] is across the river isn't it? Won't we lose that by going with the other district?" A parent pointed out that many of the parents of out-of-district students did all their shopping in Beaton and that this had to be considered. She stated, "But the Chamber of Commerce says to us that parents are important to the Chamber and to the economy of the town."

A large contingent of out-of-district parents attended the public meetings as well. They were residents from one of the counties being considered for partnership. In the past, this group of parents was able to send their children to Beaton schools under a tuition arrangement between the two boards. Parents were concerned that if Beaton chose

to amalgamate with the other school jurisdiction, they, and their children, would no longer be accorded the same status as had been enjoyed over the years. First, would their children still be able to attend Beaton schools, and second, as parents what say in school affairs would they have? As one parent asked, "How will what you eventually decided affect our involvement--say in the new parent councils? What say will we have being non-residents?" Another parent from this area re-stated this concern by saying:

> My concern is with the 47 students and their place with the new parent
> council. The regional board will be elected. But we will have no vote on
> this. What if a parent has an issue but has not vote. I have a real concern
> about that.

At each of the public meetings, three to four parents spoke to each of the above noted issues and several others. The other issues related to concerns over maintaining present school programs, the cost of new school facilities, student bussing fees, and the problems faced by out-of-district parents. Thus, parents who took part in the public discussions spoke to issues that ranged from those pertaining to quality school programming to those addressing the role of parents in decision-making at the school and regional levels. For District parents, their issue of highest priority was maintaining a viable school district. For out-of-district parents, the issue of highest priority related to the future status of their children and themselves.

## Public Issues

"If we want to attract students then what is better--to amalgamate with our neighbours to the north or south? What I'm asking is where is our best client source?" This comment is an example of the few that came from people who identified themselves as being citizens of Beaton but without children in the school system. Their comments

focused on two areas. One area had to do with maintaining a viable school district, meaning one with an expanding student base. They deemed it important to attract students from outside areas and therefore the plight of the out-of-district parents was accorded a high priority by this group. The second area had to do with the relationship between educational services and the economic viability of Beaton as a community. Those who spoke on behalf of the general public felt the out-of-district parents were an economic benefit to both the school jurisdiction as well as to the town's business community. As one Beaton resident pointed out, "Why don't you expand the Beaton's region to include that portion that comes here. They live there but do all their business here." Thus it is noted that the two main concerns expressed by citizens were identical with two areas seen as priority by the parents of Beaton.

Special Interest Group Issues

The Board of Education o representatives of special interest groups to encourage atte in and special meetings. The Chamber of Commerce was one discussions, no representative from the Chamber rose and s atives of such groups as the Play School Association and th visory Council did attend the meetings. Their representatives spoke to issues of school programs and student transportation. The local Member of the Legislature appeared at one of the meetings. He did not make a public statement but spoke informally with Board members and to those in attendance.

Staff Perspectives

School-based administrators, teachers, and the local teachers' association

representative were in attendance at the various meetings. The issues raised by school

principals were those of maintaining a strong school population, concerns with added

responsibilities for school level personnel under the government changes, and, related to

this, the changing lines of accountability. Here are samples of the principals' comments

during the meetings:

> I just want to say that I hate to lose 30% of my students and that's what
> we get from County A. I'm also worried about the transportation. There
> is a danger that the 47 out-of-district students can't come because of the
> bussing. This hasn't been resolved.

> I just would echo the statements of the first principal. I too am anxious
> about what faces us. Will we have to go back to the council [parent] every
> time we see a need in our school and have to deviate from the budget?
> There are many things here that bother me. Too much is not explained.
> We at the school are in a vulnerable position.

The local teachers' representative raised several issues he felt should be examined.

One related to program facilitation. Which prospective partner would be of most

assistance to Beaton teachers in program development and teacher inservicing? Another

issue that teachers felt needed clarification was compatibility of decision-making

processes. As one pointed out, "County A has two large municipal bases and we just

wonder--the decision-making process is not the same. Our ability to influence policy

decisions may not be as good." At the Public Forum, the teachers' representative did

comment on the hesitancy of staff in becoming involved in the debate over regionalization.

He stated:

As the ATA person I know there are lots of considerations on this whole
issue. There is no real consensus one way or another. It is very political.
As teachers we are hesitant to put our neck out and then if it doesn't go
that way, have it chopped off.

Individual teachers spoke infrequently. They did not bring forward many concerns

but rather served to clarify issues being discussed by providing any necessary information

that seemed needed.

## Administrative Issues

Throughout the public discussions and debate, the Superintendent of schools

maintained a low profile. He continued to fulfill the role of information disseminator. He

provided background information, commented on issues under discussion, and clarified

any points of information, but did not overtly define any one choice as better than another.

The Superintendent did cite some issues as being central to the ongoing discussion.

Being part of the oncoming regionalization means there are many changes
to come. The funding of education is the major change. Such major
changes will also have a major impact on you as trustees. You are
beginning to feel it now. At this time you have no power to change the
supplementary requisition. This year has been set for you. In future the
local school will decide how to spend the dollars it receives.

The Superintendent also spoke to a number of administrative concerns he saw as

issues resulting from the changes to local school governance. They were the elimination

of central services at Beaton's central office, the reduction of government funding for

kindergarten transportation, and the impact of the enacted reductions in district staffing.

As was noted above in the staff issues section, school administrators also voiced

concerns with the proposed changes to local school governance and the impact of these

changes on lines of authority. With the elimination of school boards, each school's

administration would be responsible and accountable for all facets of school programming as well as the school's budget. Though, in many ways, this was not seen as a great departure from the decentralized plans already accomplished by the District, the role of the new parent councils was a concern to principals. What type of decision-making process would be used? Individual Board members spoke to a number of these same administrative concerns. These related to issues of changing lines of authority regarding budget approval, areas of responsibility in a regional structure, and present resource allocation. More specifically, several Board members asked such questions as: Who was now legally responsible for approval of school budgets? With open boundaries, who decides program capacity? With open boundaries, who is responsible for funding the transportation of out-of-district students? Do the established tuition fee agreements still remain in effect? The problem of sorting out these administrative issues was exacerbated by the poor communication of information from the provincial government. Not enough was know about the changes by local educators and yet important decisions were being made.

## Board Member Issues

During the public meetings most, though not all, of the Board members spoke to certain issues and began to declare their choice of partner. Of the seven Board Members, four voiced their positions and discussed related issues. The remaining three Board members maintained a very low profile in public discussions and seldom took part in the debates, though, in the interviews, all spoke eloquently about what they saw as the important issues. The Superintendent's role continued as one of presenting and clarifying

information. He did not take part in the debates held in public. As the public discussions began, it was ev.dent some Board members were not reticent in speaking to the issues as individuals. To this point in the study, those on the Board of Education spoke as a united voice on matters of equity and regionalization. There was a common view accepted by individuals. Now, this was no longer the case. This was an opportunity for individual Board members to express their own wishes and some did. During one meeting, a Trustee warned the audience, "You'll realize quite soon that we don't have consensus on this issue."

During this period of discussion and debate, three issues gained prominence. The first issue centered on the importance of out-of-district students to the future of the District. Could Beaton schools, especially the high school, continue to draw enough students to maintain the various programs now in place regardless of which partner was selected? Should this be a priority issue when making the choice? At the end of the debate, even though all Board members discussed it carefully and acknowledged it as an issue, only one cited it as a high priority issue. The others felt that regardless of which partner was chosen, out-of-district students would continue to come to Beaton. The quality of programming being offered would ensure their attendance would continue.

The second issue had to do with future control over policy direction. Which partnership would give Beaton the best opportunity to maintain a strong influence over policy making? This issue was noted during the period of change and again repeatedly mentioned or alluded to, with only a few Board members seeing it as a priority. The reasoning for this was as follow. Several expressed the opinion that Beaton, being so small, would not be able to impact decisions at the regional level regardless of which

partner was selected. Other Trustees felt it was a non-issue since fair and equitable representation and treatment on regional boards was promised to all jurisdictions by the government. For example, one said:

> Not to disagree with one of my colleagues, but the government has promised the quality of education won't decrease but rather will increase. Dollars will increase if there is a need there. If there is a facility that has to be built, it will be built.

Still other Trustees saw joining a larger regional as the best way to ensure a strong voice. Their reasoning was as follows: "If we join County B, there will be three of us. With the three boards, we feel we'll have more of a say than with the other board."

The third issue centered on whether municipal economics should be a factor in making a decision on a regional partnership. Would joining one county alienate the citizens of the other county and thereby affect the municipality as a whole? At stake was a significant number of students and their parents who not only supported the school system, but also did much of their business in the town of Beaton and were active members in Beaton's sports and recreation organizations. At the end of the debate, the majority of the Board agreed with the Board Chair who stated, "How does this affect schooling? Deciding on what happens with the District is an educational issue. It's separate from economics." Once again, a particular cluster of issues was portrayed as not being germane to the discussion.

## Priorities Among Issues

The decision deadline was fast approaching for the Beaton Board of Education. A decision had to be made on a choice of partner. Many issues were being discussed. Parents, citizens, special interest groups, and the Board were engaged in these discussions.

Each group spoke to the issues it saw as being important. In the end it was up to the

Board to decide based on those issues it saw as of highest priority. At the final public

meeting, the Board shared a survey that was conducted with the prospective partners. In

the survey, representatives from each county were asked to respond to a series of

questions. A comparison could then be made between the two counties. The issues

addressed in the survey were as follows: maximum class size, priorities for new buildings,

priorities for school services, the future of small schools, the purchasing policies of the

county, privatizing maintenance and janitorial services, and the long-range plans for high

school education. Based on this comparison a Board Motion was presented and passed

which designated the Board's choice of partners. Once voted on, the results of the

Motion would be sent as a recommendation to the Minister of Education for his approval.

During the discussion and debate prior to the Motion, Board members reviewed

those issues they saw as of high priority. It is of interest to note that in spite of the lengthy

discussions involving parents, staff, administrators and the public, most of the Board said

they voted according to the information on the survey.

## Living With Policy Decisions

As the Board members and Superintendent were interviewed after the public

discussions and the vote on the Board Motion, their perceptions of current problems and

issues were garnered. One stated:

> We do have quite the problem in Beaton. It's with the County A parents
> of the students that come here. They are quite upset with us for joining
> County B. They don't seem to want to understand why we joined Cour·

B. The Chamber of Commerce called a meeting together and had [a provincial politician] and the County A parents and discussed it.

Another concurred that there had been moves by the Chamber of Commerce in an effort to re-open the decision on partner selection. This was seen as an isolated group of citizens, mostly from the county that was not selected as a partner. The action was organized by the District Chamber of Commerce. A provincial politician was on hand to speak to the citizens. Most Trustees questioned the reasons given for an outside politician becoming involved with Beaton's decision.

> They [Regionalization Task Force] are worried that he'll [politician] try to do the same as with the hospital regionalization where we decided to go with County B and it was set and they got it reversed to go with County A. People are really upset about that and don't want it to happen with the school regional.

The Chamber's decision to work at altering the Board's decision after the fact was pointed out by several Trustees. The Chamber's title and status was explained and the resulting political issues also commented upon.

> The Chamber is the Beaton and District Chamber and they are very insistent "District" be included. They started to complain about the decision and say that there wasn't enough public input. So that's why there was this forum arranged to get that. The Chamber is complaining but they never appeared at our public meetings. They didn't send a representative yet they come back at us. Most of the Chamber members have no problem with our decision but a few, who have ties to County A, don't like it.

Another Trustee had a different perception of what was happening as a result of the Board's decision.

> We already know that as a Board we're history. The dollars aren't relevant anymore either. What is relevant is have we chosen the right family to go with. Before [the Premier] put out his policy on school jurisdictions and

funding, each county had to supplement education by one third. The rich counties had no problems. So at that time we decided to align ourselves with a rich parent. But four months ago [the Premier] said I'm going to take away all the riches from everyone. Now with this different way of funding, it's the number of students that is funded. We need the students to get the dollars.

This Board member also felt very strongly about the issue of how decisions were being made and what information people used when making decisions. Some Trustees felt that the lack of definitive information on government plans was causing problems. There was a dearth of specifics connected to such areas as transportation costs, instructional time for kindergarten, and the role of school councils. One Trustee pointed out, "The problem is with the transportation and the cost. It's still up in the air whether it follows the student or not. We have eighty kids coming from County A." But another Trustee felt that decisions were being made, not only with a lack of necessary information, but also with a lack of openness. The feeling expressed was that a decision had already been made by some Board members well in advanced of any of the public discussions or debates.

The trouble is that there are Board members that had their minds made up and so nothing that was said changed that. People from County A stood up and asked questions and they were just shunted aside. I think the decision made is an economic disaster for recreation. It's an economic disaster in many ways. They [County A] make up twenty-seven percent of the high school population. Twenty-five percent of the hockey activity.

However, at this time, the majority of the Board and its Superintendent felt strongly that a decision had been made using an open, well-structured process and for any special interest group to go against it at this stage was not acceptable. They felt especially, that it was not acceptable to have an outside politician intervene when "due process" had been followed.

## Policy Decisions and Organizational Conflict

> Because education policy deals on behalf of the public and with matters of
> great importance about which not enough is known, it seems obvious that
> this situation invites conflict. And the conflict will be pursued through
> political channels such as relative number, intensity, and power of those
> groups who support particular positions. (Mann, 1975, p. 19)

As one Trustee finished the final interview he stated, "Well, we'll see what

happens. It's not over yet." Though things may not be over for Beaton Schoc l Board,

the study concluded at this point. As in most real-life problem solving situations, events

do not often come to neat and tidy resolutions. Everyone does not always agree with a

policy decision. Further discussions, debates and lobbying may still go on well after a

decision has been made. Appeals are made to those with greater political standing.

Sometimes a decision is overturned by a higher decision-making body. For Beaton School

District, the "denouement" regarding its decision-making process had yet to unfold.

## Aggregating the Findings

The following section provides a summary of the findings of the study as they

directly relate to the research questions. This summary is presented in a manner that

coalesces, compares and contrasts findings pertaining to the organization's period of calm

and the period of rapid change.

## The Issues

1. What issues arise from problem recognition and definition?

2. What factors contribute to an issue being brought forward for discussion?

3. How are issues filtered for policy consideration?

4. What factors influence the rise and fall of interest in certain issues?

During the period of organizational calm, Beaton School Board had the time to

draw upon a variety of resources to assist it in          ly defining the first policy problem

and in con. .dering how to present resulting ir.     ration. There was also time to build a

strong consensus within and between both the formal and informal stakeholders regarding

problem identification. In this less hurried and less stressful decision-making

circumstance, the Trustees were unrestrained in bringing forward issues for discussion.

Issues brought forward related to a broad spectrum of situations. At this time Board

members cited informal issue sources frequently and more readily whereas during the

period of rapid change, a more circumspect stance was taken by the Trustees. For

example, there was less openness to examining a variety of issue clusters. Less time was

given to consensus building regarding an issue cluster and more emphasis placed on group

solidarity. During the period of change, government communiqués were used as evidence

to "prod" Board members into making a decision rather than viewing these missives as

containing information that needed to be carefully examined. It was at this time that

Board members spoke at length about how the Board should rely on "facts" and survey

"results" in preparing to make the final decision yet, their voting patterns indicated a

retrenchment to positions voiced in the past. During the period of calm, informal

influencers inside the District were more easily identified by Trustees and this source of

advice credited. During the time of rapid change the Board conceded that it was now driven by political influences in its broader environment. It was the provincial government that had significant impact on Beaton's future.

## Participants

1. Which individuals emerge as influencial participants within the formal decision-making structure of the school board?

2. Which individuals and groups emerge as influential participants in the informal power structure of the school district?

3. What interest perspectives do key participants represent and to what extent do they see themselves as representing these perspectives?

During the period of calm, the Beaton Board strove to influence the direction of government policy regarding public education funding--specifically that of equity funding. It became a prime influencer in its interactions with neighbouring boards and with the provincial government on the issue of equity. At this time however, Beaton was not able to exert the type of influence needed to have one of the districts enter into a partnership with it.

Within the District and within the formal decision-making structure of the School Board, influencing behavior on the part of individual Trustees was obvious and marked during the time of rapid change; this in opposition to limited degrees of such behavior as seen during the period of organizational stability. One of the differences in the degree of influencing behavior had to do with the level of Board consensus expressed on a topic under discussion. Though Board consensus was strong regarding problem definition,

consensus on issue identification and issue priority became fragmented. This was especially noticeable during the period of rapid change. It was at this time that some individual trustees began to speak to their views, trying to structure discussions around particular issues. For example, the Board Chair assumed a predominant role in public issue discussions. She spoke repeatedly about the central issues on behalf of the Board. At the beginning of this discussion, two Trustees tried to convince their colleagues to view the partnership problem by examining a different set of issues. In the end, only one of the two Trustees remained in this position and was thus isolated from the majority.

In the informal power structure of the School District, parents and students exerted significant degrees of influence on individual Trustees during periods of organization calm. Out-of-district parents, shoppers, and users of the recreational facilities in Beaton were also recognized as stakeholders with influence at this time. During the period of calm, the Board Chair made it clear she was speaking on behalf of the students and parents, but, during the period of change increased reference was made to the Board's role in representing the local tax payers. The Trustee who opposed the Board's position on issue priority spoke consistently, during both the period of calm and period of turmoil, from the interest perspective of the high school, the broader community, and the out-of-district parents.

What could not be revealed through the data collected for this study may be just as important. Sufficient data were not gathered to properly interpret the extent of influence exerted by either the Superintendent of Schools nor that of the individual who was both town Mayor and School Trustee. Likewise, though District staff were reluctant to take part in the formal issue discussions, it is likely that they too exerted some measure of

pressure on the decision makers. The possible significance of these "hidden influencers" is noted but cannot be elaborated upon in this study.

## Environmental Factors

1. What factors within the organization affect the type of issues discussed?

2. What external factors influence the selection of issues for discussion?

3. To what extent, and in what ways, do political factors in the organization's environment influence the recognition of policy issues?

4. What linkages operate between the decision makers in the district and the informal and formal power holders in its environment?

A number of factors operating within Beaton School District affected issue discussions. The request from parents to have a greater and more meaningful role in school-level decision making was an important factor. A number of the Trustees perceived this as a high priority issue. The philosophical stance of the central administration, and one supported by the Board, on such matters as support service levels, school size, and programming priorities gave rise to issue discussions. The amount of information available to Trustees, its dissemination, and its interpretation were also factors affecting issue recognition. And finally, group dynamics and how they affected Board consensus building, solidarity, and construction of meaning were of significance as well. All the above factors were in evidence during the period of organizational calm. During the hectic period of change, the crucial factors were the role of information and Board member interactions.

Outside the organization, but in its immediate environment, the economic conditions within Beaton Town affected the community's ability to satisfy educational needs. This led to a closer examination of existing services and future needs. The provincial regionalization of health services was an important factor since it kept the Beaton and District Chamber of Commerce preoccupied for a considerable period of time. This preoccupation kept the Chamber from taking part in the main discussions related to the regionalization of school boards. There were also a number of factors operating in the broader environment of Beaton which affected issue discussions in significant ways. For example, the relationships and interplay between Beaton School District and neighbouring districts were of importance. The formal and informal working relationships between Beaton's administration and the Department of Education were factors.

It must be noted however, that the crucial environmental factors operating in both times of calm and change were associated with the Alberta government. The Minister of Education, who set policy, and the Regional Task Force, that guided districts into regionalization, were the forces which seemed to direct Beaton's decision-making activities. Their joint influences, driven by a political agenda, had an immediate and profound effect on policy issue discussions. Linkages between the Task Force, the Minister, and the Beaton Trustees were consistently maintained and openly spoken of during the period of organizational calm. During the time of rapid change, these interactions were referred to less often, and when mentioned, were done so in such a way as to "distance" any government interference from the decisions that had to be made by the Board. An image of the Board as an independent body making important decisions was still desired, though no longer a reality.

## Process

1. How are policy-related issues brought to the attention of board members?

2. How are priorities among issues established and followed?

3. How are issues which surface dealt with?

4. How do participants see themselves and others as exerting influence on the selection of issues for discussion?

At the onset of the study, policy-related issues came to the attention of Board members through both formal and informal means. At this time a wide range of issues came forward and were considered in their discussions. Both philosophical and practical issues were spoken of. Issues affecting students, parents, and educational services were given priority. Board members wanted to be seen as enacting the role of "seekers of the common good." That is, they wanted issue discussions to assist the Board in making decisions in the best interest of children; decisions that reflected the values and beliefs upon which the District was based.

As change overtook the District, few new issues were considered. In fact the broad range of issues introduced at the beginning of the study narrowed considerably, with only a few of them being considered appropriate for discussion. New issues were dismissed. Issues previously identified were given less priority if they did not fit into the context of discussions as outlined by the Board Chair. Trustees were not as willing to express publicly a stance on issue preference. They were more likely to rely on past information and past interpretations on the information. Though there were fewer issues being considered by the Board, more opportunities for public discussion were made

available to stakeholders. This gave the Board increased opportunities to systematically define and redefine the essence of the problem facing the school district and to present issues carefully. This was done, in order to highlight one set of issues over another. The Board Chair had a prominent role in the process. During both regular Board Meetings and public meetings she took time to outline the background to the District's problems. The detailed presentation of the "context" was consistently done at every meeting. The Board Chair reviewed for the audience the alternatives being considered, why they were selected, and their implications.

A "rational" decision-making stance was used when making these presentations reinforced by language that evoked pride in the independent spirit of the District and pride in the level of educational services already in place. The Superintendent was called on to offer the exact dates or numbers or facts in order to support the Chair's presentation. His role was one of "technical advisor" or someone with the expertise to ensure the credibility of the Board's stance. As government driven changes continued, the lone dissenter on the Board became more fiercely vocal against the Board's position, hoping to influence those colleagues whose resolve might be wavering. Public meetings were seen as an opportunity to garner public support.

## Summary

As the final phase of the study is reviewed, it is interesting to note which issues finally held sway in the matter of partnership selection. The issue of adequate information and knowledge, seen as important in phase two, was now a priority for only one participant. The role of trustees, seen as dropping in importance in the last phase, was

now completely off the policy agenda. Issues related to the funds received under the equity plan spoken of in phase one were not evident on the agenda now. The link between municipal economics and partner choice was dismissed as a low priority issue by most Board members and not seen as an issue at all by a number of them. Broader value and belief issues that surfaced in phase one, and were still in evidence in phase two, were not highlighted as issues in phase three. The issues that were perceived as priority items by the majority of the Board in the decision stage seemed grounded in the practicalities of the District's future. These issues related to: maintaining the quality of school-based services; ensuring the best advantage regarding local impact on regional decision-making; and maintaining access to educational and social support services. It should be noted that all of these issues made a slow, but steady ascent from the period of organizational calm.

Beaton School District was faced with two policy problems. Each gave rise to many issues, some of which were recognized as important and others set aside. Some issues that were set aside remained there, but others re-appeared at a later time. Issues arose from Board member interactions in both formal and informal venues. Public meetings and a Public Forum were arranged to ensure the District's stakeholders and the general public had opportunities for presenting their issues. In the end, the Board of Trustees made a decision as elected representatives of the school district. The entire policy process was followed through the eyes of the superintendent, five board members and through the researcher as an outside lens.

# CHAPTER VII

# THE STUDY OF POLICY MAKING: PRACTICE AND THEORY

Studying the activities of a school board as it grapples with problems and issues

related to policy making is a challenging experience. It requires an examination of

organizational activity, political behavior, small group interaction, and the interplay of

values and beliefs. The insights and understandings gleaned from such an examination

have important consequences for the study of public policy in both theoretic and practical

terms. As Dunn (1981) stated, "The aim of policy analysis is to provide policy makers

with information that could be used to exercise reasoned judgment in finding solutions to

practical problems" (p. 7). The previous chapter presents the findings of the examination

but it does not explicate the findings in a manner that directly relates to public policy

making as a field of study. What useful understandings about how public policy is

formulated can be taken from the study? In this chapter, ideas relevant to this question are

explored.

## Defining a Problem

One of the crucial steps in policy action is defining the policy problem. As a

problem is defined, not only is one particular need or circumstance singled out for

consideration over others, but the definition will have within it an implied solution or

selected alternatives (Dunn, 1981; Kingdon, 1984). There are many different and

competing ways to articulate a need or circumstance, but within each is an implied

solution. To ensure one alternative is selected over others, information is gathered that

will support a particular problem definition. By so doing, some alternatives are

"structured out of consideration" by those who wish to control the policy agenda

(Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Preferred definitions are presented, "clothed" in

appropriate language and symbolism in order to evoke images that will mobilize support

(Gaventa, 1980). Associated rhetoric is employed to convey these images effectively.

This is accomplished to have a problem perceived in one way rather than another.

Problems will also be defined in a way that classifies them as certain types of problems

which in turn defines who will be involved in their solution. For example, through

descriptive language and the careful sharing of information, a problem may be defined to

be seen as a problem of economics, or personnel, or one of social welfare. Once this

occurs it automatically places the responsibility for the problem's solution in a specific

sector of the organization. The importance of such activities regarding problem definition

is that they directly affect the type of issues that surface when the problem is presented

and the participants involved in discussions of issues.

Dunn (1981) presented an additional perspective on problem analysis. He spoke

of three main "classes" of policy problems according to how "structured" a problem was.

Elements used in judging the structure were: the number of decision makers involved; the

number of alternatives considered; the degree of values consensus; certainty of

outcomes; and the degree of probable risk (p. 103). Dunn explained this in the following

manner. "The structure of each of these three classes of problems is determined primarily

by its relative complexity; that is, the degree to which the problem is actually an

interdependent system of problems" (p. 103). More specifically, well-structured problems

were those involving a few decision makers, few alternatives, clearly marked consensus, known alternatives, and acceptable risk levels. Straightforward, low-level problems occurring in an organization typify this type of problem (for example, the purchase f computers for an organization). In opposition, ill-defined problems involve many decision makers, conflicting views of the goal, and, because alternatives and outcomes are usually unknown, the degree of risk is uncertain. Dunn (1981) pointed out that many of the most important, and most difficult, policy problems are ill structured (for example, deciding whether organizational restructuring is needed). In the middle, moderately structured problems are similar to well-structured problems--that is, have few participants, few alternatives and have value consensus--but differ in that they have uncertain outcomes with uncertain risk levels (for example, gaining agreement on a particular plan to restructure an organization). Of interest is Dunn's observation that when groups become involved in ill-structured problem situations, "rational individual choices may contribute to collective irrationality in small groups, government bureaucracies, and society as a whole" (p. 104).

Beaton's Board of Education defined its first policy problem in terms of economics. The definition was arrived at, and presented, in a rational manner. The Superintendent stated, "It's the financial matters that seem predominant right now. It's the funding." Recurring deficit budgets were worrisome to the Board and the answer to the problem was achieved by equity funding from the provincial level. Board members spoke to value issues such as how educational services needed to be reviewed and how districts should be more cooperative in working together. But none of these value-based perspectives influenced, to any significant extent, the definition of the problem. As one

Trustees stated, "The funding and the future of the District, this is why I ran for office." Another Board member pointed out, "We'll be experiencing increasing pressures on financing the needs of our community." The rhetoric that accompanied the problem's identification was selected to strike the necessary emotional response in others as well as ensure elevation of the problem. For example, We knew without equity funding we would not survive." One Board member described it in the following terms, "Without money we can't do all the things we'd like to do. We're in a fight for equity funding."

With the second policy problem, regionalization, the Board members again used a rational approach to problem definition. Equity funding had been attained and the problem of regionalization was simply the end product that now had to be dealt with. The perception Board members worked to create was the need for a common-sense approach to problem solving. Most felt that what was needed in Beaton was the most "logical" solution rather than an "emotional" one based on old ties and friendships. Suitable information was brought forward to substantiate this view. One Trustee reminded people, "The Viability Study we had done clearly stated our best course of action was to merge with County [B]." This also illustrates how often the problem's definition is presented in a manner that points to a preferred solution. Logic, combined with a strong appeal to basic emotions, helps to "soften" a purely logical approach. Some Board members, when defining the problem, used a combination of logical argument and a "play" on local pride. For example, "The policies we've established are the best and we're making sure our policies will be the ones to be followed."

And finally, both of the problems faced by Beaton might best be described as moderately structured. Relatively few decision makers were involved, a limited number of

alternatives were recognized for each problem, and strong consensus was voiced

regarding values that defined the problem. The problems were not well structured since

outcomes were uncertain, as was born out in subsequent government action, and the

probability of error in problem definition and resolution were difficult to calculate, as was

noted during the time of rapid change. Further, it might be said that Beaton's problem of

equity funding, and that of finding a suitable regional partnership, might be described as

being part of an "interdependent system of problems" with one leading to the other and

each influencing and affecting the other.

## Policy Action

Though policy formulation begins with the identification of a problem, this in itself

does not mean policy action will be taken. In the area of public services one can readily

identify a host of problems that have potential for policy action, yet are not being dealt

with. Indeed, for policy activity to be initiated, more than simple identification must take

place. The problem of financial inequities in educational funding was defined by Beaton's

Board, as had been identified by various stakeholders in the past, and yet the provincial

government did not choose to place the problem on its policy agenda. In the past, some

related issues may have been dealt with but others were not. The problem was then set

aside. Even local jurisdictions chose not to pursue the issues arising from the problem.

Maintaining strong local autonomy outweighed the need for equity funding. The

necessary elements for policy action were not present.

There are a number of prevailing factors that create the appropriate conditions for

a policy problem not only to be identified, but more importantly, to be recognized as

needing attention by policy makers. Identification of a problem may come about as a result of bureaucratic, administrative or nonpartisan activity, but gaining recognition is primarily dependent upon political activity (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). The interaction of influence and power are needed. Those with the power to make decisions regarding the expenditure of resources must be convinced that the consequences of not acting will in some way affect them. A number of factors must come into play for this to happen. For example, there must be a sufficient number of indicators that collectively say to officials in power that something is amiss in a certain area. Indicators may be those of public opinion or economic performance or pending consequences related to inaction. The media may draw the notice of the attentive public to a problem (Pross, 1986). The cumulative feedback from opinion leaders to the power elite will also assist in the recognition of a problem. A focusing event or a change in government or government direction will initiate recognition of a problem. And finally, the interest related to the problem shown by major stakeholders and the public at large must be seen as being at its height. All of these activities relate to, and affect, those who are in positions of power and influence regarding policy formulation (Elmore, 1983; Pross, 1986).

The factors noted above did serve to influence the government of Alberta in recognizing action had to be taken regarding the problem of educational funding. For example, a growing number of smaller school districts were facing deficit budgets and repeatedly seeking financial assistance from the province, the public was voicing resistance to increased taxation whether imposed at the local or provincial level, and the provincial government was itself facing huge budgetary deficits. Further, as a newly mandated

government, it promised to reduce the provincial debt. The Premier gave a much

publicized speech focusing attention on how this would be accomplished.

In the normal course of events, not everyone is interested in the same problem at

the same time. This circumstance hinders policy action. Thus, recognition of a problem

more readily takes place when: circumstances are such that a large number of

stakeholders are affected by similar phenomena; the public's interest has been focused on

the phenomena; and the political elite see action regarding the phenomena as serving to

satisfy some of its own political goals. This is what occurred in Beaton. The general

public, parents, school boards, and the government were all concerned with matters

related to educational funding at the same time. Taxpayers were exerting pressure on

elected officials at all levels of gove ance not to increase the tax load on citizens.

Lobbyists were active in their efforts to reveal the failings of public schooling. Some of

the business communities voiced concern over the quality of public school graduates and

the provincial government wanted to re-structure the educational system to allow for more

centralized control over spending. A "window of opportunity" opened for the

government (Kingdon, 1984).

<center>Policy Issues</center>

Though policy problems may be identified and recognized individually, issues

come forward for discussion in groups, that is, many issues may arise from discussions

pertaining to one policy problem (Kingdon, 1984; Mann, 1975). Issues also tend to form

clusters with each cluster defined by central criteria. These criteria ensure the problem has

been viewed and defined in a certain manner (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon,

1984). A cluster of issues might define the problem as having to do with technical

feasibility, or economic needs, or societal values. Further, as in problem definition, the use

of language becomes a critical factor in issue discussions (Firestone, 1987). The type of

rhetoric adopted and its intensity have much to do with which cluster of issues gains

dominance in defining the policy problem. Effective rhetoric may also serve to dislodge or

alter an accepted view of a problem.

Rational thinking may be responsible for the selection of issues and their

prioritizing but some speculate that it is more likely other factors, in addition to "objective

conditions," are responsible for an issue's standing (Kelman, 1981; Lineberry, 1981;

Rochefort & Cobb, 1993). Such factors as the intensity of issue advocacy, the

organization's openness to the debate, and the leadership's values and beliefs affect issue

recognition and selection. Equally, policy entrepreneurs tend to support issue clusters

they feel will better speak to policy makers or those in positions to influence policy

makers. In such cases, the cluster of issues may not define the policy entrepreneurs' total

stance regarding the policy problem, nor even reflect what is felt as a priority in its

examination. Rather, a policy advocate may choose one issue cluster over another

because it will be received in a positive way, at that particular time, by the greatest number

of people. Such choices are made on political grounds. An understanding of the different

perspectives on the policy problem can be gained by examining each cluster of issues

(Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

In the study reported herein, Board members discussed a variety of issues that

clustered around certain themes. In the end, each Board member chose to recognize and

support one of these clusters or sets of criteria because it best described how she or he felt

about the situation. Howe (1988) described this as filtering knowledge via one's belief system. These views or perceptions were, however, subject to influence and change as group membe , interacted and worked with the issues. Dunn (1981) saw change resulting from "the pattern of involvement of stakeholders and their response to the policy environment" (p. 59). In Beaton, Trustees had an opportunity to exercise a greater degree of influence on colleagues because of their dual roles. Since they are elected to serve as both municipal and school district representatives, a considerable amount of time was spent together making decisions on both educational and municipal matters. Board members were also influenced by what occurred in the District's broader environment. Board member views were affected by discussions at the Provincial Zone meetings, participation in government sponso: ·:. .{oundtable Meetings, and ongoing interactions with neighbouring school jurisdictions.

A further theoretical perspective applicable here relates to how Board members made issue selections on the basis of what they knew, that is the information they chose to recognize because it coincided or supported their "dominant" values. For example, some Board members had as their goal to ensure that greater parental involvement in decision making at the school level would result regardless of any other broader changes being contemplated. Other issues, such as loss of school board governance or loss of locally appointed superintendents, were weighed against their main criterion. If, at the end of regionalization, parents gained greater control over their local school, then attaining that goal mattered more than retaining a locally appointed superintendent. For others what mattered was eliminating the School District's debt problem without placing additional burdens on the electorate. The provincial government promised this would happen if

smaller districts joined together in regions. Individuals who wanted the District to be debt free believed in the promise and tended to dismiss those issues that in any way questioned the government's plans or its integrity in fulfilling this promise. In order to gain one's ultimate goal something else had to be sacrificed.

## Agenda Setting

Direct access to the policy agenda in traditionally-structured organizations is available to some, but not all, members. Members with direct access are those possessing mandated power to make decisions regarding organizational goals and expenditure of resources. Such organizational members comprise the formal power elite and operate in the formal context of the organiz .on (Dror, 1983; Dye, 1978). This group tends to be small in number. At the same time, a wider circle of participants work to influence what is placed on the agenda. Lacking direct access to agenda setting, they must attain their goals through contacts with the power elite (Kelman, 1981; Pross, 1986). Those who are successful in building and maintaining strong and consistent ties and networks with the formal power elite, will themselves gain policy power. They become the informal power holders by virtue of the influence they wield. Yet, some researchers have pointed out that *access* to agenda setting occurs during policy formulation, while *influencing* behaviors tend to occur during the later stages of policy making such as implementation (Kelman, 1981; Mann, 1975).

Public education is a traditionally structured system. It is an open system but is still bureaucratic in administrative matters. The provincial government controls the overall agenda for educational services while school boards control the agenda pertaining to local

matters. In a very real sense the provincial government has ready access to the agendas of local boards since it can mandate what boards must place on their policy agendas. The government also influences the agenda setting of school boards as a result of the interaction of school jurisdictions with the Department of Education, the Regional Offices, and by way of special services and projects funded by the government. On the other hand, though boards may have various formal and informal avenues through which to influence provincial agenda setting, they have virtually no means by which to directly access the provincial-level agenda.

Is this what happened with Beaton? According to the Board Chair, the Beaton Board did gain access to the government's policy agenda. This is a comment made by the Chair:

> A small voice but we got what we wanted. The equity funding. We got it
> much to the chagrin of places like [a large county]. We got it even though
> it's not just like we wanted. It shows that small voices like u: :an win.

The question must be asked whether Beaton's lobbying of the government, and the Board's long standing interaction with Alberta Education and other government officials resulted in access to the government's policy agenda, or whether Board action served only to influence how government policy was finally implemented? If one defines gaining successful access to the agenda-setting arena as being able to play a *major* role in both the recognition and definition of policy problems, then Beaton's actions might be seen as less than successful. Beaton's actions certainly forced the government to turn its attention to the problem but it was the government that defined the problem and chose a solution. In fact it might be said that the lobbying efforts of Beaton, and the other boards who joined forces with Beaton, gave the government an opportunity to place on its agenda an item it

long wanted to act upon. Rather than accessing the government's agenda, Beaton and the other boards created the necessary "public mood" for policy action. They did not direct policy action but rather gave the government an opportunity to do so. However, a less harsh critic might present the argument that participants who assume minor or more subtle roles in the process of agenda setting can, and do, significantly influence policy development. For example, they can be successful in having one problem definition highlighted over another. This is important. They can be successful in focussing attention on this particular definition. This is necessary. They can work in a collaborative manner with policy decision makers and thus have their ideas received more readily. This too is important.

In terms of local governance, Beaton's ability to set its policy agenda was significantly affected by activities beyond its borders. While waiting for the government to come forward with its directives and guidelines regarding regionalization, Beaton's Board set no new school-related policies for a period of ten months. The reason for this was explained by the Superintendent: "What's the point. Any policies will have to fit into a regional perspective. Any policy will be established on a regional basis." Some might argue that the ability of school boards to set their own policy agenda is, as a rule, not curtailed by outside influences to this extent, and that the study points to an atypical phenomena that only occurred as a result of great change. They would say the study does not examine the norm but an anomaly. The theoretical stance to counter this argument would draw attention to the open systems model. First, as part of such an organizational structure, the school board is continuously affected by elements in its immediate and broader environments. Second, an unexpected change in the system might accentuate the

interdependence that exists, but the interdependence certainly does exist and exists at all times. Third, every system undergoes periods of turbulence brought on by change. The significance of this study however, is that it highlights the strength and extent of influence certain elements in the environment have on an organization. The provincial government became a dominant influence during the period of accelerated change beyond that that might be expected in "regular" times. Also, this study recognized how the ideology of the "dominant influencer" will affect, in significant ways, the policy agenda of the associated organization. The provincial government made it clear that deficit reduction would drive future policy initiatives in education. Regionalization of school boards was seen as falling in line with such a direction. Thus it was noted that during times of hectic change, Beaton's Board of Education was significantly influenced by external forces in its environment. Its decision making was influenced to such an extent that the Board's ability to set its own policy agenda was curtailed.

## Decision Making

One of the interesting and important aspects to the study of policy making is the examination of decision making activities exhibited during the policy-making process. Decisions come about as a result of interactions among people. These interactions arrange themselves in a variety of formats beyond that of the traditional rational, decision-making model. For example, decisions can be made through a pluralistic process where the individuals or groups involved represent a range of stakeholder views (Berry, 1989; Kimbrough, 1964; Kinder, 1978). Gaining consensus is important in this process. Others describe decision making as a process of coalition building where "brokering" for power

and influence is important (Gaventa, 1980; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). An incremental process to making decisions is also described in policy literature (Dye, 1978; Sabatier, 1986). An added dimension to the discussion is provided by Dror (1983) who cautioned that decision making has as much to do with the organization's environment as it has to do with the activities of the decision makers. The stability of the environment, its complexity, and the amount of information decision makers possess about the environment affect decisions that are made. For example, in secure and settled times, matters of policy are generally decided upon in an incremental fashion (Dye, 1978). Small changes and adjustments to organizational activity occur without causing any noticeable disruption to the organization or patterns of established activity. Thus, the existing organizational equilibrium or status quo is maintained (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). During calm periods, policy formulation is more readily perceived as being a rational decision-making process because there is time to discuss, organize and plan with more thought and deliberation. There is time to invite a variety of participants to take part in the policy process, and to orchestrate their involvement. There is time to gather, process, and evaluate information related to a policy problem. Policy makers have ample time to anticipate and prepare for possible issues that might be raised.

Of the above decision-making patterns, three are noted in the study of Beaton's Board of Education. They are incrementalism, coalition building and rational decision making. The decision patterns that evolved were significantly affected by occurrences in Beaton's immediate context and broader environment. During the time when Beaton's Board of Education was defining its first problem, conditions in its environment were stable. The regular business of school governance took place. There were no changes to

the existing rules and regulations by the government. Under such circumstances, Beaton began its work to attain equity in educational funding. At this time, the Board made many important policy-related decisions. For example, it established an ongoing dialogue with government officials. It asked the Department of Education to help gather necessary information on the jurisdiction's future alternatives. Board members were able to take advantage of regular meetings at which they presented their views on equity funding. Time was spent in building coalitions with neighbouring districts. There were numerous opportunities to keep parents and public well informed of the progress being made and these were utilized to the fullest. Such were the activities of the decision makers during the period of organizational calm.

During times of change and disturbance--whether the disturbance occurs in the organization or in its environment--decision making resembles more clearly what Mann (1975) described as "disjointed incrementalism." Instead of having the time and inclination to consider a variety of problem solutions and accompanying issues, only a limited number are considered. There is a greater possibility that long standing goals will be changed or adjusted to comply with available means. Discussions of issues more obviously reflect the values and beliefs of participants rather than those of expert knowledge (Kelman, 1981; Kingdon, 1984). As an important factor in evaluating issues, lack of information becomes a problem. Further, in turbulent times it is difficult to gather all the necessary information within an allotted time-frame. The applicable information is often not readily available or it may be incomplete. It also becomes subject to a greater possibility of being changed. Alternatives, issues, and decision makers arrange and rearrange themselves many times before a policy decision is made. Support for a

particular policy stance may suddenly appear or just as suddenly melt away. During such times there is increased informal interaction between decision makers since informal venues do not call for public declarations or what might be termed "going on record." Policy makers want time to come to an understanding of the issues without having to deal with public reactions. And finally, when change takes place in a hectic manner and within a short period of time, the "imbalance" that results in an organization makes it more susceptible to imposed agenda setting from outside the organization.

As a result of dramatic changes in its environment, the Beaton Board dealt with its second policy problem in a different manner from that of the first. A strict government timeline kept the Board from engaging in any extended planning activities. As one Board member stated, "The speed of changes drives us a lot." Many of the above mentioned features of disjointed incrementalism occurred. The original Viability Study was resurrected and once again placed on the policy agenda. Though it was updated, it still contained a limited number of solution alternatives. By choosing to recognize the problem and its solution in a limited way, the Board members discussed only those issues that had to do with selecting one regional partner over another. Such "deflection" away from other issues became an important issue-discussion technique. As a result, many of the issues that had priority during the period of organizational stability dropped off the agenda at this time. Issues such as those pertaining to the role of public education and who was best able to represent the interest of parents and children, had no venue for discussion.

During the period of calm, the Board maintained the perception that it was united when making decisions. During the time of rapid change, Board solidarity was showing signs of strain. For example, during a public meeting one Trustee asked of another, "Are

you saying that on your own or on behalf of the Board?" Such a statement was not in keeping with the image of a united Board noted earlier. Still, most issue-clarification activities between Trustees continued to take place away from public view. At this time virtually no public Board debates took place related to policy issues. Rather, open Board Meetings served as information sharing sessions and opportunities for Trustees to remind each other, and the public, what the District stood for and what was at stake as a result of the changes taking place. Language that evoked images of working together, trust, fairness, and doing what was best for students were repeatedly used by some Board members. Rhetoric intensified. Pride in the District and maintaining the best in District policies were presented as important considerations. The search for a solution was viewed in terms of "a fight for our life." The strength of commitment to a position on issues tended to be more subject to reversals during the change period in Beaton's broader environment. Influencing behaviors used by Board members intensified at this time as illustrated by the following comment made by one Trustee. "People sit and see how others will vote. I've seen people change their mind in a matter of minutes."

Adequate time was not available to collect and validate information. Traditional sources of information and previously collected facts were used by Trustees when speaking to issues. Having the Viability Study updated by Alberta Education illustrates that, again, government sources were relied on by Beaton to supply and clarify facts for the Board. During this turbulent time, the Beaton Board grew more insular and placed a priority on those issues that had relevance to Beaton alone. For example, during the period of organizational calm there were comments made by Board members stating that school boards needed to work more closely for the common good and that a "turf"

mentality should be discouraged. But during the period of turbulence, most Trustees gave

priority to those issues that would directly benefit the local taxpayer. The out-of-district

parents had to look elsewhere for someone to "champion" their cause. It was not the

Beaton School Board's role to do so.

The period of turbulence drew to a close for Beaton. Due to the government's

timeline, the Board had to present a "Motion of Partnership" and vote on it. The rational

decision-making model once again appeared. Board members were directed to

systematically compare the information on each prospective partner. They were reminded

of the policy direction Beaton had chosen and how important it was this continued within

the new part: :rship. Emotional arguments were dismissed. Ties of friendship and mutual

cooperation were not to be seen as priority issues.

## Policy Making and Democratic Action

If a political society is to be democratic, it logically must ground its
interest, including its intentions and laws, ultimately upon the principle of
public interest, or the compatibility of a state's interests with the central
traits of its members' voluntary actions. (Heslep, 1989, p. 68)

Mann (1975) stated that policy determination was accomplished through political

activity while policy implementation came about through administrative actions. Within

this structure, the traditional policy process reflects both participatory and representative

democratic activity. At the policy formulation stage, elected or appointed representatives

of the organization make decisions, while policy implementation requires a wider range of

stakeholder participation. Unclear understanding of this dichotomy in democratic action is

a major source of dissatisfaction with a policy process. Further dissatisfaction may come

about when stakeholders feel there is little connection between the *perception* that

meaningful input is being facilitated, and the *reality* of what is actually happening. There

is more potential for unhappiness when policy makers deem it necessary to respond, not to

the common wishes of their public, but to what they determine is the common good of the

public. Policy makers see this as acting on the basis of altruistic motives while the public

may see it as self-serving or partisan.

Members of the Beaton Board questioned the usefulness of the government's

Roundtable sessions. The purpose of the discussions was to garner the opinions of

stakeholders, yet many of the subsequent decisions by the government were seen as not

reflecting the asked for advice. Was the Roundtable structure in place only to create the

perception of grassroots participation? Some Board members feared this was the case.

At the District level, problems arose once the Board made its final decision on partnership.

There was an unwillingness, on the part of some of its public, to accept the representative

aspect of democracy as it applied to school board governance. The Board felt that once

stakeholder ideas were gathered and considered it was the role of the elected Trustees to

exercise their representative mandate and make a final decision. In terms of common

good, both the provincial government and the Beaton Board saw its respective policy

decisions as ultimately being the best for all concerned, and further, that it was their role

to make such judgements.

## Policy Making and Knowledge

"Knowledge is a guide to action rather than an end in itself" (Dunn, 1981, p. 7).

What is recognized as "valid" knowledge in the world of academia has slowly changed. In

recent years there is a growing recognition that useful knowledge, that is information

necessary to make reasoned judgements in solving problems, can be derived by other than empirical and quantitative methodologies (Evers & Lakomski, 1991). This evolution of how facts, knowledge, and ways of knowing are viewed reflects the following principles (Cobb & Elder, 1983). Knowledge can be socially created. Knowledge can come from personally assigned meanings shared by people who experience a phenomenon. Collective definitions speak to, and validate, lived experiences and are sources of knowledge. Thus, meaningful information comes from those who live the phenomenon just as it comes from those who take the role of observer and study the phenomenon. Together, the two sources offer a rich array of data needed for problem solving; though, the value that is placed on information gained from each source does vary.

In policy making, individual beliefs and political factors affect which knowledge source is validated at which time (Howe, 1988). During periods of organizational calm, the knowledge of experts is actively sought because policy makers have the time to acquaint themselves with the information and to select that which is in harmony with organizational goals and personal beliefs. They also have time to "massage" and organize the information for presentation to other decision makers (Kelman, 1981). During periods of upheaval and rapid change, a compressed time frame works against gathering new information from reports and studies. At such times, policy makers often feel that expert knowledge, especially if it is not fully understood, makes them vulnerable and not in control. They fear not being able to use the facts readily in discussions and of being challenged on these facts during public debate. Decision makers prefer to draw upon a familiar knowledge base and tend to rely on the ideas and opinions of advisors both in the formal and informal organizational setting. If it becomes necessary to present expert

knowledge, policy makers may rely upon the reports and studies gathered in the past rather than initiating new studies. At this time, information provided by government departments or officials is also more readily drawn upon.

The Beaton Board made use of both expert and socially constructed knowledge at various times when solving policy problems. The Viability Study on the District's future, information gathered by the Superintendent, and the comparison chart of possible partners, were documents representing expert knowledge. But, when Board members were asked about sources of issues and how issues were filtered regarding validity and priority, they spoke about their own "personal" knowledge regarding such matters. They mentioned the role of parents and neighbours, and pointed to children as being especially useful in providing information related to issues. What might be termed as "expert" knowledge in matters of school issues, was not given a high profile by those interviewed. Though Board members cited the Superintendent and school-based staffs as originators of many of the formal policies already in place, the issues that preoccupied the Trustees came from other sources. Further, the Superintendent's role in matters of policy, was never articulated as being central to how policy issues should be resolved. The Superintendent did serve the role of liaison between the schools and the Board and between Parent Advisory Councils and the Board. Issues were channelled through the Superintendent and presented for Board consideration. He was also relied upon to gather necessary information and present it to the Board in a meaningful fashion. His overall expertise in matters of educational programming and administration was lauded by all Trustees. But in public meetings at least, the Superintendent simply conveyed information and did not

interpret it in any way that disclosed his own preferences or bias regarding policy direction, nor was he called upon to do so by the Board.

Though all Board members relied on information from the provincial government to guide their decision making, some Trustees saw this information as more trustworthy than did others. Many questioned the validity of government communiqués as educational restructuring began to take place. What they saw on paper was often not seen occurring in reality. What was stated as a certainty was often changed shortly there after. Thus comments such as, "They keep changing things on us" and "We really don't know what's happening" were common as the Board first started to consider solutions to the problem that faced the District. In spite of this, as time went on and rapid change overtook them, fewer and fewer Trustees questioned the intent or validity of government information. The overall intentions of the government were accepted as being the best for Beaton and issues related to the details of the government's plan, whether accurate or not, were no longer a priority.

Thus, what can be said is that in Beaton basic beliefs and values and strongly set perceptions governed the type of knowledge policy makers used. Though expert knowledge was sought and considered, expert knowledge did not by itself dictate the content of decisions. What expert knowledge did do was to help narrow the range of choice. Ultimately, the choices made by decision makers were governed by many factors other than "facts" offered by experts.

## Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the phenomenon of policy formulation as presented in theoretical writing and how ideas gleaned from such work compare to the findings of the study. Areas of discussion selected for the chapter had to do with activities connected to: defining policy problems and issues; policy actions taken by participants including that of agenda setting; policy making and democratic action; and the role and source of knowledge used in policy formulation. The following observations are presented for consideration.

Policy problems, issues and preferred solutions are brought to the attention of policy makers as interconnected elements. The recognition and definition of these elements sets the stage for the initial step in policy formulation. For policy formulation to take place conditions in the organization and in its environment must be such that attention is effectively focused on a problem. Participants expend considerable time and energy to define the problem in a considered manner since this will, to a significant extent, shape the resulting policy issues that will be discussed. Attention for these activities is gained through political behavior of participants in both the formal and informal settings of the organization. The effective use of language and rhetoric plays an important part in not only presenting issues in a certain way, but also used in deflecting attention away from one issue cluster to another.

Interesting observations can be made regarding decision-making activities surrounding policy formulation. During periods of organizational calm, the decision-making patterns tend to reflect the rational and incremental models. When there is rapid change in the organization, or when the organization must adjust to significant changes in

its environment, then decision paths become more disjointed. Decisions tend to be based upon previously recognized knowledge. Established information sources are more readily utilized. Information disseminated by government officials or bureaucratic departments is accepted less critically.

It might be said that during times of upheaval, policy formulation is marked by a different combination of participant behavior than that which occurs during periods of stability. During turbulent times decision makers rely more heavily on their own feelings, beliefs, and value structures when making decisions. Group solidarity undergoes greater stress as discussions proceed and the time for a decision draws near. Divergent views are less tolerated. Group members become more susceptible to the opinion leaders.

Of particular interest in this chapter's presentation was the idea that sometimes an organization may find itself in the position of losing control of its own agenda setting capabilities. Sometimes external factors are such that particular policy problems are pre-determined by mandated power holders in the broader environment. Sometimes such circumstances place the organization in the role of a "minor player" regarding policy direction.

# CHAPTER VIII

# CONCEPTUAL THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS

The specific purpose of the study was to investigate how policy makers come to recognize policy issues, why they promote some issues over others, and what happens to policy issues over a period of time. Also of relevance to this investigation were examinations of the role of participants in policy formulation and the effect environmental activities have on policy making. The broader purpose of the study was to gain further insights and understandings related to the initial stages of policy formulation.

The intent of this chapter is to offer interpretations and insights with respect to the practical and theoretical contributions of this study in the area of public policy and school governance. In order to address the purpose of the chapter, information has been organized into two sections: themes and "working" hypotheses, and conclusions.

Five "conceptual" themes were introduced in Chapter I. They defined, or set the basis for, the study's conceptual framework. In this chapter each of the themes is revisited and discussed. As adjuncts to each theme, a number of specific working hypotheses are delineated with a concluding general working hypothesis. More specifically, the conceptual themes and accompanying working hypotheses are presented in a manner that relates the study's findings to knowledge and insights highlighted in the literature review. Suggestions for further research and ideas for educational practice accompany the presentation of working hypotheses.

The hypotheses are labelled "working hypotheses" because the study from which they emerged is grounded in the interpretive paradigm. The goal of interpretive researchers is to discover working hypotheses that describe relationships in a particular setting. Thus interpretive studies seek to reveal relationships and provide insights into phenomena under study, not to identify universal truths. The interpretive researcher acknowledges that what has been discovered is, to some extent, "bound" by the context of the study and may not be directly applicable to other situations. Nevertheless, working hypotheses and the insights, understandings, and researcher experiences, can be of value to others working in the area of study.

The final section of the chapter contains conclusions based on the study's findings and key concepts that relate to public policy studies. This section presents a summary of selected theoretical perspectives on policy making.

## Themes and Working Hypotheses

There are five themes that serve to "bind together" the four areas that comprise the study's conceptual frame. The first section of the chapter includes a review of these themes and a discussion of how the study's findings relate to each. Examples from the study are used to illustrate this. A sixth theme which emerged through data analysis has been included. Since this was an interpretive study, it was important to acknowledge that the analysis of data might result in recognition of new concepts supportive of the study's conceptual frame. This did occur. Thus, the sixth theme is presented for consideration along with the original five which were put in place at the onset of the study.

Theme #1: Policy matters are shaped by formal and informal power structures
operating in both the organization and the organization's environment.

Formal power is vested in individuals or groups by virtue of position or legislated
mandate. Formal structures have designated associations (for example, ministries,
departments, councils, administrative levels) that depict how membership interacts in order
to accomplish the organization's goals. Formal structures are easily identified and form
the organization's hierarchical levels. If these organizations also follow the bureaucratic
model, then formal power tends to be stable and clearly defined within, and between, the
organizational structures (Morgan, 1986). It is understood that in most policy matters,
decisions made by the individual or group with the greatest amount of formal power will
affect and shape the decisions of other organizational members.

School boards, Alberta Education and the Minister of Education represent
different levels of formal power. In many policy-making areas, Beaton's Board of
Education was able to make policy decisions without reference to any other formal power
holders. In some of these areas, Beaton was influenced by Alberta Education primarily
because of the working relationship the two had formed. In other areas, such as
curriculum, Alberta Education did possess the delegated power to direct school board
matters. On the other hand, the Regional Task Force worked to influence the Board on
the clarification of policy issues rather than direct it since the Task Force did not have
similar delegated power. The main purpose of the Task Force was to assist school
jurisdictions to arrive at consensus in matters of regionalization, not to mandate any

action. The Minister of Education however, did possess the formal power to direct and significantly affect the policy actions of Beaton's Board of Education.

Informal power structures can be found in the context of the organization and in its broader environment. Where formal power structures exist, written rules and regulations explain the workings of these structures and how they relate one to another. Informal power structures are not so easily identified. Informal power is created by a person or group through the cultivation of social and political alliances and networks. These activities occur, "over the phone, through old-boy networks and other friendship groups, through the golf club, or through chance meetings" (Morgan, 1986, p. 174). People who belong to informal power structures may, at various times, come together, focus on a specific policy issue, and work to influence its promotion. But, there will be periods when activity, in and between these structures, is dormant. Informal power structures are built on mutual dependency and result in an exchange of assistance when circumstances warrant. This symbiotic relationship exists as much for future considerations as for present needs, or as Morgan (1986) described it, "trading help for the present for promises in the future" (p. 148). As a result, informal power structures are fluid, invisible, episodic and unstable. The power for these groups comes from their ability to create an opposing power bloc to counter that held by the formal power elite. In order to accomplish this, informal structures must possess something the formal power elite needs. This "something" might be a commodity or people resource or political support. Regardless, it must be important enough to affect the decision-making activity of the formal power structure. Such sanction-based activity acts as an effective counter weight to formal power. "Countervailing power provides a way of influencing organizations when one is

not part of the established power structure" (Morgan, 1986, p. 175). Some see this as a significant and necessary element in the democratic process (Galbraith, 1993).

There were many informal power structures operating within Beaton's immediate context. Various parent groups, school staffs, the local teachers' association, and the business sector all had some measure of influence on Board members. Parent power operated effectively on matters at the school level. Board members met with parents at school gatherings, in the neighbourhood, and when doing business in the town centre. Parents worked to influence the Board on such issues as bussing costs and the kindergarten program. During the term of the study, the parents did not unite as one body to lobby the Board on any particular issue. The District Chamber of Commerce also chose not to exercise its formal influence in discussions of issues throughout most of Beaton's policy deliberations. Of interest however, is that the Chamber did quickly marshal an informal power base once the Board made a policy decision with which the Chamber's stakeholders did not agree. On the other hand, District staff maintained a consistent focus on how they might influence District policies. This was accomplished by their efforts in those policy areas that directly related to school-level matters. The staff worked with the school Superintendent and presented policy proposals for Board consideration. Board members declared that most of the school related policies came from the central and school level administration and teaching staff.

In the broader environment of the District, only a few active informal power structures were noted. The citizens of a neighbouring school jurisdiction joined together to influence Beaton's School Board in selecting their county as a regional partner. This group saw its source of influence emanating from their numbers and their economic

power. In the end, these resources were not strong enough to sway the Board. Provincial politicians also operated as part of informal power structures in Beaton's broader environment. One politician joined the disaffected out-of-district parents in pressuring the Beaton Board to reconsider its partnership decision. Others had many informal contacts with Beaton's Board members because of the municipal activities with which Beaton's Trustees were also involved.

For the Beaton Board of Education, both formal and informal power structures affected its policy deliberations. The government represented the strongest formal power structure because of its mandated power and its position at the apex of the hierarchical pyramid. In other words, it was the government's "place" to set the direction of educational policy (Coleman, 1973; Rebore, 1984). But of special interest in this study was the existing public mood that enabled the government to initiate "bold" policy measures it, at another time, would not have attempted to do. Budget deficits both at the local and provincial levels and a public opposed to any further tax increases, helped give the provincial government the "wave of public support" it needed along with its legislated authority. The Beaton Board and its superintendent spent considerable time in seeking and establishing ties with Alberta Education members who were in positions to influence government policy. The students and parents of the District operated from an informal power base and were recognized as influencing school-based policy matters in a significant manner. Provincial level politicians "floated" in and out of the informal power structures that existed in Beaton's broader environment. Their influence was inconsistent but present.

The following are a set of specific working hypotheses based on ideas or arguments related to the discussion presented above.

1. In matters of policy, there is a distribution of political power in formal and informal structures operating in, and associated with, an organization. It may be mandated power or power may be due to activities that effectively influence decision makers.

2. Power relationships are critical in determining the degree of consensus in decision making. Because of this, participants spend considerable time in cultivating associations that will enhance their power to influence others engaged in the policy process.

3. The "loose coupling" of units and sub units, evident in open systems, means that policy decision making is not static but fluid and changing and that its development varies across organizational levels.

4. In policy studies it is difficult to assess who the "hidden influencers" are and the extent of their power. Identifying members of this informal group often proves elusive and makes the examination of the make-up and strength of informal power structures difficult.

General Working Hypothesis: Many of the available models for policy analysis are useful in their ability to help in the identification and labelling of policy making characteristics such as process, participants, and environmental factors. In the wake of greater politicization of public education in recent years (due to economic constraints and the formal pressures and demands of today's public), such models are less useful in helping analysts identify and attach meaning to the covert political behaviors of the organization's formal and informal power elite.

Theme #2: Various individuals and groups in an organization, and associated with

it, do not possess equal power to access or influence policy making.

Access to policy formulation is made easier by one's formal positioning in an

organization. Those individuals or groups with the legislated or mandated power to set

the organization's agenda have easy access to initial stages of policy making. Access to,

and the control of, policy formulation tend to go together in most organizations. Though

the power elite have the right of access to policy formulation, a broader span of

participants is involved in trying to influence policy at this stage in its process. Influencing

involves discussing, debating, negotiating, and working in a collaborative manner as means

of presenting one set of values and beliefs in preference to another. It is an attempt to

strengthen or alter perceptions held by decision makers. The goal is one of changing

perceptions since this is the crucial first step to changing behavior. The best opportunity

to influence others occurs during initial discussions of issues because it is here that a

confirming or negating voice can better alter perceptions based on values or beliefs.

But not all participants are involved in the formal discussions of issues. This

occurs for many reasons. People associated with an organization may not know how to

access the venues in which such discussions take place. They may not be politically adept,

that is, not able to enhance their power of influence, and thus remain silent and

disenfranchised. "Social psychology studies have found that political learning is dependent

at least to some degree on political participation within and mastery upon one's

environment" (Gaventa, 1980, p. 18). There are also those who choose not to become

involved because the issue is not a priority for them or because they are uncomfortable

with making public declarations. In contrast, politically adept players in the organizational environment mobilize their political, social and economic resources and establish long-standing connections with policy decision makers. Thus it has been pointed out that though the Pluralistic Model is useful in explaining how a decision-making power balance is reached between competing stakeholders, it does not address the role of those stakeholders who are unable to take part or those who choose not to be involved.

Inside the organization, attempts to influence policy making are evident. Participants who are members of an organization are closer to the policy decision makers and have ample opportunity for influencing them via formal and informal channels of communication. Unions, worker committees, regular worker-management meetings, rules of the organization, and special conferences are examples of vehicles for influencing policy formulation. But organizational members often face a dilemma. If they are in agreement with the organization's policy direction, there is little problem in voicing their agreement. But at those times when they disagree, there may be a conflict of interest between the role of employee and that of policy critic. Therefore, employees often feel more comfortable in applying the force of their influence during policy enactment rather than the more politicized process of policy formulation.

In Alberta the history of policy development in public education shows the Minister of Education and the elected school boards sharing, though not equally, in this responsibility. The Minister of Education had the legislated power to set policy direction at the provincial level, which directly affected all school districts, while school boards were allowed to have a delegated measure of control over policy direction at the local level. Thus, the Minister of Education could both control and influence policy formulation

at the local levels. School boards, on the other hand, had the delegated power to draft their own local policies but always with "an eye" to the overall provincial directives. School boards could however, work to influence provincial policy direction through both formal and informal interactions. Changes or shifts in the balance of power between these two institutions affect the extent to which school boards will influence provincial policy direction. The Beaton Board put much effort into influencing the government to change its method of educational financing. School systems have been described as, "Encased in a network of extra-governmental friends and allies" (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, p. 18). The Board maintained both formal and informal contacts with government officials and department staff. Beaton's Trustees did not have direct access to the government's policy agenda, but, through these working ties, they hoped to influence those individuals in government who did have access. Beaton also coordinated the efforts of other jurisdictions so that the same message would reach the policy makers from a number of sources. Such tactics did influence the government to recognize the problem of education funding inequities. However, the extent to which the Beaton Board was able to influence directly how the equity problem was defined, and the solution that was selected--that is regionalization of school boards and withdrawal of local taxation rights--is problematic. Beaton Board members hastened to reassure the researcher that the essence of such moves were anticipated. Prior discussions with government officials had prepared the Board for the changes.

At the local level, the teaching staff of Beaton was careful in how it exercised its power of influence in matters of policy making. Though Beaton's staff worked to influence policy related to school-level business, it was more circumspect in the role it

assumed in decision making involving the broader policy issues preoccupying the Board. For example, staff were cautious in expressing preferences regarding the issue of regional partnership. A representative stated that becoming involved in this particular area of policy formulation might make the staff vulnerable to redress. The staff representative shared the staff's view that there were both "pros and cons" for partnership with each of the counties. The final decision would be left to the Board. In the study, the non-certificated staff did not assume a role in policy formulation. It too saw its power of influence better utilized during policy implementation.

The following arguments are presented as a support for the general working hypothesis set out for this theme:

1. Access to, and control over, educational agenda setting is affected by the allocation of formal, legislated authority. This legislated authority is distributed in diminishing amounts down through the hierarchical levels.

2. The use of low pressure, low profile politics applied in a consistent manner allows the policy entrepreneurs to influence policy decision makers. Such behavior compensates for the lack of direct policy-making access

3. When policy making is perceived as being highly politicized, that is having more to do with control and power brokering than goal setting, then organizational stakeholders become more vulnerable and less likely to participate in policy setting.

General Working Hypothesis: The power elite, in both the formal and informal structures of an organization, tend to work together for purposes of gaining and maintaining power and control rather than to work collaboratively with stakeholders to create a vision and set goals for the organization. Asking stakeholders for ideas and

sharing information with them represents only one phase of policy formulation. Board members were able to present, discuss, and sort out their ideas, beliefs and fears with government officials. It is from such interaction that meaning and consensus is created. Most local stakeholders do not participate in such a process. The result is that potential policy issues are kept from being placed on the policy agenda of the organization.

### Theme #3: The level of interest, influence and power enacted by individuals or a group is likely to fluctuate depending upon policy issues.

Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) pointed out that the exercise of influence and power in school-district governance is different from that which occurs in other political arenas. Though similar organizational activities are evident, the way they evolve differs. For example, interest group activity exists in school districts but tends to be sporadic and short lived. There are few lobby groups actively working in a jurisdiction at any given time. In local school governance the board expects that competing special interest groups will arrive at consensus on their own prior to appearing before the board. This means that many issues are never acted upon by stakeholders because representatives cannot mobilize the necessary support. As a result, issues other than those being considered by a board have little chance of being discussed. For those in power however, it is in their best interest to ensure that certain issues reflecting desired beliefs and goals emerge. They work to gain a consensus on issue priority through the effective use of language, the manipulation of symbols, the control of information, and the perpetuation of myths. Interest and involvement in policy activity will also vary depending upon how policy issues are portrayed (Gaventa, 1980; Gormley & Peters, 1992). Labelling issues as women's

issues, or labour issues, or issues of economics will evoke interest from some, but not all, stakeholders. The degree to which an issue's definition is consistent with the norms and traditions of stakeholders will determine who becomes involved in discussions. Organizations also have what is termed "de facto" pressure groups who do not engage in ongoing policy discussions but do watch and monitor policy statements and directives carefully. "They look after their own interests and stand prepared to take action if they see their interests threatened in any way" (Donges, 1982). This means that some group members will become more involved in policy discussions than will those who are not affected by the particular set of issues. The vast number of issues that abound in an organization and in its environment work against the possibility of everyone paying attention to them all. Some researchers point out that the power elite itself tends to focus on one issue at a time (Dahl, 1984; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). Others speak to the fact that problem s·  ·ers ( ʔ only process a given amount of information when considering policy issues (Lindblom, 1990). Even media focus attention on one main issue for a short period of time and then proceed to another, reflecting the habits of their audiences (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). The degree of media exposure will influence, to some degree, the level of sustained interest of the public in an issue. Finally, the values and beliefs of the individual or group will affect the extent of interest in and support for an issue. If an issue falls in line with a fundamental belief or if it threatens a fundamental value, then interest in it will awaken.

The issue of funding equity did not gain the government's interest until a number of factors came together to create the right "time and place" for its serious examination. As Kingdon (1984) put it, "It is an idea whose time had come" (p. 1). Government

officials saw that economic, legal and political problems facing the government c.,.ild be

alleviated through greater centralization of educational administration and funding. Such a

move would better ensure greater control over fiscal spending, enhance efficiency,

increase local accountability, and attain a more equitable distribution of resources. Many

in the public were also expressing opinions that depicted such action as necessary in order

to improve the present education system. These results were weighed against potential

political costs of centralization related to the government's past record of speaking to, and

validating, the need for having governing structures nearest to those they are meant to

serve. The government, helped along by a growing public mood demanding fiscal

accountability in the public sector, threats of legal action from school boards, and the

availability of a solution pointing to centralization, moved in the direction of

regionalization.

In contrast, issues related to educational regionalization did not gain the interest of

Beaton's business community for a considerable period of time. The District Chamber of

Commerce centered its concerns on the regionalization of health services. As was noted

above, people tend to deal with only one issue at a time to the exclusion of others. It was

only when out-of-district parents began to lobby Chamber members that business'

attention was drawn to education. It was then that the Chamber and parents mobilized

their power in an attempt to influence the Board to reconsider its decision.

The parents and general public of Beaton showed a heightened interest in matters

that affected each school, but issues related to regional partner selection were not as

important. Parents and the public wanted to be kept informed and they wanted to be in a

position to monitor what was occurring, but they never attempted to direct the Boar on

this question. Specific issues related to individual schools were important to them. The broader issue of regionalization was not.

Individual Board members varied in their level of interest and commitment to various issues. One Trustee, representing the religious fundamentalist sector of the town, came out with a strong stand on whether machines dispensing contraceptives should be located in high schools. She made it very clear that if the Board made any move in this direction she would use all her power and influence to block it. The issue of meaningful parental participation in school decision making had the full attention and support of a number of Trustees, while others never spoke to the issue. The economics issues were brought forward for recognition by one Trustee repeatedly, but again, others dismissed them as not relevant.

In consideration of the above explanations, the following specific working hypotheses have been presented to support a concluding general working hypothesis:

1. Many factors operate to raise or lower interest in, and support for, policy issues. Of significance are the values and beliefs held by key decision makers. These have the greatest potential for affecting decisions about which issues are validated.

2. The "in use" values and beliefs of the members of the formal power elite of an organization that underpin their decision making tend to be the same values and beliefs expressed by members of the informal power structure in the organization's environment.

3. People will take a greater interest in those issues they see directly affecting them. They will be more vigilant in what occurs with such issues and will become involved in the policy process if decisions, not to their liking, are made.

4. In small group decision-making, gaining consensus regarding policy issues is as much a matter of decision makers "talking their way to consensus" as it is of using a rational or scientific process to come to a decision.

5. Dissident policy issues which come from a minority interest perspective and lack the backing of an informal power structure can be readily set aside by policy makers as being emotionally driven, lacking in factual background, and not being representative of "community" values.

General Working Hypothesis: The extent to which the shared meaning of a decision-making group will influence the policy decisions of individuals in the group depends upon such factors as: the strength of the originally held views on an issue, the degree of ambiguity faced, and the extent to which she/he is influenced by political behavior. Knowledge base may prove to be a secondary influence here.

## Theme #4: Variations of power and influence amongst individuals and groups are associated with differences in access to, and control of, resources.

It is of value to review the topic of power in policy making from the perspective of who possesses the greatest amount of resources. Dahl (1984) used the term "political resources" in his study of local governance. Political resources were defined as knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and educational level. He went on to explain that though all citizens have the option of taking part in political behavior, all will not have access to the same resources. Inequities arise. Individuals and groups may choose to reduce these inequities in several ways. They may decide to come together and pool resources thus enhancing their individual power base. They may align themselves

with powerful "insiders" who will lobby on their behalf. Effective use of political rhetoric, and timely use of argumentation regarding issue selection will also reduce power inequities. Those lacking power may choose to work cooperatively with selected power holders hoping to gradually "co-opt" them into being more amenable to demands of the powerless. In such situations however, it must be expected that the power holders will also seek to "co-opt" those in opposition or those not yet committed to their plans. They work to enlarge their "circle" of consensus. With more resources at their disposal, both financial and political, the power elite can be more effective in co-opting others to their way of viewing an issue or defining a problem. As Gaventa (1980) found in his research, "Power serves to maintain the prevailing order of inequality through its established control and through its ability for breeding consensus" (p. 82). Some of the less powerful stakeholders may prevail against such inequities and still take part in the policy process but others, feeling their vulnerability more acutely, may decide not to take part. The result is that political behavior in an organization, and between the organization and its environment, comes about because of the interplay between unequal power structures and their competing needs. These interactions, non actions, and exchanges are evident in public education and affect policy formulation.

The Beaton Board of Education drew upon a variety of political resources in order to influence and affect policy matters. The Board developed valuable contacts and working relationships with government officials in order to diminish the inequities in its power status with the government. The Board strengthened its ties to neighbouring school districts as a means of enhancing school jurisdiction power. It utilized organizational structures such as Parent Councils, the Municipal Council, and School

Board Meetings to speak to those issues it felt were most important. The Board controlled the information sent out to parents through these same structures. By operating from a formal power base, and by using both formal and informal meeting venues, the Board of Education was able to access and control a considerable amount of political resources.

Other participants affected by educational policies were less effective in marshalling political resources. Paren      were divided because of differing levels of concern with the various issues under discussion by the Board. For example, some parents centered their attention on programming issues, others spoke about bussing costs, while still others were concerned with their future role in decision making at the school level. The out-of-district parents seemed more united yet their organization and interventionist activities were not effectively managed. The business community of Beaton had an effective resource base in the District Chamber of Commerce, but their attention remained on issues other than those of schooling for too long a period of time. Their poor sense of timing in finally turning their attention to matters of educational services, worked against them. Therefore, it might be said that for participants in the informal power structures, there are greater difficulties in both accessing political resources and in coordinating them to be effective. For participants in informal power structures it is essential to remain "connected" to what is happening in and around an organization if influence is to be applied at the most appropriate time. That is, when important issue decisions are happening.

The specific working hypotheses taken from the discussion above are as follows:

1. Public officials have access to a wide range of political resources because of where they are situated in the formal power hierarchy and because of their informal political networks which add a supportive dimension to their activities. Participants who are outside the organization's hierarchy and not part of a power structure, will have less access to necessary political resources and will have greater difficulty in using the resources available to them in an effective manner.

2. Participants who are not part of the formal power hierarchy may choose to combine their resources with other participants in order to form an influential coalition. Such action calls for effective organizational skills, adept timing with regard to actions taken, and mobilization of sanctions that might be used against the formal power elite.

3. There will always be individuals or groups in an organization, or associated with it, that do not know how to mobilize their resources, or choose not to do so, and therefore will not be represented in the policy process.

General Working Hypothesis: Neither the representative aspect of democracy, (as seen in elected school boards), nor the concept of pluralism, (as depicted by interest group activity), can ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders in matters of local school governance. On the contrary, when these activities are controlled by the power holders, it may result in diminished opportunities for meaningful participation of minorities and weaken the chances for incorporation of minority views into policy.

Theme #5: District policies are affected by decisions made outside the authority of

the Board of Education.

The process of policy making in the public sector is affected by forces in the

environment. There are many overlapping policy-making venues and a variety of

participants involved. Such factors combine to give policy formulation a quixotic

appearance. Much as it may have this appearance, policy making is not a random activity.

There are discernible patterns of activity found in the interactions between the people in

both the organization and in its environment. Information is exchanged, alliances made,

and verbal commitments given. The problem is that some of this appears on public record

and some does not. Kimbrough (1964) described the latter phenomena as the "hidden

influences" of political activity. Gaventa (1980) said it was accomplished by the "hidden

faces" of power.

In matters of provincial policy setting, Beaton's Board of Education had the role

of "middle managers" rather than "directors" of the company. That is, the Board's main

influence was in helping to focus attention on problems and set out and evaluate

alternative solutions for them, rather than setting the course for overall policy direction.

The Board's governance held the greatest sway in matters of school-site policy, though

even here (for example the modernization of facilities) it was the government who

approved or delayed projects as it saw fit.

The following working hypotheses arise from the discussion related to Theme #5

and support the general working hypothesis:

1. Since the responsibility for education in Canada is in the hands of provincial

governments, it is this level of governance that has the power to define the crucial policy-

making parameters that operate in an educational system. Within these parameters power

is granted to the lower echelon but it is discretionary power and subject to change.

2. Though the various processes related to policy making may seem fragmented

and disjointed, in reality, the core of policy formulation is very patterned and has, at its

centre, a few select participants from the organization or associated with it.

General Working Hypothesis: From a theoretical perspective this study reinforces

those writings that speak to many participants having a role in the policy-making

processes. The study indicates that in an open systems setting, forces outside an

organization affect the organization's policy formulation process in significant ways. It

also adds to those writings that speak to the importance of understanding the role of

"hidden influences" on the process of policy formulation. This initial control tends to

ensure that a policy is developed in the direction of predetermined goals.

The previous five conceptual themes were identified at the onset of the study. The

sixth theme was identified as the study unfolded.

Additional Theme: In periods of organizational turmoil and change, the policy

activities of an organization will differ in significant ways from those activities that occur

in periods of organizational calm.

Organizations may be characterized as having the same "life cycle" as do the

people that comprise them. That is, organizations experience both periods of operational

calm or stability as well as periods marked by change and turmoil. During periods of

stability, goals and objectives are pursued in a relatively uninterrupted fashion. The

existing organizational plans may be followed with adjustments being made to them rather

than noticeable changes. The status quo is maintained. If changes are made the new goals tend to evolve from previously established goals resulting in a gradual or incremental growth pattern for the organization. Changes occur but they are in keeping with a familiar "vision." Any proposed changes are also investigated within an extended time frame and thus give organizational members and associates time to absorb the new ideas and alter or refashion them.

When the organization enters a period of accelerated change the level of uncertainty and insecurity experienced by organizational members rises dramatically. At such times the very goals of the organization come under scrutiny. Sometimes the turmoil is a result of changes originating from within the organization and sometimes disruption is caused by unexpected changes in its environment that directly affect organizational behavior. Regardless of the source, decision-making patterns in the organization do alter. This is especially evident in decision-making related to policy problems and issues.

The study of Beaton's Board of Education began during a time when there was stability in the school district. Though the district was experiencing financial challenges, the decision-making pattern of the school board was one of incremental, rationally-based problem solving. Board members were able to have a continual dialogue with various stakeholders regarding policy matters. They cultivated important networks with government officials. There was also time to plan carefully a viability study in order to gather necessary information upon which to base a final decision regarding the district's future. An established system of communication linkages with stakeholders was strengthened to ensure an exchange of ideas and information would take place. Individual Board members freely expressed opinions on issues under discussion but made it clear that

in the end, it would be the Board as a unified body, that would make the decision. A reasonable time for reflecting upon the gathered information and taking part in public debates was planned for. Since no unanticipated pressures were operating, the meetings and interactions between the Board and stakeholders gave little indication of politicized activity, that is no unexpected demands were made on either side. Individual r  atees openly declared any contacts made with members of the informal power structure. Jseful information gained from such contacts was shared with the Board.

When the Beaton School District was faced with rapid and unexpected changes brought about by the provincial government, both the Board's decision-making patterns and that of individual Board members did change. Board activity was characterized more by Cohen, March and Olson's (1972) garbage car model of organizational choice than that of rational or incremental decision-making behavior. For example, rather than conducting new studies to provide much needed information, a previous study was quickly updated. Protracted investigations into alternative solutions were staid. Government directives were questioned less often and followed more readily. Threatened sanctions by the government were taken seriously based on the government's actions in other areas of public services. Contacts between Board members and other stakeholders were spoken of less frequently as was the outcomes of such contacts.

Individual trustee decision-making patterns altered as well. There was a greater reliance on, and use of, information garnered in the past even though previously some of this information might have been judged as unclear and unreliable. This was the case with many of the government communications received by the Board. Yet, some Board members, when faced with the uncertainties of the many changes to local school

governance, repeatedly pointed to government promises as evidence that the District would be well served once the turmoil was over. For example, such statements as the following were made by these Board members: "The government promised we'd have good representation" and "They [government] said if there was a need for a new school, one would be built." When policy issues were discussed Trustees were less open to considering new arguments or a new point of view. Rather, individual Trustees "retrenched" to positions that reflected personally held values and beliefs. Trustees also felt is was important to support the Board's "consensus" stance as presented by the Chair. For some stakeholders this created a perception that Board members were simply going through the motion of listening. As one parent stated, "From this handout, it looks as if you have already made up your mind." New information did not sway Trustees. For example, the facts and figures on the economic impact of the out-of-district stakeholders was seen as not relevant and was "rationalized off" the discussion agenda. Individual Board members were also more obviously swayed by the arguments of the "majority" on the Board. As one Trustee noted, "I've seen some [Trustees] change their mind in a matter of minutes." Of significance was the observer's sense that behind the scene a great deal of issue filtration was taking place, yet publicly, there was little evidence to support the claim.

The specific working hypotheses gleaned from this theme and the accompanying general working hypothesis are as follows:

1. During periods of organizational calm the policy-making processes tend to go forward in a more open and inclusive manner.

2. When the organization is in the midst of great change some policy-making processes are circumvented or become less important.

3. During periods of organizational turmoil, as occurs during times of great change, politicized behavior increases both in the organization and its environment.

4. As the organization reacts to rapid changes the informal power elite will seek to exert pressure on the decision makers in the organization to ensure the changes being made will be of benefit to the informal elite.

5. The organization's formal power elite find it more difficult to maintain control and chart their desired course of action when there are significant changes impacting the organization. This is especially so if the impetus for the changes originates outside the organization.

General Working Hypothesis: Interest group activity and lobbying efforts have a greater chance of affecting the policy direction of an organization if such efforts are brought into play during periods of organization stability and calm since this is the time that decision makers are most open to the influence of information and argumentation. During times of organizational turmoil, policy decision makers are more likely to take part in, and be affected by, politicized behavior. Such behavior (for example, suspension of rational decision-making processes, greater deference to central authority, individual values posturing) tends to become exclusive in nature rather than inclusive.

## Conclusions

The conclusions presented in this section focus on what this research can add in conceptual unders⁺  dings to the study of policy making. Specifically, the concluding remarks address the followir.g: what policy making means; who becomes involved in policy making; what form does this involvement take; and the factors that significantly affect the various policy processes. The conclusions offered herein are presented in a manner that connects them to s·  ·ve theories and postulations first presented in the study's literature re·¨ ·w. Each c    usion is meant to build upon, and integrate, the preceding conclusion.

The first conclusion that is drawn from this study's examination of policy development, and one that matches that of scholarly works in this area, is that policy making is not one definable activity, but rather, is comprised of a number of interrelated processes. Kingdon (1984) identified four processes in public policy making (setting of the agenda; specification of alternatives; authoritative choice among alternatives; implementation of the decision). Others writers, when presenting their definitions of policy, also made reference to policy as a set of processes, though the number of processes and their labelling may have differed ˏBaumgartner and Jones, 1993; Dunn, 1981). The significance of this depiction of policy making is, first, that it recognizes a policy item must enter a number of organizational settings and be dealt with by a number of individuals and groups, and second, that decision-making activities are the mainstay of these processes. In addition, activities of bargaining, consensus building, political behavior and the effective use of language and symbolic representations are engaged in order to control or influence organizational decision making pertaining to allocation of

values and thereby allocation of scarce resources (Almond & Powell, 1978; Scribner & Englert, 1977). Because of the complexity of this "pathway" to final policy status, many potential policy items do not complete the entire journey.

A second conclusion offered is that whoever controls the initial stage of policy making, that is, whoever controls the decisions regarding problem definition and issue recognition, is in the most advantageous position to influence what occurs in the subsequent policy processes. Though someone else may draw attention to a particular need (for example by mobilizing public opinion regarding it), the power to shape the eventual policy rests with those who are able to first define the problem. By so doing, they are able to discount certain solution alternatives and delimit the type of issues that might be discussed. This type of control calls for a careful management of information, effective use of language and rhetoric in order to create the necessary perceptions, and accessibility to substantive resources (Baldridge, 1971; Campbell, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979; Rochefort & Cobb, 1993).

A third conclusion is that there can be found in each policy process an "ebb and flow" of policy activities, and it is within these activities that the success of policy issue advocacy lies. Such activities are undertaken by a variety of individuals and groups in the organization or connected to it. The participants who control these centres of policy activity come from both the formal power structure in the organization and the informal power structure associated with it. Control comes from mandated power or the cultivated power of influence. Burbules (1986) portrayed power as a commodity. He wrote that it was a commodity shared between people with organizational status. More clearly stated for purposes of this study, power is a commodity shared among people who are members

of "governing elites" operating in both the formal and informal structures of the organization. The elites tend to drive the policy activities previously mentioned. The power elite controls, in the case of the formal power elite (for example, government control), and influences, in the case of the informal power elite (for example, the business sector) the "ebb and flow" of policy activities and thereby the decisions made relevant to policy formulation and development.

A fourth conclusion draws attention to the concept of political behavior in policy development. If power is seen as a commodity, it is a commodity that can be gained and lost. Herein lies the necessity of political behavior. Though the formal power elite has a mandated power base, this mandate may be withdrawn under certain circumstances. First, it is usually given for a designated period of time (as in an election or an appointment) and second, it must be maintained and enhanced to be useful to those who hold it (as in building coalitions, shaping public opinion, and holding to stated promises). In order to stay in public positions of power for the full term, and into the future, effective political behavior is seen as necessary. It should also be noted that the attentive public does not engage in any substantive political behavior until decisions being made by the organization's leadership are seen as not in keeping with the public's perceived best interest. Then political behavior is engaged. It takes the form of pressure group mobilization and active lobbying efforts. The attentive public's strength lies in its ability to apply electoral sanctions and public censorship. A third element in examining political behavior relates to the informal power elite of an organization. The informal power elite also relies on political behavior to acquire and keep its informal power base. This elite's effectiveness rests with the degree to which it can influence the decision making of those

with mandated power. The informal elite's "political" strength is derived from its ability to provide resources to the organization. Therefore, in the realm of public policy making, there exists a variety of participants who engage in political activity. This activity is not undertaken by all participants, at all times, but rather, when policy-making circumstances warrant. For others, political activity is the basis of their existence. The underlying aim of this activity is to alter the values and beliefs upon which decisions are being made. In all cases, the purpose of this activity is to gain control of, or influence as directly as possible, these decisions.

A fifth conclusion pertains to the manner by which the meaning of a policy is shaped in public policy making. The following statement illustrates the intent of this conclusion. "Policy problems and issues are not simply givens nor are they matters of the facts of a situation, rather, they are matters of interpretation and social definition" (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993, p. 56). The reality of a policy comes about through the interactions of individuals and groups as they seek to define their needs. Issue debates are characterized by activities concerned with both perception manipulation and argumentation. Discussions of issues centre on participants clarifying what must be considered in order for changes to take place. Such activity calls for a declaration and prioritizing of values. In essence this means participants explain their views of reality and present interpretations of how a circumstance should be improved in light of these. This "sets the stage" for participants with one view of reality to try and alter the view of opposing participants. Persuasion here, in the form of debate and argumentation, is most effective if it appeals directly to the emotional rather than the rational thinking of the opponent. The reasoning is that such an appeal will more readily alter values and beliefs.

Further, policy definitions and interpretations are based on personally held values and beliefs which have been shaped by the social norms and expectations in which participants function. It is not so much the "expert" knowledge that will ultimately influence public policy formulation, but rather the "in use" knowledge that accumulates as people live, work, and socialize in a community. Coming from this point of view it can be concluded that public policy making is a social activity marked by the creation of knowledge and understanding derived through social interactions. This makes the prioritizing of public policy issues a volatile and uncertain activity (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993).

The sixth conclusion deals with how the sequence and the intensity of policy activities may vary from those seen during times of organizational calm to what occurs during periods of turmoil and change. From the study of Beaton it was noted that certain decision-making behaviors can be identified during both times of calm and times of change. For example, the following were noted in both circumstances: problem recognition, issue discussion; stakeholder input, and the collection and communication of pertinent information. Though similar events related to policy making are found during both periods of organizational calm and organizational turmoil, there are differences in how these events unfold. These differences relate to the degree of openness and inclusiveness in the decision-making process, the information base used to make decisions, and the intensity of internal and external pressures exerted on decision makers. Time becomes an important factor as well. Thus, during periods of organizational turmoil, these mitigating circumstances result in policy making that is more likely to be based on individual values and beliefs and previously validated information. As a result, existing problem solutions are also more readily accepted by decision makers who become

reluctant to expend the necessary time and energy in searching out alternative solutions. Because of increased pressures on decision makers during chaotic times, they tend to draw together seeking the strength and security of their group. In so doing, individual decision makers become more susceptible to patterns of "group think" and leadership demands for group solidarity.

The final conclusion relates to democratic activity and how it applies to public policy making. In essence, political behavior in policy making has, as its base, the goal of excluding certain elements in a decision-making arena in order to elevate other elements more favourably disposed to a desired policy action. Control over decisions made is gained by elevating what some participants say and devaluing the opinions of others (Locke, 1974). This often deflects certain issue clusters while promoting others. In an authoritarian structure this is easily accomplished because little room is given for an opposition to organize itself. In a democratically oriented organization the premise is that much as there may be a strong, authoritarian or bureaucratic influence on the operations of the organization, there must still exist some countervailing checks and balances. To maintain this balance, elements of both representative and participatory democracy work together. Interest group activity is less and less validated by the power elite who portrayed such activity as not representative of the general public. The actions of lobby groups, also validated in the past as necessary to democratic interaction, are now often viewed as obstructionist and too narrow in focus. If lobbying efforts occur they tend to be recognized selectively and funded selectively by the power elite. For example, the provincial government supported the Provincial Home and School Association in the Association's efforts to show that school boards were no longer acting in a manner that

allowed for meaningful parental involvement in decision making. In connection with this, the formal power elite, especially that of an elected government, works to build the perception that it alone can decide upon and act for the common good. Such attitudes and activities bring to bear increased pressures on the democratic process in policy making with conflicting expectations placed on both representative and participatory elements of democracy. In the past, activities related to participatory democracy were seen as offering the necessary checks and balances to the elected or appointed representative elements in an organization. It has been the view of scholars in this area that the strength of a democracy itself is in its plurality of views and countervailing actions (Berry, 1989; Galbraith, 1992; Kimbrough, 1964; Locke, 1974). The conclusion presented is that those who are part of the representative element of the organization are able to subvert the role of participatory democratic activity in order to ensure support for the elite's decisions. They do this, rather than include the necessary counter arguments to such decisions on its policy agenda.

# CHAPTER IX

## RESEARCHER VIEWS AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The final chapter is included in order to present a more personalized view of the study's interpretations. Several aspects of the study are re-examined and discussed, a personal reflection shared, and a suggestion given for further research that might be useful in advancing the knowledge base regarding public policy making.

### The Findings: Researcher's Perspective

In this section of the chapter, I would like to revisit those findings in the study that continue to raise a number of questions for me as researcher. My purpose in doing so is to discuss the more puzzling aspects of some activities described in the study, what might be learned from them, and what new questions they might lead us to ask and investigate.

#### Controlling the Policy Agenda

In reviewing the study, the question to be asked is whether school boards, working under politically mandated authority as they do, retain the ability to control their own policy agenda setting. In the end, must they not accept that it is the central government that sets the policy agenda because it is there that ultimate power, authority and accountability reside. Should local school boards, given their role as sub-units, be content to be administrators of policy and not policy directors?

School boards are subject to the vagaries of political masters and policy agenda setting is directly subject to the ideology of the government in power, an ideology that may change even if the party in power remains the same. Thus, the central government is in an enviable position because through its intervention it is able to either maintain the status quo or to instigate change in policy matters. The extent of government intervention can be found to vary significantly depending upon the degree of stability or reform the government is willing to foster. If it suits the government's agenda to maintain a "status quo" in a particular area, the government will be more likely to invite and create situations where its representatives and stakeholders have opportunities to work collaboratively. At such time it is more likely to work with its stakeholders to define a problem and base it on a variety of perspectives. It will also be more willing at such times to engage in projects with stakeholders that search out information and recognize a knowledge base needed for future decision making.

But, if the government wishes to significantly change public policy direction, it adopts a different strategy. The government will ensure that its ideological stance and policy direction is clearly understood by its representatives. Previously, these representatives may have worked collaboratively with stakeholders, but, during periods of forced change such working relationships alter. Government becomes more directive. It is less likely to ask for input but rather, begins to "test" a number of options it wishes to use. At such times, government representatives work to ensure that stakeholders have a "given" understanding of the problem, a "given" understanding of alternatives available, and a "given" understanding of how much they can and cannot do to alter these "givens." Government begins to take control of the flow of information between itself and

stakeholders. It deliberately "shapes" perceptions through manipulation of language. Often information is provided sporadically and in an incomplete form. Sometimes information is presented in contradictory terms; one communiqué may override another. Some stakeholders may receive information while other do not. Such deliberate "disorientation" efforts benefit the government during times of change. Stakeholder issues can be deflected. Solidarity amongst stakeholders can be weakened. Groups draw inward and become more self protective and more insular. This discourages the formation of effective coalitions. There is a growing sense of insecurity among stakeholders and with this insecurity comes a reluctance to question the central government's purpose and activities. The result is an effective way to "filter" policy issues, control policy participants, and to direct policy agendas.

And finally, during times of reform the government will remind its stakeholders that it has the ultimate power to force change. This is done in both positive and negative forms. It may do so through incentives to encourage stakeholders to come "on line" with the changes quickly. Additional dollars may be offered, additional decision-making power promised, or special consideration in the future set in place. In the later stages of reform the government may present an array of sanctions to ensure that the remaining "delinquents" are brought into line.

## The Strength of the Subsystem

Given the argument presented above, can it be said that local school boards have the power to set policy? If not power, then how much influence can they exert on the process of agenda setting? To what extent are educational leaders at the local school

jurisdiction level able to lead in matters of policy formulation? One of the interesting aspects of the study of Beaton relates to how the Beaton Board viewed its part in influencing government policy action. The Board felt it had indeed made a significant contribution to directing policy formulation. After all, it had worked with government officials over a period of three years, comparing and sharing ideas and searching for answers to the District's financial problems. School Board views were clearly articulated over this period of time. It had also learned much about the government's views. This particular role of "influencer" in government agenda setting was explored by Kingdon (1984) in his research. He wrote about the importance of "the gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among the specialists in a given area" and how this process affected the shaping of policy proposals (p. 18). Beaton's Board chair and its superintendent spoke about their part in such "shaping." It was their perception they were indeed prime "influencers" regarding the government's policy agenda. Perhaps in situations where the governing units are not equal in power and authority, this type of influence over policy is a significant method of control and one needed by the partner with less power. However, as a researcher having watched events unfold, I cannot help but speculate that in such situations mutual influencing behaviors might very readily meld into a covert manipulation of the weaker partner by the stronger. The "perception" that one is exerting influence may not be so in "reality" and that as often as such influence will prove to be beneficial to the weaker partner, it will as many times prove to be detrimental. In such circumstances, what roles do school boards have?

Scholars have focussed some attention on issues associated with this question. Literature does exist showing considerable debate as to whether expert communities, such as school boards, can remain in control of their policy agendas (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Berry, 1989; George & Miller, 1994; Sabatier, 1986). Some observations taken from the literature are as follows. First, subsystems operating today are far less insulated against external forces, both political and economic, then ever before. This because political and economic activity of the 1990s is complex and high interconnected making self chosen isolation a luxury of the past. Second, the ability of subsystems to gain and maintain a tightly held consensus on policy issues is equally as difficult to realize. The public has enthusiastically embraced the concept of participatory democracy. With the accompanying increase in special interest group activity and lobbying efforts, conflicts over problem definitions and issue identification have increased. Third, as long as provincial economies continue to struggle with the recurring forces of recession, resource constraints will lead to diminished funding to local school authorities. This along with the recent moves to centralized educational governance, will leave school boards with a significantly weakened role as policy decision makers. Further, business interests will continue to be reflected, in increasing measure, on the government's policy agenda as much in education as in other areas of public services. And finally, some of the literature on the changing role of local governance refers to what might be termed "empowering the consumer" movement governments of the 1990s are pursuing. By trying to give as much control as possible to the parents, and by listening to the business sector related to economic needs, the roles and responsibilities of the remaining partners in education are

often unclear. The cumulative affect of the above stated factors make school board

governance a problematic and unpredictable activity, as was found by Beaton's Trustees.

Though policy literature may help explain the current domination of subsystems, it

offers somewhat less in useful insights regarding what such subsystems might do to alter

their positions. This returns me to the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter.

How much control over the policy agenda should school boards expect to have? Should

they be content to be administrators of policy, which in essence would make them "non

participants" in the broader decision-making arena. On the other hand, to be accountable

to the public but not to have any measure of authority in financial matters is an unenviable

position to find oneself. It is here that Beaton's story, if examined from the standpoint of

organizational survival in the face of change, does offer some insights. As an

organization, Beaton engaged in a variety of activities in order to fulfill its mandate. It

established strong working relationships with political and non political partners. It was

effective in its efforts to influence friends and opponents. It followed a plan of policy

development that reflected stakeholder needs. When outside forces began to take control

of its policy agenda, the Board opted for short term losses for long term gains. Perhaps it

might be said that self government was not so much surrendered as it was set aside until

political "ideology" would once again reconsider the benefits of local governance.

## A Final Personal Reflection

There are many important issues that emanate from a study of this kind. In

drawing this study to a close, I am left with a profound feeling that there is one point of

inquiry that begs further considered thought or at least a deliberate "earmarking" for more in-depth questioning. This is related to the problematic role of leadership--leadership in public education--especially at the school district level. The question I am asking is, "How well do educational leaders really know those they seek to lead and represent?"

I come to this question having stepped back and reflected upon the findings and data of this study in a more general sense--very much as that which occurs when one is directed to find, "What is wrong with this picture?" In so doing I noted a number of interesting and significant discrepancies. For example, during the regional meetings between Alberta Education and educational leaders from public school jurisdiction, many of the district representatives expressed the view that kindergarten could be forfeited as an effective cost-cutting measure. Subsequently, when the provincial government reduced kindergarten expenditures by fifty percent, there ensued wide-spread public protest against the downgrading of this portion of schooling for children. Did those district leaders, who first voiced this option, not realize how parents and the general public really felt about such a move? How "in touch" with their stakeholders were they? At these same regional meetings with the government, a significant number of district representatives felt that the amalgamation of smaller school districts into larger units was an acceptable and necessary move in order to maintain educational viability for everyone. The Beaton Board of Education expressed great pride at being one of the leading districts to force the government into such a move. Yet, once the government's target for regionalization was finalized--that is, partnerships approved by the Minister of Education--a growing number of lawsuits against the government (brought forward by districts not wishing to be amalgamated) began to appear. Did the educational leaders who represented these

districts not realize what their call for equity funding and regionalization might entail? From what knowledge base were they functioning? How useful is this type of educational leadership in the long term if the reform or restructuring of public education is to be done by more than politicians and the upper-level bureaucrats?

In an article on organizations as theater (Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff, 1991), the authors explored the roles of managers, leaders and entrepreneurs. As an introductory comment they wrote, "Leaders are in, managers are out, entrepreneurs are waiting in the corridor" (p. 529). Leaders were depicted as those who sought to control destiny, managers established order and coordination, while entrepreneurs worked to create new worlds. Which would best describe leadership at the school district level? Perhaps the more fruitful question should be which of these should educators strive to be?

In public education the concept of effective leadership is often embodied in the image of the strong, charismatic person who drives workers on to greater success due to her/his knowledge and vision. Such a depiction is inadequate, perhaps unrealistic. Even in the business world this archetypal leader may be more myth than reality. As Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff (1991) pointed out, "It is easier to believe that Lee Iacocca single-handedly saved Chrysler from bankruptcy than to accept the real story: a large team of people with diverse backgrounds and interests joined together to rescue the ailing company" (p. 530). Perhaps a more realistic and a more useful depiction of leadership is that leaders serve as symbols of what the organization stands for and what the organization wants to be. If leaders are to do this effectively they must ensure their symbolic representation is as "true" as possible. This means leaders must not only know their stakeholders but they must also work with them to create and recreate organizational

meaning and purpose. Only then can leaders both motivate and lead in what has been described as "growing" organizations. This, in turn, calls for what is termed, effective discourse strategy (Knights & Morgan, 1991).

In the view of Knights and Morgan, discourse strategy examines "power/knowledge relations that were written, spoken, communicated and thus embedded in the social practices of the organization" (p. 253). These were seen as important because such elements conditioned the way people related to what occurred around them. The type of discourse strategy employed by leaders was therefore significant because it is through it that leaders and stakeholders come to know each other. It is through effective discourse strategies that organizational problems are defined, solutions found, and further organizational advancement and change encouraged. Knowledge then, becomes something that is jointly created, shared, and equally understood. In such discourse, power is no longer something that is used to control and repress. Rather, it is used to engage those with and those without formal power to become part of a comprehensive discourse strategy. Power becomes associated with choice and change rather than control and dependency and it is through such use of power by leaders that organizations grow. This is leadership for change. This begins to describe the type of leadership needed for true educational reform, or what Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff (1991) called the "creation of new worlds."

How effective are present educational leaders? Perhaps for the present they are adequate but for the future they may be woefully inadequate. In the introductory comments in this thesis I noted that with dwindling resources educational leaders were forced to make difficult choices. Can it be said that educational leaders are making too

many choices that belong in the realm of managers, very few that are in the realm of

leaders, and none that reflect an entrepreneurial spirit? To be effective and have efficacy

educational leaders need to re-establish their ties with the people they wish to lead and say

they represent. They must take notice when parents make such statements as, "I don't

feel very well served by my school board" (Panzeri, 1994). They must take notice when

critics say that meaningful change in education is too often slow in coming about (Tanner,

1994). If they do take notice, perhaps then educational leaders will be able to help create

a vision for public education reform that is inclusive enough, and bold enough, to hold its

own against re-structuring initiatives that are heavily based in business ideology and too

easily driven by political considerations alone.


## For Further Study

One of the challen₃     ꞏ ꞏ .esearchers embarking on studies that seek to interpret

the role of participants in policy formulation is to identify the "hidden" power holders and

their interactions with organizational decision makers. Even in the "openness" of today's

public organizations there is still significant "behind the scene" activity that is suspected by

the researcher, but not readily accessed. The study of Beaton School Board is an example

of this. What affect did the leadership skills of the Superintendent actually have on

problem definition and issue selection? Was he simply an information source? One

Trustee referred to the fact that fellow Trustees could "change their minds in a matter of

minutes." Who was responsible for swaying opinion in these situations?

Thus, with respect to research methodology it would be of value to conduct a "real-time" study where the researcher became a participant-observer in a setting where, she/he knew or got to know the organizational decision-making paths, was able to become totally integrated into the organization, and had the cooperation of key decision makers. Such an approach would allow for a closer examination of the "hidden" participants, the "invisible" policy-making venues, and the politically based relationships in an organization and its community. It is important that further study be done to uncover these elements in policy formulation in order to provide a more inclusive picture of policy decision making at the crucial initial stage of the process.

# References

Alberta Education. (1985). Partners in education: Principles for a new school act. Edmonton: Author.

Alberta Education. (1987). Framework for a new school act: Highlights. Edmonton: Author.

Alberta Education. (1993, October). A record of Alberta Education's regional meeting with stakeholders in Westlock September 22-23, 1993 on education grant and capital plans. Edmonton: Author.

Alberta Education. (1993). Meeting the challenge: An education roundtable workbook. Edmonton: Author.

Alberta Education. (1994, March). Regional division boards. Edmonton: Author.

Alberta School Trustee Association. (1973). ASTA Handbook. Edmonton: Author.

Alberta School Trustees' Association. (1983). Role of the school trustee. Edmonton: Author.

Allan, E. C. (1985). Policy-making in a county: A study in school system governance. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Almond, G. A., & Powell, G. B. (1978). Comparative politics. Boston: Little Brown.

Altheide, D. L. (1985) Media power. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Arnez, N. L. (1981). The besieged school superintendent. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America.

Bachrach, P., & Baratz, M. S. (1970). Power and poverty: Theory and practice. London: Oxford University.

Baldridge, J. V. (1971). Power and conflict in the university: Research in the sociology of complex organization. New York: Wiley & Sons.

Banks, J. A. (1987). Ethnic diversity, the social responsibility of educators, and school reform. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge & responsibility. (pp. 59-78). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Bates, A. (Mar. 23, 1994). Cut superintendents first [Letter to the editor]. Calgary Herald, p. A8.

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (1993). Agendas and instability in American politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bell, R. (1985). The culture of policy deliberations. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Berg, B. L. (1989). Qualitative research methods for the social sciences. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bergen, J. J. (1980). Central and local control in the governance of education in the Province of Alberta. In E. D. Hodgson, J. J. Bergen, & R. C. Bryce (Eds.), The organization and administration of education in Canada. (pp. 34-47). Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Berlak, H. (1987). Literacy in a democracy: Our responsibility as educators and citizens. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge & responsibility. (pp. 113-124). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Berry, J. M. (1989). The interest group society ( 2nd ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Bill 19: School Amendment Act. (1994). Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

Bill 59: School Act. (1987). Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bogue, E. G. (1985). The enemies of leadership: Lessons for leaders in education. Bloomington, IN: PKD.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). Reframing organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Borg, W. R., & Gall, M. D. (1983). Education research: An introduction. (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

Bowers, C. A., Housego, I., & Dyke, D. (Eds.). (1970). Education and social policy: Local control of education. New York: Random House.

Brathwaite, F. (1988). The Alberta superintendent of schools: The qualities, competencies and skills required for effective educational leadership in a changing environment. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Walden University, Minneapolis, MI.

Brownhill, R., & Smart, P. (1989). Political education. New York: Routledge.

Brownlee, B. (1994). Reinventing government: Alberta blueprint. Spectrum, 15(1), 7.

Bryce, R. (1980). Educational decision-making. In E. D. Hodgson, J. J. Bergen, & R. C. Bryce (Eds.), The organization and administration of education in Canada. (pp. 229-241). Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Bryden, K. (1982). Public input into policy-making and administration: The present situation and some requirements for the future. Canadian Public Administration, 25(1), 81-107.

Burbules, N. C. (1986). A theory of power in education. Educational Theory, 36(2), 95-114.

Burch, H. A. (1991). The why's of social policy: Perspective on policy preferences. New York: Praeger.

Burgess, R. G. (Ed. ). (1989). The ethics of educational research. New York: Falmer.

Calgary Herald. (March 27, 1994). Equality in jeopardy, educator warns. Edmonton Journal, p. C3.

Calgary Herald. (March 27, 1994). Taking school to the streets. Edmonton Journal, p. C3.

Campbell, J. H., & Hepler, H. W. (1970). Dimensions in communication: Readings(2nd ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Campbell, R. F. (1978). A history of administrative thought Administrator's Notebook, 26(4), 1-4.

CBC Television News. (March 30, 1994). Charter schools. Special report. CBC: Edmonton.

Charon, J. M. (1985). Symbolic interactions: An introduction, an interpretation, an integration. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Child, J. (1977). Strategies of control and organizational behavior. In D. S. Pugh, & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 21-43). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Cistone, P. J. (1975). Understanding school boards. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.

Cobb, R. W., & Elder, C. D. (1983). Participation in American politics: The dynamics of agenda-building. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press

Codd, J. H., Hacher, R., & Nash, R. (Eds.). (1985). Political issues in New Zealand education. New Zealand: Dunmore.

Cohen, D. K. (1973). Politics and research. In E. R. House (Ed.), School evaluation: The politics and process. (pp. 97-124). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Cohen, M. D., March, J. D., & Olson, J. (1972). A garbage can model of organizational choice. Administrative Science Quarterly, 17(1), 319-336.

Coleman, P. (1973). The school trustee and the administration of education. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta.

Collins, C. P. (1958). The role of the provincially appointed superintendent of schools in larger units of administration in Canada. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Commission on Educational Planning (1972). A choice of futures. Edmonton, Alberta: Queen's Printer.

County Act. (1951). Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

Crockatt, J. (Legislative Bureau Chief). (Jan. 19, 1994). Tory 'change' to slash $1.3 billion. Edmonton Journal, p. A1.

Cunningham, F., Findlay, S., Kadar, M., Lennon, A., & Silva, E. (Eds.). (1988). Social movement / social change: The politics and practice of organizing. Toronto: Between The Lines.

Czarniawka-Joerges, B., & Wolff, R. (1991). Leaders on and off the organizational stage. Organization Studies, 12(4), 529-546.

Daft, R. L. (1989). Organization theory and design (3rd ed.). St. Paul, MN: West Publishing.

Dahl, R. A. (1961). Who governs?: Democracy and power in an American city. New Haven: Yale University.

Dahl, R. A. (1984). Modern political analysis. Englewood Cliffs, CA: Prentice Hall.

Das, S. (Mar. 21, 1994). Keynesian theory still the best road map for economic recovery. Edmonton Journal, p. A8.

de Sola Pool, I., Ableson, R. P., & Popkin, S. L. (1964). Candidates, issues, and strategies: A computer simulation of the 1960 presidential election. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T.

Dempster, L. (Calgary Herald Writer). (March 27, 1994). Pioneers in education. Edmonton Journal, p. C3.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). Interpretive interactionism. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Dewar, D., Todes, A., & Watson, V. (1986). Regional development and settlement policy: Premises and prospects. Boston: Allen and Unwin.

Dewey, J. (1972). The ethics of democracy. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms. (Original work published 1888).

Dobuzinskis, L. (1992). Modernist and postmodernist metaphors of the policy process: Control and stability vs. chaos and reflexive understanding. Policy Sciences, 25(4), 355-380.

Donagan, A. (1977). The theory of mortality. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Donges, G. S. (1982). Policymaking for the mentally handicapped. Aaldershot, NH: Gower.

Donnellon, A., Gray, B., & Bougon, M. G. (1986). Communication, meaning and organized action. Administrative Quarterly, 31(1), 43-55.

Douglas, R. (1993). Unfinished business. Random House: New Zealand

Dror, Y. (1983). Public policymaking reexamined. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Dunn, W. N. (1981). Public policy analysis. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Dye, T. R. (1978). Understanding public policy (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Eaman, R. A. (1987). The media society. Basic issues and controversies. Toronto: Butterworths.

Earn, B., & Towson, S. (1986). (Eds.). Readings in social psychology: Classic and Canadian contributions. Peterbourough, Ont.: Broadview.

Easton, D. (1979). A framework for political analysis. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Edelman, M. (1964). The symbolic uses of politics. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois.

Ellis, T., & Child, J. (1977). Placing stereotypes of the manager into perspective. In D. S. Pugh , & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 44-70). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Elmore, R. F. (1978). Complexity and control: What legislators and administrators can do about implementing public policy. Public Policy, 26(2), 185-228.

Elmore, R. F. (1983). Complexity and control: What legislators and administrators can do about implementing public policy. In L. S. Shulman , & G. Sykes (Eds.), Handbook of teaching and policy. (pp. 342-369). New York: Longman.

Ely, M. (1991). Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles. London: Falmer.

Erlandson, D. A. (1973). Evaluation and an administrators' autonomy. In E. R. House (Ed.), School evaluation: The politic and process. (pp. 20-26). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Evers, C. W., & Lakomski, G. (1991). Knowing educational administration: Contemporary methodological controversies in educational administration research. Oxford: Pergamon.

Ewanyshyn, E. L. (1986). Control over educational decisions. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Fennell, B. H. (1985). The determination of the goals of basic education for Alberta: A case study in political decision-making. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Firestone, W. A. (1987). Meaning in method: The rhetoric of quantitative and qualitative research. Educational Researcher, 16(7), 16-21.

Fisher, J. R. (1988). Print media coverage of educational policy making. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Fitz, J., Power, S., & Halpin, D. (1993). Opting for the grant-maintained status: A study of policymaking in education. Policy Studies, 14(1), 4-20.

Flower, D. (1994). Between the covers. ATA News, 28(11), 5.

Freedman, A. E., & Freedman, P. E. (1975). The psychology of political control. New York: St. Martin's.

Friedman, M. (1982). Capitalism and freedom. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Friedmann, J. (1979). The good society. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Galbraith, J. K. (1993). American capitalism: The concept of countervailing power. London: Transaction.

Gaventa, J. (1980). Power and powerlessness. Oxford: Clarendon.

Geen, A. G. (1986). Decision making and secondary education: A case study. Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press.

George, V., & Miller, S. (Eds.). (1994). Social policy towards 2000. London: Routledge.

Giacaione, R.A., & Rosenfeld P. (Eds.). (1991). Applied impression management. London: Sage.

Goar. C. (Mar. 21, 1994). Future looks bleak for students. Edmonton Journal, p. A8.

Goodlad, J. I. (1988). The national network for educational renewal: Past, present, future. (Report No. 7). Seattle: Washington University.

Goodlad, J. I. (1990). Teachers for our nation's schools. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gormley, W. T., & Peters, B. G. (1992). National styles of regulation: Child care in three countries. Policy Sciences, 25(4), 381-385.

Green, W. J. (1988). Role of the superintendent. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). Effective evaluation: Improving the usefullness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Guba, E. G., & Stufflebeam, D. L. (1970). Evaluation: The process of stimulating, aiding and abetting insightful action. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University.

Hahn, H., & Holland, R. W. (1976). American Government: Minority rights versus majority rule. New York: Wiley and Sons.

Hemphill, H. D. (1968). The structure of interaction at school board meetings. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Heslep, R. D. (1989). Education in democracy: Education's moral role in the democratic state. Ames, IA: Iowa University.

Hickson, D. J. (1977). A convergence in organizational theory. In D. S. Pugh, & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 3-13). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Hodgson, E. D. (1980). Control over local control. In E. D. Hodgson, J. J. Bergen, & R. C. Bryce (Eds.), The organization and administration of education in Canada. (pp. 245-248). Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Holsapple, C. W., & Moskowitz, H. (1980). A conceptual framework for studying complex decision processes. Policy Sciences, 12, 83-104.

Howe, K. R. (1988). Against the quantitative-qualitative incompatibility thesis or dogmas die hard. Educational Researcher, 10-16.

Hunter, F. (1953). Community power structure: A study of decision makers. North Carolina: University of North Carolina.

Iannaccone, L., & Lutz, F. W. (1970). Politics, power and policy: The governing of local school districts. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.

Inkson, J. H. K., Hickson, D.J., & Pugh, D.S. (1977). Administrative reduction of variance In organization and behavior: A comparative study. In D. S Pugh , & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 14-20). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Jackson, R. M., & Crawford, G. J. (1991, April). The superintendent and school improvement: Antecedents, actions and outcomes. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association Chicago. (underline title)

Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. Administrative Science Quarterly, 24, 602-611.

Johns, G. (1988). Organizational behavior: Understanding life at work (2nd ed.). Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Johnson, A. (Apr. 2, 1994). Government in or a fight over school Act amendments. Calgary Herald, p. A1.

Johnson, A. (Mar. 23, 1994). Future role of boards in doubt. Calgary Herald, p. B2.

Johnson, N. A. (1987). Perspectives: The pervasive, persuasive power of perceptions. The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 33(3), 206-228.

Jones, C. (1985). Patterns of social policy: An introduction to comparative analysis. London: Tavistock.

Jowett, G. S., & O'Donnell, V. (1992). Propaganda and persuasion. London: Sage.

Kelman, S. (1981). Regulating America, regulating Sweden: A comparative study of occupational safety and health policy. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Keynes, J. M. (1936). The general theory of employment, interest and money. New York: Brace.

Kimbrough, R. B. (1964). Political power and educational decision-making. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Knights, D., & Morgan, G. (1991). Corporate strategy, organizations, and subjectivity: A critique. Organization Studies, 12(2), 251-273.

Kinder, J. A. (1978). Decision making in public education. Austin, Texas: MESA.

Kingdon, J. W. (1984). Agendas, alternatives, and public policies. Boston: Little, Brown.

Klapper, J. T. (1961). The effects of mass communication. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Klein, R. (Address). (Jan. 18, 1994). Need for change is urgent. Edmonton Journal, p. A11.

Kowalski, K. (Mar. 7, 1994). Economic necessity, not politics, behind government's cuts [Letter to the editor]. Edmonton Journal, p. A6.

LaRocque, L., & Coleman, P. (1989). The politics of excellence: Trustee leadership and school district ethos. Paper presented to the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (pp. 1-30). San Francisco, CA.

Lasswell, H. D., & Kaplan, A (1969). Power and society: A framework for political inquiry. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lawrence, P., & Lorsch, J, (1989). The organization in its environment. In D. S. Pugh , & D. J. Hickson (Eds.), Writers on organizations. (4th ed.). (pp. 58-63). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. Review of educational research, 52(1), 31-60.

Levitt, R. (1980). Implementing public policy. London: Croom Helm.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lindblom, C. E. (1990). Inquiry and change: The troubled attempt to understand and shape society. New York: Yale University Press.

Lineberry, R. (1981). Government in America. Boston: Little, Brown.

Locke, M. (1974). Power and politics in the school system: A guidebook. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Lord, C. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 20, 1994). Innovation of charter schools enables new local autonomy. Edmonton Journal, p. A7.

Lortie, D. C. (1973). Rational decision making: Is it possible today? In E. R. House (Ed.), School evaluation: The politics and process. (pp. 11-19). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

Lundquist, L. (1988). Housing policy and tenures in Sweden: The quest for neutrality. Sidney: Avebury.

Lutz, F. W., & Iannaccone, L. (Eds.) (1978). Public participation in local school districts: The dissatisfaction theory of democracy. Toronto: D. C. Heath.

Lutz, F. W., & Iannaccone, L. (1969). Understanding educational organizations: A field study approach. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.

Mabbot, J. (1993). The role of community involvement. Policy Studies, 14(2), 27-35.

Mann, D. (1975). Policy decision-making in education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Mansfield, R., & Payne, R. L. (1977). Correlates of variance in perceptions of organizational climate. In D. S. Pugh , & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 134-159). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Martin, D. (Columnist). (Apr. 2, 1994). Calgary Herald, p. A3.

Martin, S. W. (1968). A political systems analysis of an urban school board. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

May, P. J. (1986). Politics and policy analysis. Political Science Quarterly, 101(1), 109-125.

Maynes, B. (1993). Educating urban poor children: Narrowing the gap between good intentions and policy making. The Canadian Administrator, 33(1), 1-12.

Maynes, W. G. (1990). The education of Edmonton's urban poor: A policy perspective. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

McConnell, R. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 19, 1994). Alberta's school boards lose power. Edmonton Journal, p. A7.

McConnell, R. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 20, 1994). Premier defends property tax grab. Edmonton Journal, p. A7.

McConnell, R. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 20, 1994). Superintendent sees end of board, job. Edmonton Journal, p. A7.

McConnell, R. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 25, 1994). B.C. experience makes teachers jittery over province's plan to collect school tax. Edmonton Journal, p. A8.

McConnell, R. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 25, 1994). Elitist education feared. Edmonton Journal, p. A8.

McConnell, R. (Staff Writer). (May 1, 1994). New Zealander warns of deficit-cut 'hoax'. Edmonton Journal, p. A5.

McDonnell, L. M., & Elmore, R. L. (1987). Getting the job done: Alternative policy instruments. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 9(2), 133-152.

McGrath, S. J. (1992). The pluralism of educational decision-making. Canadian Administrator, 31(6), 1-11.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1987). Learning from experience: Lessons from policy implementation. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 9(2), 171-178.

McLeod, G. T. (12976). Educational governance as theatre. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Merriam, S. B., & Simpson, E. D. (1984). A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults. Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger.

Microsoft Corporation. (1993). Microsoft Word 6.0. [Computer program]. Redman, WA: Author.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Millman, J., & Gowin, D. B. (1974). Appraising educational research: A case study approach. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Mintzberg, H. (1975). Impediments to the use of management information. Hamilton, Ontario: The Society of Industrial Accountants of Canada.

Mintzberg, H. (1979). The structuring of organizations: A synthesis of the research. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Mintzberg, H. (1983). Structure in fives: Designing effective organizations. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Molnar, A. (1987). The Emperor Has No Clothes. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge, & responsibility. (pp. 1-14). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Montgomerie, H. L. (1990). A prospective policy analysis of degree granting in Alberta community colleges. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Morgan, G. (1986). Images of organization. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Moysa, M. (Educational Writer). (Jan. 25, 1994). Premier's figures paint picture, school brass say. Edmonton Journal, p. A8.

Moysa, M. (Educational Writer). (Feb. 25, 1994). Education plan still too foggy, school officials say. Edmonton Journal, p. A7.

Moysa, M. (Educational Writer). (May 25, 1994). Appointed trustee's 'dictatorial' act incenses parents. Edmonton Journal, p. A9.

Moysa, M. (Educational Writer). (May 31, 1994). Special team looking for advice on how to manage school system. Edmonton Journal, p. A5.

Mullen, G. A. (1993). Superintendents predict the future of education: A modified delphi. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Musella, D. (1991). The changing role of the chief education officers in Canada. Paper presented to the Learned societies conference. (pp. 1-17). Kingston, Ontario.

Oakes, J. (1987). Tracking: Beliefs, practices, and consequences. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge , & responsibility. (pp. 15-30). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Osborne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1993). Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector. New York: Plume.

Panzeri, A. (Educational Writer). (Jan. 29, 1994). What's your school board done for you lately? Edmonton Journal, p. G1.

Panzeri, A. (Educational Writer). (June 1, 1994). MLAs told to curb parent councils' lout. Edmonton Journal, p. A10.

Pavlin, J. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 21, 1994). School boards losing autonomy, Mather says. Examiner, p. 1.

Pavlin, J. (Staff Writer). (Oct. 15, 1994). Parents want more pull with school board. Examiner, p. 27.

Payne, R. L., & Pheysey, D. (1977). Organization structure and sociometric nominations amongst line managers in three contrasted organizations. In D. S. Pugh , & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 87-112). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Payne, R. L., & Pheysey, D. (1977). Stern's organizational climate index: A reconceptualization and application to business organizations. In D. S. Pugh , & R. L. Payne (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 113-133). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Perrone, V. (1987). Promoting equity: the forgotten responsibility. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge , & responsibility. (pp. 125-134). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Personal Bibliographic Software Inc.(1988). Pro-Cite 1.4. [Computer program]. Ann Arbor, MI: Author

Pheysey, D. P., Payne, R. L., & Pugh, D. S. (1977). Influence of structure at organizational and group levels. In D. S. Pugh , & R. L Payne. (Eds.), Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. (pp. 71-86). Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Pressman, J. L., & Wildavsky, A. (1979). Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland(2nd ed). Berkeley, CA: University of California.

Probert, E. R. (1971). Shared decision-making in the high school. Unpublished masters thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Pross, A. P. (1986). Group politics and public policy. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Pugh, D. S., & Hickson, D. J. (1989). Writers on organizations.(4th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pugh, D. S., & Payne, R.L. (Eds.). (1977). Organizational behavior in its context: The Aston programme III. Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Rebore, R. W. (1984). A handbook for school board members. Englewood Cliffs, CA: Prentice-Hall.

Robinson, N., & Wood, M. (1987). Why school board members choose to seek or not seek re-election: A test of political efficacy and trust. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (pp. 1-18). Washington, D. C.

Rochfort, D. A., & Cobb, R. W. (1993). Problem definition, agenda access, and policy choice. Policy Studies Jm `    `i), 556-571.

Rourke, F. E. (Ed). (1965)           wer in national politics., Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Rourke, F. E. (198'                   nd public policy. Toronto: Little, Brown & Co.

Rowell, P. M. (198.                   tation of the Baccalaureate Program: A situational stu.           ,ial dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Ali

Sabatier, P. A., & Mazmanian, D. (1980). The implementation of public policy: A framework of analysis. Policy Studies Journal, 8(4), 538-560.

Sabatier, P. A. (1986). Top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation research: A critical analysis and suggested synthesis. Journal of Public Policy, 6(1), 21-48.

Salancik, G. R., & Pfeffer, J. (1974). The bases of power in organizational decision-making: The case of a university. The Administrative Science Quarterly, 19(4), 435-473.

Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. ANS, 8(3), 27-37.

Schein, E. H. (1985). Organizational culture and leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

School Act. (1976). Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

School Act. (1988).Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

School Act. (1994). Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

School Division Act. (1936). Edmonton: Queen's Printer.

Schuler, C. (Provincial Affairs Writer). (Jan. 19, 1994). Needy kids could loose kindergarten. Edmonton Journal, p. A1.

Schuler, C. (Staff Writer). (May 28, 1994). Keep elected school board trustees say. Edmonton Journal, p. B3.

Scribner, J. D., & Englert, R. M. (1977). The politics of education: An introduction. In J. D. Scribner (Ed. ), The politics of education. (pp. 1-29). Chicago: University of Chicago.

Selden, S. (1987). Confronting social attitudes in textbooks: The response and responsibility of today's educator. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge & responsibility. (pp. 31-46). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Shepard, C. R. (1964). Small groups: Some sociological perspectives. New York: Chandler.

Somjee, A. H. (1968). The political theory of John Dewey. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sroufe, G. E. (1977). Evaluation and politics. In J. D. Scribner (Ed.), The politics of education. (pp. 287-318). Chicago: University of Chicago.

Stevens, E., & Wood, G. H. (Eds.). (1987). Justice, ideology and education. New York: Random.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). Basics of qualitative research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Tanner, A. (Staff Writer). (Feb. 7, 1994). The American experience. Edmonton Journal, p. A1.

Taylor, W. H. (1980). The evolution of a policy-making system: A case in university governance. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Thom, D. J., & Klassen, D. (1986). Educational administration with conscience: Seeking the "Truth". McGill Journal of Education, 21(2), 125-139.

Thomas, D. (Staff Writer). (Jan. 20, 1994). Strathcona reeve backs education plan. Edmonton Journal, p. A7.

Tymko, J. L. (Guest Writer). (Feb. 5, 1994). Despite grass-roots talk, local school control would end. Edmonton Journal, p. A3.

Ulschak, F. L., Nathanson, L., & Gillan, P.G. (1981). Small group problem solving: An aid to organizational effectiveness. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Van Horn, C. E., & Van Meter, D. (1977). The implementation of intergovernment policy. In S. S. Nagel (Ed.), Policy studies review annual. (pp. 97-120). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London, Ontario: University of West Ontario.

Verba, S. (1961). Small groups and political behavior: A study of leadership. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.

Vierra, A., & Pollock, J. (1988). Reading educational research. Scotsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.

Wagner, T. (1987). Educating for excellence on an endangered planet. In A. Molnar (Ed.), Social issues and education: Challenge & responsibility. (pp. 101-112). Alexandria, VA: Association for supervision and curriculum development.

Walker, R. (1985). Doing research: A handbook for teachers. London: Methuen.

Webster's II new riverside university dictionary. (1984). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. Administrative Science Quarterly, 21(1), 1-19.

Weiss, C. H. (1992). Research should supplement, not supplant, lay inquiry. Educational Researcher, 21(7), 38-40.

Wolcott, H. F. (1973). The man in the principal's office: An ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Wolcott, H. F. (1982). Differing styles of on-site research, or, "If it isn't ethnography, what is it? Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science, 7(1 & 2), 154-169.

Wood, D. D. (1991). Faculty student and support staff participation in college governance: A study in the politics of organizations. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

APPENDICES

# APPENDIX I

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

At the beginning of the study, each potential interviewee was contacted. An explanation was given regarding the purpose of the study and the importance of the interviews. The format of the interviews was shared and an indication given of how the resulting data would be used. Confidentiality and anonymity was discussed.

Primary Questions:

1. What are the issues, concerns that the board is dealing with now?

2. How were they brought to the board's attention?

3. Why are they important?

4. What do the stakeholders say?   parents, staff, business community, public

5. What do you think is important?

6. Is there anything else you'd like to comment on?


Supplemental Questions:

1. What has happened to issue x mentioned last interview?

2. How has the board's focus changed from last interview time?

3. Where is the interest for that issue coming from?

4. Why do you think that concern is/isn't being discussed?

5. How has the latest government announcement affected board plans?

**APPENDIX II**

**REQUEST TO RESEARCH LETTER**

September 27, 1993

Name
Address

Dear Name;

As I indicated in our telephone conversation, I am presently attending the University of Alberta as a full time doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Educational Administration. I am busily working to ready myself for my study pertaining to educational policy.

Specifically, I am interested in how various issues and problems come to be recognized and discussed in a school district and to gain some insight into why some of these issues are carried forward and others are not. This is a fascinating topic as well as being important to educational administration. Though I have read much on it related to general public policy, little is available having to do with education.

In order to do this work, I need the help of those who are closest to the initial stages in policy discussions; this being the School Trustees and the Superintendent. If the trustees, and you, would be willing to speak with me, it would be most helpful. The time commitment would be in the form of two, one hour interviews with each participant. The first interview would occur during the October/November period and the second in February/March. Though I will use some general questions to initiate each discussion, the topics covered will remain the prerogative of the interviewee.

Please be assured that, as required by the University's ethical guidelines, confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly maintained. As well, when I write up my study, each participant will be given the opportunity to proof my interpretation of what he or she shared with me. There will also be no problem if someone is not able to follow through will both interviews. Any information will be most appreciated.

Thank you very much for considering my request. I know this is a further infringement on valuable time but I trust it would not be too onerous.

Yours sincerely,

Parnel Pierce

**APPENDIX III**

**REQUEST FOR VERIFICATION LETTER**

August, 1994

3315 - 136 A Ave.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5L 4B8

Name
Address
City, Province
Postal Code

Dear

First of all, thank you again for the time you spent with me. Without your cooperation I wouldn't have been able to do this study.

As promised, I am sending a draft copy of the chapter with the study's findings. In it I have used information from our interviews and information I collected through my board-meeting observations. To give my study the necessary credibility for standards of rigour in research, I need you to verify the data and how I used them.

It is a long chapter and I know you are busy. To save time might I suggest you scan the quotations, and then read more carefully the summation sections on pages 132, 143, and 155. As you read my interpretations please remember that in a "time-study" I can only use the actual information someone shares with me, I observe, or that I read. You may know that lots of other things were happening at that time, but unless someone told me about them, I couldn't include that as real data. However, if you feel there are obvious gaps that should be noted, share this in your feedback to me.

I am enclosing a response form for your use. Could you return it as soon as possible or contact me by phone and give me your feedback. If you have any questions call me at 455-3620. Many thanks for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Pamel Pierce

**APPENDIX IV**

**RETURN FORM FOR VERIFICATION**

Name:_____

1. I would like to respond in the following way:

   I'd like to give you feedback by telephone.
   Call me at _____.

   I would like to meet with you and discuss
   the study. Call me at _____.

   My comments are provided below.

2. My comments are as follows:

(Please return the form as soon as possible or phone me at 455-3620. Thank You)