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An Analysis of Attitudes and Beliefs About Public Education in Alberta

by

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ABSTRACT

Alberta's educational reforms of the past decade have been significant and far-reaching. At this time, it is crucial that we reflect upon and examine recent changes, and that we continue to explore ways in which education might be reshaped and revised to meet the needs of our children in a rapidly changing world. This study analyzes the current attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about public education - what it is, and what it should be - of a variety of educational stakeholders. Participants addressed a series of questions designed to encourage discussion and debate around a focus issue: "Why public education?" The findings of this study reveal that while there is a tremendous commitment to public education, there is also a desire for change. However, recent government mandated public education reforms appear to be narrow and short sighted. The debate must continue in order that alternative approaches to change be considered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis represents a significant learning event; it is the product of an intensive and multidimensional process which officially began when I started my Master of Arts Degree Program in September, 1997. It marks the completion of one phase, albeit important, in the larger journey of my life as an educator, a journey which commenced with my beginnings as a teacher.

Personal Experience

I started in the teaching profession as most do - enthusiastic, sincere, and ready to do a good job. Moreover, firmly beneath me was a philosophical foundation based on the ideal that children - all children - deserve an opportunity to learn and to succeed, not only as individuals, but as members of a larger community, in a society that values them, cares for them, and nurtures them. Grounded in this conviction I supported public education, its flaws included, because I truly believed that, in upholding the ideals of social justice and the common good, it was one of the few institutions of our time that stood to guard and champion the rights of all of our children. During the early years of my career, I saw my school as an accessible, safe, and positive place for my students, the youth of my community who represented the wide spectrum of our society - from the privileged and gifted to the needy and severely challenged. Because of this, I ardently supported public education.

About two-thirds of the way through my career, my journey led me to a crossroads, a point where I was compelled to reexamine my convictions and beliefs about public education and its purpose. It was Alberta in the mid-'90s, and the waves of educational reform were upon us. We began to see changes in our school and in our district that altered the way we understood education, the way we saw ourselves as educators, and the way we did things. More to the point, I became aware that my role as a teacher was changing significantly in the face of government cuts to the provincial education budget, the massive reorganization which ensued as the result of the amalgamation of my school division with another, and the implementation of site-based management at the school level.

Accountability and efficiency became our touchstones as we were reminded that our school had to be competitive and financially viable. Our division's expectations for site-based management caused administrative nightmares, the Alberta Education requirements for reporting were changing faster than we could keep up, funding was tied to our ability to account, and CEUs (Credit Enrollment Units) determined our financial condition. Programs were cut and, in some cases, class sizes increased significantly. We waited with anxiety to hear which of our colleagues would be transferred and who would find themselves without a job at the end of the semester or in the upcoming school year. As a curriculum leader and teacher-librarian, I was required to assume more administrative responsibilities, and I was obligated to serve on budget and planning committees to ensure that the needs of the English Department and the Library/Resource Centre were taken into consideration. Achievement and Diploma Exam results were seen as a significant measure of our school's success, and the results of these exams were to be published. I worried about being over my allotted monthly allowance for photocopying, about getting along for yet another year without purchasing any new English texts and materials, and about making do with media equipment and library resources that were in dire need of repair or replacement. I scrambled to make sense of what was happening, challenged and troubled by issues that, for me, had previously not been concerns.

At the same time, site-based management and the amalgamation of two fairly large school districts required the kind of reorganization that began with a collaborative and cooperative approach to examining shared educational visions and common values and ideals. To an extent I had never experienced, I was invited to participate at both the school and division level in shared decision-making and planning. The "new" voices of parents and community members were appreciated in this process, but schools and educators were criticized and challenged as much as they were celebrated and affirmed. I devoted a significant amount of time and energy to "philosophy and goals" meetings and retreats, "action planning" and organizational workshops, school and program evaluation initiatives, and School Council meetings. All of this was on top of what had always been a challenging and time-intensive job.

New administration brought more changes, more opportunities, and more challenges. The tough questions and difficult decisions associated with spending and generating funds confronted us on a daily basis in our "new," autonomous site-based school. On one hand, we were charged with making educationally sound and ethical choices and, on the other hand - often contradictory or incompatible with the first - was the fact that we needed money. Interesting, strange, and exciting compromises and innovations emerged. Ironically, our autonomy was often challenged when our school division administrators required that we answer for our actions and decisions. All the while, school and division resources - human and otherwise - continued to be cut or reallocated.

In a period of about three years, I found myself on shifting sands, hardly realizing what was happening, let alone having the time to figure it out. I felt strongly about my commitment to public education, both in my school and in the larger educational community, and I accepted and took the challenges and responsibilities of my teacher/leader role willingly and seriously. I was not alone. Many of my colleagues were doing the same and, even though we appreciated the changes that brought positive results, morale began to wane. The reason we had become teachers - the students - became less and less the focus of our days. We were overwhelmed with meetings and administrative tasks and worries. I found myself looking forward to my classes and my interactions with students as brief reprieves in my otherwise overflowing days. This was not why I had become a teacher. Moreover, I was not alone in feeling that, as I assumed more responsibility, I was less and less equipped to take on what was expected of me. I began to seriously wonder about whether the school I had once seen as a great place to be was still operating in the best interests of its students, or whether we had become consumed with being fiscally responsible and able to justify our every decision to others and, indeed, amongst ourselves.

The face of public education in our community was changing. I found myself having to respond, both in and outside of my school, to hard questions about what education was and where it was headed. I was challenged to revisit and to question my own assumptions about what I believed was "good" and "right" in schools. While in many cases my experiences within this whirlwind of change were invigorating and exciting, they were also often

angering, frustrating, and tiring. I needed to reassess my reasons for being in education. For me, leaving was not really a choice as, even at that point, my passion for what I did made my career more of a vocation than a job. If nothing else, I found myself reaffirming my commitment to my profession. However, I needed some time to take stock and to "breathe." It was fitting that I return to university, something I always knew I would eventually do. I was motivated by a desire to explore, investigate, and to challenge myself. I wanted some answers to the questions I had about what was going on. I needed to remove myself from the details of the day-to-day existence of my teaching life and to step back to get a view of the bigger picture.

When I arrived at the University of Calgary to begin the "official" segment of this journey, my intent was to investigate something I felt was close to my experience in the classroom and in the school. I wanted to look at the notion of teacher as leader, a capacity often informal or unofficial. I hoped to examine the changing role of the teacher in schools where site-based management requires that professionals not only be involved in collaborative decision-making but also participate in instructional and administrative initiatives that have been developed out of a need for individual schools to be financially viable and, at the same time, accountable. I saw site-based management as having implications for professional development, and I believed that the autonomy of the site-managed school offered an opportunity to consider alternatives or innovative models for staff development.

However, this was just the beginning, and my experiences as a new graduate student began to offer a myriad of issues for my consideration. Yet, one important theme kept coming to the fore as I grappled with a number of possible problems or topics for research. Even the "teacher/leader" idea had come from a more important root. In thinking and talking to others about what my research might be, I kept coming back to perhaps the most significant reason I had returned to university. In the recent years of my teaching career I had been plagued with questions about and reactions to the results of the education reforms of our provincial government's *Three Year Business Plan* (Alberta Education, 1994). Most of these questions and reactions represented the fundamental concern I had with the current

state and condition of public education in our province. I recognized that within this general area of interest were dozens of possible project topics, so my challenge was to try to narrow this concern down to one problem or question that would be manageable for my research purposes.

In mid-October, I attended a class for which the discussion centred around the very issues in public education I had been consumed with to that point. We talked a lot about public education - what it is, and what it should be. We challenged our own beliefs and considered possibilities and alternatives. I left that class wondering whether I had it all wrong. Here I had based my entire existence as a teacher on my own notions about what education is supposed to be, and I now I had to wonder whether those notions continued to be appropriate. A new set of questions emerged: What do I think public education is? What is it in reality? Why does what I think public education is contradict what it often looks like? What do others think public education is? What do they think it should be? Is public education an institution born of a democratic system? If so, do our educational institutions reflect the wishes of our society? If this is the case, then why am I so concerned? Is the real issue a societal issue? Have we, as a society, evolved in a way that sees the institution of public education as different from what it has been? I began to identify a research problem based on what troubled and challenged me, and on a need for clarification and for answers (Merriam, 1988).

Among my classmates that evening, I was not the only one who was perplexed. Many of us were taking a close, hard look at our own ideals and assumptions. That said, we weren't necessarily ready to give them up. But we were, at least, thinking. Our discussion that evening included a look at the positive ways in which we could be proactive in response to the present situation in Alberta, rather than merely reactive. A lot of good ideas came out of our discussion, but what interested me most had to do with the growing number of venues or opportunities for the promotion of dialogue and the exchange of ideas among all education stakeholders. I couldn't think of a better way to find out what people were really thinking and feeling than by getting involved in discussion with others who were interested

and involved in education, particularly with those such as parents and business and community members who are not educators in the traditional sense.

I could see some new research interests emerging, so I took an opportunity after that class to speak with my professor, Dr. Webber, who was also my advisor. He talked to me about an opportunity to be involved with the Centre for Leadership in Learning (CLL), a consortium of educational organizations which offers an annual seminar series for the promotion of the kind of dialogue and exchange of ideas I was curious about. Coincidentally, and particularly timely considering my interests, was the year's seminar series theme: "Why Public Education?" The series was to offer the following seminar topics: "Public Education: Myths and Realities," "Community Involvement: Beyond the Classroom," "Shared Decision-Making: What Should It Look Like?" and "Exploring Public Education in the 21st Century." Dr. Webber encouraged me to think about whether I might like to do my research in conjunction with this particular series in a way that would allow me to investigate the issues that so intrigued and troubled me. This took some serious thought. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) talk about the importance of choosing a study that is not only interesting, but that is also near to one's heart. They suggest that whatever the topic is, and however it presents itself - whether it is an interest in something that has somehow touched one's life, whether it is suggested by a professor or an associate, or whether it is simply an opportunity that arises - it must be exciting enough to carry one through the time and effort required to do the work of the research project. I was confident that the area I had chosen and felt passionate about, coupled with the opportunity to work with the CLL, would sustain my interest. I accepted Dr. Webber's offer.

At this point I also began to focus the reading I was doing so as to begin a literature review and to develop a contextual outline within which my research findings could be presented. When I thought about the kind of reading that might be helpful to me at this point, I realized that I needed to formulate a question that would narrow down the many I had in mind and provide a frame for what it was I wanted to explore (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I decided to focus my inquiry this way: "At present, what do those in the Calgary area who are involved or interested in education think public

education is, and what do they think it should be? The reading that I had done so far was enough to let me know that the topic of public education is huge and that I wouldn't even begin to scratch the surface if I didn't narrow my search to a specificity that was somewhat manageable. Even then, I realized that my reading would have to be, like every other aspect of this whole process, an ongoing venture. Because I had not started my research, I could not anticipate what literature would be specifically suggested by the data I would later gather, and I knew I would have to revisit and continue my reading as my research evolved, and as the themes and topics of my findings emerged. But I had to start somewhere (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gay, 1996; Merriam, 1988).

In order to feel informed, at least to the point of understanding some of the key issues, I decided to investigate two general topics or areas of interest. First, I wanted to look at the context of educational reforms of the past two decades. I began by exploring global trends, concentrating on Western industrialized nations. I then brought my focus closer to home with a look at the Canadian scene and, more specifically and most important, I examined the situation in Alberta. This investigation was particularly important in providing a contextual frame or "history" for my research project. In Alberta, the reforms initiated in 1993 by the Klein government's first *Three-year Business Plan* (Alberta Education, 1994) represented a turning point in education in our province. A consideration of global reform events preceding and surrounding Alberta's reforms was crucial in understanding Alberta's place within a bigger picture. As Albertans, we are not alone in our struggles over public education. Indeed, in important ways, our reforms have been influenced by, have influenced, or will potentially influence the reforms of others in our country and in our global community. My analysis beyond Alberta included an examination of recent reforms in the countries of England and Wales, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, as well as a look at nationwide and provincial reforms in Canada. Although many interesting and important changes have occurred in these countries in the past five years, based on the recognition of 1993 as a turning point in Alberta, I chose to focus my investigation on the educational changes of the 1980s and early 1990s which led up to or paralleled the reforms

of Alberta's *The Three-year Business Plan* (Alberta Education, 1994). This analysis is presented in the next section of my thesis entitled "The Global Context."

The second topic or area of interest I wanted to further explore was what I had come to think of as the public education debate. This would uncover some of the more critical issues concerning education and educational reform. I wanted to understand, as much as possible, the arguments of both sides of the debate. My choice of a research project had come to be a challenge of my own beliefs; therefore, I was very motivated and open to understanding positions which were in opposition to what I had, up until recently, advocated with a conviction I was now ready to reexamine. To this point my reading had presented me with a number of arguments in favor of public education and, in the face of pressures for reform, the preservation of its democratic foundations. I needed to also investigate the other side of the debate which favored a free-market model for education and called for a parental choice and a more private, decentralized system of delivering education. My reading revealed an enormous collection of work on a myriad of complex issues. The results of this analysis are presented in the section entitled "The Public Education Debate," which follows "The Global Context" section.

The Global Context

With few exceptions, an analysis of the education reform policy of the last two decades in Western industrialized nations points to the significance of global social, political, and economic conditions, the broader context within which the public education debate and the formulation of policy occurs. The global context is seen as particularly pertinent, as reforms in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada followed reforms in England and Wales and the United States closely or, in some cases, occurred simultaneously. Considering what these nations have in common in terms of "cultural heritage, political ideology, and general social aspirations" (Kennedy, 1995, p. 71), it is not surprising that comparable tendencies can been seen in their educational reform policies. Indeed, an examination of the recent reforms of these countries provides an appropriate backdrop for understanding what has occurred in our own context in Alberta in the past decade.

To begin, in each of these countries throughout the 1980s and continuing today, a key imperative is the ability to compete in a global economy. This has resulted in a certain and common set of forces which has driven the radical reform, restructuring, and transformation of education at all levels (O'Neill, 1995; Knight, Lingard, & Porter, 1993). Therefore, the economic challenges and trends of Western nations, though recognized as inseparable and entwined with political and social trends, have a definite influence on education reform. Policy analysts Apple (1993), Angus (1992), Gallagher (1995), Porter (1993), and Wotherspoon (1998) have identified these trends as follows: (a) the development of internationalism and global interconnectedness requiring nations to be economically independent, globally competitive, and knowledgeable of other nations with which business is done; (b) high levels of inflation, deficit and public debt; (c) an increase in new technologies (computers, robotics, electronics, etc.) and technological innovation in production and consumption; (d) the post-industrial decline in manufacturing employment and an increase in service sector employment, the reorganization and restructuring of the workplace (post-fordism) in response to economic challenges calling for flexibility in the production of customised goods for particular markets, the broadening or "loosening" of employee roles and occupations, and an increase in the degree of proactive employee participation in the decision-making of the organization, particularly in terms of production; and (e) high levels of unemployment, a breakdown of the traditional family structure, a decline in the regard for traditional values and institutions, and an increase in the number of "at risk" children who are, because of a lack of resources in the home or community, unlikely to succeed in school and, therefore, are seen as an economic and social liability.

Many analysts (Apple, 1993; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Ball, 1990; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Codd, Harker & Nash, 1990; Knight et al., 1993; Marginson, 1993) of the nations of my discussion argued that the above economic conditions or trends have encouraged the emergence of a New Right (including its neo-conservative and neo-liberal manifestations), first apparent in the early 1980s and more obvious by the late 1980s. With this movement came a readiness to blame not only the liberal reform programs of the welfare state of the 1960s and 1970s for inefficiency, mediocrity, intrusive bureaucracy and

limitations on individual liberty, but also a tendency to blame the previous liberal-progressive projects of state or public education systems for the failure to produce graduates prepared for a job market thought to be the vehicle by which national economies might move into a global arena of economic competitiveness. Schools became the scapegoat for social and economic uncertainty. Moreover, education was seen to be in crisis and, according to critics, standards were declining and quality and excellence were lacking in schools.

In response to the national and global economic concerns and the consequent perception of the "failed school," notable shifts in education policy rationale occurred in England and Wales, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada in the early to mid-1980s. These shifts reveal some distinct similarities or trends: There is a significant move to decentralize and devolve the governance and financial control of education to the local or school level. While this recognizes the need for diversity in provision and the importance of decisions being made as close as possible to those they affect, at the same time, this restructuring involves a strengthening or regrouping of central government authority and an increase in centralized accountability mechanisms. In addition, there is a growing recognition of the right of parents in matters of school choice, often acknowledged by changes in funding schemes so that "the dollar follows the student." This has introduced a level of competition to schools and has resulted in the emergence of a market or quasi-market influence in public education (Knight et al., 1993; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998).

England and Wales

The late 1970s marked the beginning of an era of significant educational reform in England and Wales. Up until that time, publicly funded and maintained state schools were governed by local education authorities (LEAs), elected bodies which operated under the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Department of Education and Science (DES), the central government authorities. However, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher's newly elected Conservative government, on an agenda of efficiency and economy, initiated a series of Education Acts that were to change this arrangement in fundamental ways. An increased dissatisfaction with education in reaction to the 1970s' oil and inflation crisis, the

subsequent economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s, and the resulting high levels of unemployment led to pressure to establish stronger connections between education and the economy (Dale & Ozga, 1993; Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998). The aim of the ensuing Education Acts of the 1980s and early 1990s was to restructure education by reducing the power of the supposed self-serving and excessive LEAs (Dale & Ozga, 1993; Whitty et al., 1998), and by encouraging greater differentiation among schools and reintroducing selection in order to provide students with the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge suitable for their "probable future position in society" (Walford, 1992, p. 212).

The first of these acts, the 1980 Education Act, was introduced with two main purposes. The first was the initiation of the Assisted Places Scheme (APS), a program to support differentiation and private schooling by providing funds for selected state-maintained school students to attend prominent academic private schools (Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998). The second purpose of the 1980 Act was to increase parental choice by giving parents the right to choose among state-maintained schools rather than being required to send their children to neighborhood schools within the catchment areas of established school district boundaries. Schools were required to publish information regarding examination performance, facilities, philosophy, and curriculum in order to enable parents to make informed decisions regarding school preference (Walford, 1992).

The LEAs had traditionally enjoyed a degree of power and autonomy which made the 1980 Education Act difficult to implement. Further, the Department of Education and Science (DES) was seen as an obstruction to the Act's new policies. In 1982, the central government initiated a plan for an alternative system of schooling which was to bypass the DES altogether by funding the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) to develop the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) for the training of 14 to 18 year olds (Kennedy, 1995; Walford, 1992).

The 1986 Education Act brought in the next wave of reforms. It restructured LEA governance to allow schools to form individual governing committees which were responsible for management, curriculum, and staffing decisions. The act required that LEAs replace local politicians and local government appointees with parents of the school's

children and members of the local business community (Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998). The intent of this restructuring was to increase and promote accountability and responsiveness to "clients," and to strengthen links between schools and the workplace. Through increased differentiation and competition among schools, it marked the introduction of a quasi-market system in the public education sector (Walford, 1992).

By far the most radical of the acts of the 1980s in England and Wales was the 1988 Education Reform Act. The first of its initiatives called for the establishment of a national curriculum of prescribed programs of study for the core subjects of English, mathematics, and science (also Welsh in Wales), and seven other "foundation" subjects. Included in this common framework were achievement or attainment targets for all levels in all subjects, and compulsory performance testing at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16, with a requirement to report assessment results in the form of "league tables." The intent of the national curriculum and assessment reforms was to enhance achievement and accountability (Gipps, 1995; Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998).

The second initiative of the 1988 Education Reform Act was to grant the governing committees of all state-maintained secondary schools and many primary schools increased independence or autonomy through the local management of schools (LMS) policy, which gave the control of budgets and decision-making to schools. This initiative further enhanced open enrollment and parental choice by allowing schools to attract students to their maximum capacity (Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998).

Third, to further provide a diverse range of schools and to enhance private sector involvement in education, the 1988 Act established another alternative school system, the independent city technology colleges (CTCs), outside of the jurisdiction of the LEAs (Walford, 1992). The CTCs focused on providing science and technology programs to 11 to 18 year olds, and were to be supported largely through business and private sector sponsorship and supplementary per capita government funding. However, industrial and commercial sponsorship was not forthcoming to the degree originally expected, and the government was forced to assume the funding responsibility to a great extent. CTCs

became a contentious issue due to increased costs, lack of sponsorship, and opposition from LEAs and parents (Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998).

Fourth, the 1988 Education Reform Act allowed parents to vote to have their school "opt out" of the LEA control and to govern themselves as a "grant-maintained" school (GMS). GMS approval was based on an evaluation of the viability of the school by the secretary of state for education, and funding was then provided directly from the central government on a per capita basis at the same level provided by the LEA. However, the benefit of the GMS was that it would also receive, for discretionary use, its portion of the LEA service, facilities, and administration funding (Walford, 1992; Whitty et al., 1998).

The initiatives of the 1988 Education Reform Act were revolutionary and seen by some (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Cornford, 1994; Walford, 1992) as a turning point, the beginning of a privatized system of education in which schools, as separate nonprofit organizations driven by market principals, established closer ties with local industry and commerce and were to compete for pupils and teachers.

The advent of a new decade brought additional reform acts for the early 1990s. The 1992 Education Act introduced the expansion of school inspections, an initiative administered by the central government Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which contracted private inspection teams to do the evaluation of schools and teachers. This inspection program, designed to have reported on every school in England by the end of 1997 had, as its aim, to increase public accountability (Whitty et al., 1998).

A year later, the 1993 Education Act was introduced to allow schools to change enrollment guidelines in order to encourage the development of "specialty" schools such as those focusing on technology, language and sports. It also allowed private schools to "opt in" to the grant-maintained project, and was intended to encourage private schools to devolve authority to the level of the school, its parents, and the community. The 1993 Education Act also introduced the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS), a national agency which assumed the planning function of the LEAs in the cases where grant-maintained schools were the majority (Whitty et al., 1998).

Although in 1995 Prime Minister Major suggested legislation for the abolishment of LEAs, arguing for diversity and choice and for trust in educators to run schools and in parents to make appropriate choices for their children, and although the intent of the education acts of the 1980s and early 1990s was to reduce the role of the LEAs significantly, most schools did not opt out of LEA control. By the mid-1990s, grant-maintained schools represented approximately 4 % of public schools, mostly at the secondary level. This included about 10% of England's school population. Although independent of LEAs, as is the case with maintained schools, at present grant-maintained schools continue to be regulated by the central state, are required to deliver prescribed national curriculum, and are inspected by the central state (Whitty et al., 1998).

The United States of America

By the early 1980s, public education in the United States was also under considerable criticism. The 1960s and 1970s "liberal" reform movements were blamed for a decline in educational standards (Cibulka, 1995; Semel, Cookson, & Sadovnik, 1992). In addition, critics believed that the 1960s and 1970s educational focus on social issues had not only failed to improve societal conditions, but had also resulted in pervasive mediocrity in schools. As a result, the 1980s marked an era of significant educational reforms aimed at completely reshaping the American public school system (Semel et al., 1992).

In 1983, the Reagan administration's National Commission on Excellence issued its monumental report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which identified high rates of adult illiteracy, declining scholastic aptitude test (SAT) scores, and the low standings of American students in international achievement comparisons as cause for alarm. The committee asserted that the foundations and the future of the nation were threatened by mediocrity, and appealed to Americans for a commitment to educational reform for global competitiveness in commerce, industry, science, and technology, and for intellectual, moral, and spiritual strength (Semel et al., 1992).

The result of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was a decade of significant educational reform characterized by Cibulka (1995) and Semel et

al. (1992) as having two waves. The first wave began in the mid-1980s and focused on issues of accountability and achievement. Increases in graduation requirements, curriculum expectations, a focus on common, core curricula, and standardized testing programs for measuring student achievement were implemented. Programs for "tracking" or "streaming" students in educational routes according to achievement or ability were eliminated, vocational education was revamped, and attention to technology and computer literacy became a primary focus. Emphasis was given to the issue of the quality of teaching, the role of the principal was redefined to include more responsibility for school achievement, and partnerships between schools, corporations, and businesses became a priority (Cibulka, 1995; Kennedy, 1995; Semel et al., 1992).

This "top-down" type of reform became seen as limited or ineffectual because of the variety of problems faced by individual schools (Semel et al., 1992). Changes in evaluation and assessment mechanisms resulted in some increased student achievement and improved standards in teacher accountability, but additional measures were recommended by many, including the National Governor's Association, a force which became particularly influential in the reform policies of the federal government. As a result of the National Governor's Association's analysis of educational issues, *Time for Results: The Governor's 1991 Report on Education* (National Governor's Association, 1986), and the 1991 *America 2000* (United States Department of Education, 1991) and 1994 *Goals 2000* (United States Department of Education, 1994) programs of the early 1990s Bush and Clinton administrations, a second wave of reform targeted the structure and processes of schools in order to decentralize school governance and control to local and school levels (Cibulka, 1995; Semel et al., 1992; Whitty et al., 1998). This included a variety of schemes for restructuring teacher performance and salary policies, and for focusing on the development of leadership and management. It also involved initiatives for increased parental choice and participation in schools, and the reporting of results at the local, state, and national levels. In addition, plans called for increased use of technology in teaching, and early intervention "readiness" programs for 4 and 5 year olds as an attempt to decrease the eventual dropout rate of children of poor families (Cibulka, 1995; Semel et al., 1992).

According to Semel et al. (1992), these two waves of educational reform resulted in the implementation of five significant programs or initiatives: school choice, school-based management, school-business partnerships, the effective school movement, and teacher education reform.

Because public schools were seen to be failing, private and "magnet" schools were held up as exemplar "choice" systems which, by meeting the needs and desires of their communities, were sensitive and responsive to change. Private schools were perceived to be efficient, accountable, safe, and as having higher levels of achievement. "Magnet" public schools, which operated independent of the public system, offered special programs and curriculum to specific student populations and were perceived to be more positive and productive in terms of academic achievement and student well-being. With these models as examples, the school choice movement became a primary catalyst for educational reform (Semel et al., 1992).

From the outset, a voucher system was proposed based on arguments that students, not schools, should be funded, and that parents should enjoy more choice and participation in their children's education. In addition, voucher proponents argued that by selecting "with their dollars, parents would reward good schools and punish bad schools" (Semel et al., 1992, p. 456).

Both the Reagan and Bush administrations supported school choice as "nonbureaucratic, inexpensive, and fundamentally egalitarian because it allows market forces to shape school policy, rather than subjecting educators to the heavy hand of the educational bureaucracy" (Semel et al., 1992, p. 457). In addition, influential economists, John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990), made a strong case for unregulated school choice as the means by which a free market system would reform public education. Subsequently, throughout the United States, a variety of choice plans were introduced to permit students to attend schools outside of their traditional school zones or districts. The intent of choice plans was to encourage school competition and accountability and, thus, responsiveness (Semel et al., 1992).

In the United States, the school choice movement was paralleled by the charter school movement, which was also promoted by free-market advocates. Those in favor of charter schools argued that schools should stand as autonomous organizations and should be governed according to individual "charters." As was the case with choice plans, because charter school legislation was the responsibility of individual states, there were a variety of charter school schemes introduced throughout the United States. Most plans involved the following: A school's charter was to be drawn up between interested individuals (usually teachers, parents, and community members) and the charter-granting authority (usually the state or school district). Charter schools were given authority over budgets, staffing, and curriculum with the condition that they remained accountable for the standards of performance agreed upon. State governments determined charter school purposes, the number of schools eligible to apply for or to receive charter grants, and the goals particular charter schools had to meet before being renewed. By 1994, 11 states had approved charter school legislation. The charter schools of these states focused on innovative teaching rather than community involvement, and some accommodated "at risk" students. In 1996, there were a total of 200 charter schools in 25 states. Although some of these were newly formed, most were converted from public school status (Whitty et al., 1998).

Because of the concern that schools were not graduating students prepared to meet the nation's economic challenges, school-business partnerships also became a major topic of the 1980s reform debate. Many school-business partnerships were initiated; however, despite a great deal of public and media attention, by the 1990s corporate and business support for public schools had decreased significantly from what it had been a decade earlier (Semel, et al., 1992).

The 1980s also saw significant restructuring policies for the devolution and decentralization of the control over schools and educational decision-making from state authorities to local and community authorities. This was intended to allow those most informed and closest to the school to make independent and autonomous decisions (Semel et al., 1992). It was also intended to increase the accountability and quality of public schools (Whitty et al., 1998). The "self-managed" or "site-based" public school resulted.

Perhaps the most outstanding example of this type of reform began in Chicago in 1985, when school councils comprised of parents, community members, teachers, and principals were given full control of individual schools (Steffy & English, 1995). In 1995, an initial evaluation of Chicago's restructuring showed no relationship between the reforms and student achievement. As a result, state legislation put the Chicago public system under mayoral control and introduced a corporate management plan for schools. This model made Chicago's reforms unique by involving community empowerment along with accountability to the state (Whitty et al., 1998).

The effective school movement was also at the forefront of American educational reform in the 1980s and early 1990s. A result of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and similar reports which criticized the effectiveness of public schools, this movement called for schools to focus on problems of equity and quality by meeting five defined objectives for success:

> high expectations for all students and staff acceptance of responsibility for student learning; instructional leadership on the part of the principal; a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning; a clear and focused mission concerning instructional goals shared by the staff; and frequent monitoring of student progress. (Semel et al., 1992, p. 461)

Semel et al. (1992) noted that the focus of the school effectiveness movement was on the outcomes of teaching, teacher effectiveness, and learning, rather than on the process of teaching and learning.

With teaching and teacher effectiveness as primary concerns, the reforms of the 1980s also included an extensive investigation into teacher education. Based on the assumption that teachers and teaching programs were a part of the education problem, teacher education and training were seen as the logical place to begin analysis and scrutiny. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) assumed a leadership role in these investigations in order to prevent their teaching membership from being blamed unfairly, and to take the initiative to identify and address the problematic conditions under which teachers worked (Semel et al., 1992).

New Zealand

The 1980s also brought radical educational reform to New Zealand. Although criticism of public education in New Zealand did not focus on the failure of schools in terms of performance or student achievement, it did focus on the failure of schools to respond to pressure for greater community and parental participation in education, and the growing public concern over bureaucratic inefficiency, waste, and undemocratic centralization (Whitty et al., 1998). By 1984, the conservative National Party was seen as "epitomizing some of the worst authoritarian features of a welfare capitalist state," and New Zealand found itself in the midst of a "crisis of legitimation" (Codd et al., 1990, p. 15). This crisis was coupled and fueled by the mid-1980s global recession which found New Zealand in the midst of a devastating economic crisis. In July of 1984, New Zealanders elected the fourth Labour Government on a platform of economic reform. This began an era of "Rogernomics," termed so after Roger Douglas, the Minister of Finance, who advocated for radical free market reform as a balance to the power of the state (Dale & Ozga, 1993).

In addition to its focus on economic restructuring, the Labour Government also promised to re-open public debate on the issue of curriculum. In November 1984, the Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools was formed and, after almost two years of debate and consultation, *The Curriculum Review* (New Zealand Department of Education, 1986) was released in 1987 (Codd et al., 1990; Snook, 1993). It was considered to be a significant reform initiative, promoting a "liberal-progressive view of education" (Codd et al., 1990, p. 16) and a focus on school and community involvement within state guidelines. However, it was immediately seen as incompatible with the Government's new economic reform agenda which emphasized a monetarist approach to restructuring, and it was strongly opposed as "liberal and costly" (p. 16).

This marked a turning point in New Zealand education. Just before the 1987 general election, the Taskforce to Review Education Administration was formed with a mandate based on two key concepts: devolution and efficiency. *The Curriculum Review* (New Zealand Department of Education, 1986) was shelved and the focus for education turned from curriculum and teaching and learning to administration. Accountability and efficiency

became the dominant discourse of contemporary education policy (Codd et al., 1990; Dale & Ozga, 1993).

This new direction for education resulted in a crucial division in the Labour Government and, with re-election in the 1987 general election, David Lange resigned as Prime Minister and took the education portfolio for himself, a sign that education was to become a high profile area (Codd et al., 1990, Dale & Ozga, 1993). Even before assuming the education portfolio, Lange had begun to form the Taskforce on Education Administration (The Picot Committee) which was chaired by businessman, Brian Picot. The Picot Committee was committed to four goals: The first goal was to create an efficient, responsive administrative system where decision-making would be brought to the level of those affected by the decisions. In turn, the devolution of decision-making power to schools and their communities was the second goal. The third goal was a commitment to equity and fairness and, as such, issues of race, gender, class, and equitable distribution of resources were considered. Fourth, educational funding would not be cut; however, it was hoped that savings would result from a more efficient system and that these savings could be reinvested in areas where supplementary funding was most needed (Ramsay, 1993). These goals were based on a foundation of educational partnership, and the cornerstone of this foundation was to be the School Charter (Dale & Ozga, 1993; Ramsay, 1993).

The report of the taskforce, the *Picot Report* (Picot, 1988), was released in May 1988 and, essentially unchanged, was re-released in August 1988 as Lange's *Tomorrow's Schools* (Minister of Education, 1988), the policy document which initiated legislation for the most radical reforms of the education system in more than a century (Codd et al., 1993; Snook, 1993). The *Picot Report* proposed the following: Each school would become a basic learning unit and would be managed by an elected board of trustees to encourage a closer connection between teachers and the community. Each school would have a "charter" to define the responsibilities of both the school and the government. (This was later revised so that the charter became "undertakings" of the school.) Regional education boards would be eliminated and the Department of Education would be replaced by a ministry which would give policy advice through a council consisting of four ministry officials and four lay people.

(Provision for a policy council was deleted in *Tomorrow's Schools*.) There would be compulsory education forums and a Parents' Advocacy Council (PAC) for each school. (These were abolished in the National Government's first year of office.) A single authority, The New Zealand Qualifications Authority, would validate qualifications. Resource and support groups would be privately contracted. Separate from the ministry, a Review and Audit Agency, which later became the Education Review Office (ERO), would replace the inspectorate and report to the minister (Snook, 1993, pp. 161-162).

Although the Picot reforms reflected the context of Rogernomics and were in accordance with the ideals of choice and the market, they were, first, founded on fundamental welfare state principles and, therefore, were not seen as sufficient for the total realization of a market system (Dale & Ozga, 1993; Gordon, 1992). In November 1990, however, the Labour government was defeated by the National Party which confirmed a stronger commitment to the ideals of the free market in all areas and departments. Issues of local control, teacher accountability, decentralized financing and "bulk funding," national standards of achievement, and parental choice were given full attention (Snook, 1993). It was argued that the extent of the state role in education should only be to require that children attend school and, beyond that, the state should step aside and let the market take over. Demands for a voucher system increased and the ideals of equity, choice, and partnership adhered to in the *Picot Report* (Picot, 1988) were eroded through subsequent revisions to the *Tomorrow's Schools* (Minister of Education, 1988) document (Peters, 1995).

More recent developments have ensued. The Government introduced "bulk funding," and boards opting for this salary funding scheme may transfer money from the salary "envelope" to operations areas and vice versa. In addition, teacher registration was made voluntary and schools may employ non-registered teachers. Moreover, all issues pertaining to equity and empowerment were de-emphasized and the requirement that school charters include equity clauses was repealed (Gordon, 1992). Macpherson (1991) argued that these recent developments have heightened the tension between the competing interests of the traditional, broad educational concerns of equity and the new, narrowed educational

concerns of competition and managerialism. Gordon (1992) suggested that it is only because of the strong resistance of groups such as teachers' unions, opposition parties, Boards of Trustees, and educational academics that these values have remained balanced, keeping in check the pressures of a market model for education.

Australia

In Australia, as was the case in England and Wales, the United States, and New Zealand, the global and national economic conditions of the 1980s set the stage for an unrivaled decade of educational reform. Moreover, high secondary school dropout rates added to the perception that Australian education had failed to meet the needs of all students (Teese, 1992). With a focus on remedying the country's educational ills, the themes excellence, competition, and consumer choice became important in the 1980s (Angus, 1992). To a large extent, these themes were to be addressed through a free market approach to education that would allow parental choice among schools and, subsequently, would promote competition and consumer pressure and increase educational standards and relevance to the labour market. Competition and labour relevance would decrease wastage of human capital and, consequently, would increase educational quality and productivity and directly contribute to the economic interests of the nation (Angus, 1992).

A significant shift in education policy rationale occurred in Australia beginning in 1982 with the first Hawke Labor government. By the mid-1980s, education reform policy in Australia revealed an interesting paradox. Even as education was seen by many to be the problem - responsible for Australia's economic malaise - it was seen by many more to be the solution - a means whereby Australia, with a highly trained work force, might compete in the world market (Marginson, 1993; Porter, 1993). Thus, education and the economy were understood by the federal government as closely related, and Australian education reform and restructuring policies and initiatives began to reflect two important assumptions or views: that education could serve as a micro-economic reform tool, and that economic efficiency and effectiveness should be primary goals for education.

With the Australian government's view of education as a mechanism for economic reform, came certain policy priorities. According to Carter (1995), these were: "increasing [federal government] participation in education; an emphasis on skills training; involving the private sector and trade-union representatives in skills education; increasing school retention rates; and improving the overall quality of education" (p. 34). These priorities were reflected in the policies of The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), headed in 1987 by the federal Minister of Education, John Dawkins. Fitzclarence and Kenway (1993) referred to Dawkins' 1988 document, *Strengthening Australia's Schools: A Consideration of the Focus and Content of Schooling* (Dawkins, 1988), as an example of how economic priorities were to drive education. Intended to be the outline or blueprint for Australian education in the late twentieth century, it recognized that schools were the "starting point of an integrated education and training structure in the economy. They provide the foundation on which a well-informed, compassionate and cohesive society is built. They also form the basis of a more highly skilled, adaptive and productive workforce" (cited in Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1993, p. 95).

John Dawkins initiated a national policy for curriculum reform in the 1987 document, *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins, 1987), indicative of a particular focus which had as its goal a highly skilled workforce able to contribute to the nation's economic viability (Kennedy, 1995). Subsequently, state representatives came together as the Australian Education Council (AEC) to work collaboratively in the development of a common curriculum framework. The common framework consisted of: (a) eight key learning areas identified by a curriculum mapping exercise which reviewed existing curriculums across subject areas and states, (b) subject profiles including a sequence of content and skills which outlined prescribed outcomes for knowledge, skills, and understandings for all students, (c) behavioral indicators of student achievement to provide a basis for standardized national assessment, (d) and statements and profiles which included a number of employment-related key competencies to be achieved by all 16 to 19 year olds (Carter, 1995; Kennedy, 1995).

By the mid-eighties, state governments began to acknowledge that, in the foreseeable future, raising revenue for the increasing costs of public services would become more and

more difficult. Hence, the ensuing reforms were not solely based on curriculum changes for the achievement of a highly trained workforce; they were also cost cutting measures and an attempt to get better value for education expenditures (Angus, 1995). Therefore, the second assumption underlying education reform policy in Australia was the view that education should be informed by the notions of economic rationalism and corporate managerialism (Angus, 1992; Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1993; Lingard, 1993; Marginson, 1993). This view focused on efficiency and effectiveness for "business" success: getting more for less, outputs rather than inputs, and results rather than processes. It can be recognized in bureaucracies which are characterized by leaner, tighter, more defined management structures, in the desirability of generic managerial skills rather than managerial knowledge, and in the development of features such as precisely articulated policy goals, corporate plans, mission statements, program budgeting, program evaluation, performance indicators, and performance appraisals. As well, this approach included a decentralization and devolution of services to the "work face" (Angus, 1991; Lingard, 1993; Porter, 1993).

In 1985, The Quality of Education Review Commission was established to assess the quality of education and the degree to which education contributed to the economy. Among other documents, the resulting *Quality of Education in Australia* (Quality of Education Review Commission, 1985) called for an end to increased federal spending on education through a "value for money" (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997, p. 12) approach to fiscal responsibility. This approach was soon adopted throughout Australia. For example, the Government of Western Australia's 1986 White Paper, *Managing Change in the Public Sector* (Burke, 1986), identified the problem of balancing the demands of the community for increased and improved services with the imperative of budgetary restraint. Dimmock and O'Donoghue (1997) outlined the key points for public sector reform of The White Paper: "responsiveness and adaptability to the needs of the community, flexibility in the use of resources, and accountability and responsibility to government for standards of service and funding" (p. 12).

To this end, reforms for decentralization and devolution became a significant focus in Australian education. Motivated by a need to improve and enhance services within budgetary constrains, central bureaucracies were reduced and staff at school levels were given control over the deployment of resources. According to Angus (1995), what became noteworthy about these restructuring initiatives was that the desired goals or "ends" of these reforms were predetermined and clearly articulated by the central government. Schools were not given the local authority to decide what the "ends" should be; they were, however, given the authority and capacity to determine the "means" by which these ends should be achieved.

State authorities employed strategies for devolution which consisted of a development plan in each school; block grants for schools which included funds previously allocated centrally for defined purposes; the formalization of constituted school decision-making groups, consisting of staff and community representatives authorized to develop school plans and to control budgets and, in some cases, to select staff; an external auditing authority for educational and financial monitoring; central offices which focused on defining policy parameters and standards; and decentralized support services for schools (Angus, 1995).

By the late 1980s, initiatives for educational reform were adopted throughout Australia and a series of state reports which "blue printed" restructuring in the future were released. Although reform plans varied from state to state, similarities in these reforms were evident. For example, the 1987 *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Program for Improvement* (Ministry of Education, Western Australia, 1987) report recommended that decision-making be devolved to schools from the central authority, and outlined the state's plans to provide block funding and staffing allowances, and to give individual schools the authority over staff selection and non-staff budgets. Henceforth, the key to restructuring would be the self-determining, site-based school (Angus, 1995). A common curriculum and accompanying measures for monitoring performance were also initiated by *Better Schools*. The Northern Territory also released a plan for reform in 1987 entitled *Towards the '90s* (Northern Territory, Department of Education, 1987), similar to *Better Schools*, but which maintained

a greater degree of central power. In South Australia, a revamped administrative structure authorized significant powers to principals. In Queensland, reform was the result of the 1990 *Focus on Schools* (Education Queensland, 1990) report, and the 1992 Student Performance Standards policy which introduced a common curriculum and accompanying competency testing for the measurement of student achievement against pre-established competency indicators. New South Wales began a program of decentralization with the *Schools Renewal* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 1989) report which had three main thrusts. The first was to encourage parental choice of schools and introduce competition among schools by eliminating school zone boundaries, the second was to devolve power by restructuring school governance in accordance with corporate managerial principles, and the third was to introduce alternative or specialized high schools that focused on areas such as languages and technology (Whitty et al., 1998).

The state of Victoria led reform throughout the 1980s, particularly in terms of secondary education, with the most comprehensive and far-reaching of Australia's educational changes. In 1983, the Labor government initiated a ministerial review of education and training programs for all teenagers and, in 1984, the *Discussion Paper* (Ministry of Education, Victoria, 1984) and its final 1985 *Report* (Ministry of Education, Victoria, 1985) were issued. These documents presented a number of recommendations which focused on restructuring by amalgamating high schools and technical schools in an attempt to end the class division that had been promoted by the traditional system of segregated academic and technical courses. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board became responsible for the implementation of an integrated, high school program with a common curriculum which was to offer similar learning experiences to all high school students and a focus on preparation for work in society. In addition to a common curriculum, externally administered examinations and a single high school credential, the Victorian Certificate of Education, were intended to promote Victorian public secondary education as challenging, valued, and recognized by post-secondary institutions (Teese, 1992).

Victoria also led the way in achieving the goals of economic efficiency and effectiveness. State funding was reduced significantly and school governance was devolved and decentralized. With the 1993 release of the *Schools of the Future* (Ministry of Education, Victoria, 1993) report, school management was the responsibility of local school councils which controlled all school budget areas with the exception of teacher salaries (Whitty et al., 1998).

Canada

On a national level, educational reform in Canada has been less extensive than reforms in England and Wales, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. Furthermore, the beginnings of significant reforms in Canada did not take place until the late 1980s and early 1990s. As is the case with the United States and Australia, education in Canada is, for the most part, not a federal responsibility. Rather, with the exception of some federal control over designated areas such as minority languages, denominational schooling, and the education of specified groups such as registered Native peoples, penitentiary inmates, and the armed forces, education falls under the authority of individual provincial and territorial governments (Dunning, 1997; Wotherspoon, 1998). Taking this into account, the most dramatic of recent Canadian reforms have occurred in the provinces of New Brunswick and Alberta (Gallagher, 1995; Manzer, 1994). However, the late 1980s was also noteworthy in Canadian education generally, marking a shift away from the "ethical liberal" stance of previous educational policies of the 1960s and 1970s (Manzer, 1994; Wotherspoon, 1998).

This shift was influenced, to a great degree, by a series of significant reports. The first, the *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issues of Dropouts* (Radwanski, 1987), was released in 1988 by George Radwanski, a former editor-in-chief of the *Toronto Star*, for the Ontario Ministry of Education. The second, *A Legacy for Learners* (Sullivan, 1988) was also prepared in 1988 by Barry Sullivan, the Royal Commissioner on Education in British Columbia. Prompted by and closely following these reports were other provincial government, federal agency, and public institute documents. These reports had in common the accusation that public schools in Canada were failing. They pointed to high dropout

rates, far-reaching functional illiteracy, and unimpressive international mathematics and science tests scores as evidence of this failure (Dunning, 1997; Gallagher, 1995; Manzer, 1994; Wotherspoon, 1998). Apparently at fault was a lack of consistency in curricula content and purpose, and a lack of accountability mechanisms. These reports called for educational excellence and "externally established curriculum and standards of a uniform education transformed to meet the competitive demands of the new global political economy" (Manzer, 1994, p. 212).

Specifically, in Ontario, the 1990 *People and Skills in the New Global Economy* (Ontario Premier's Council, 1990) report focused on education and training and identified, as an important goal of Ontario's education system, the preparation of students for the workplace in order to ensure provincial and national viability in the new global economy (Manzer, 1994). As well, the Economic Council of Canada's 1992 report, *A Lot to Learn* (Economic Council of Canada, 1992), also presented a strong argument that better prepared workers were the answer to Canada's ability to be globally competitive (Manzer, 1994; Wotherspoon, 1998). From a somewhat different perspective, Barry Sullivan's 1988 *A Legacy for Learners* (Sullivan, 1988) report on education in British Columbia paid some attention to considerations of social diversity. As was the case with some of New Zealand's early reform efforts (Codd et al., 1990; Whitty et al., 1998), Sullivan's recommendations acknowledged the importance of a child-centered approach to schooling and a balance between meeting the goals of a general education and responding to the needs of ethnic and cultural groups. According to Manzer (1994), Sullivan's "concern to reconcile common education and social diversity is unusual in official policy studies of public education in the late 1980s and early 1990s. More typical is a position which ignores the issue, or even dismisses it" (p. 218). However, the "bottom line" of Sullivan's report ultimately argued for a common education in support of the ideal of a productive and socially responsible society and a national common good (Manzer, 1994).

Setting the stage for Canadian reform in the 1990s, these reports revealed a number of common thrusts: First, education policy must reflect technological change and international competition in a global economy. Second, basic knowledge and skills, and core and

common curricula should be emphasized at elementary and secondary levels. Third, to meet the challenges of a technological society and a global economy, the recognition of individual differences, cultural pluralism, and social diversity must take a second place to a focus on content-oriented common curricula. Fourth, "outcomes-based" content-oriented curricula will enhance accountability by enabling the measurement of knowledge and skills expectations through common examinations and by allowing comparisons in achievement. Fifth, public accountability requires that the province, as a policy-determining center, have authority over decisions regarding resource allocation, content of common or core curricula, provincial standards of achievement, and accountability mechanisms. Management of schools, however, should be devolved to local school boards, school councils, and educators at the school level. Sixth, educational decision and policy-making should extend beyond the interests of education professionals to include the interests of business and labor; educational partnerships between governments and business are imperative in restructuring education for economic competitiveness (Manzer, 1994).

In 1993, a policy study of the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning called for accountability through standards and testing for achievement, an increased role of parental and public involvement, curriculum redesign for a focus on knowledge and skills in a technological society, and a shared vision for public education in Ontario. This study initiated an intense debate between organizations including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Council of Canada, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and organizations including teachers' unions and trustees' associations. The debate resulted in some significant compromises and a continued commitment to "person-regarding" education, stressing the growth of students as individuals, as opposed to education concentrating on training for the new global economy (Manzer, 1994).

In 1988, the British Columbia Ministry of Education released *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1988). It introduced a provincial curriculum which recognized the individual needs of students through "differentiated programming" and an integrated curriculum approach for the first four years of elementary school. In high school, students continued to take subjects separately and were required to

take provincial examinations in Grade 12. By 1993, *Year 2000* was the object of much parental and public criticism and was considered a failure because of concerns related to the elementary implementation. Traditional grade letter reporting replaced the *Year 2000* anecdotal assessment approach in elementary schools and, at all levels, a focus on basic skills in the core areas of reading, writing, and mathematics was reintroduced (Manzer, 1994).

In the late 1980s, an increased national view of education emerged with the announcement of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 1989 School Achievement Indicators Project (SAIP) for the annual nationwide evaluation of student performance. This project proposed a focus on educational outcomes, basic knowledge and skills, and established national standards (Dunning, 1997; Manzer, 1994; Wotherspoon, 1998). It was opposed by provincial teachers' unions and the Canadian Teachers Federation on the basis that the national tests did not reflect the curriculum of individual provinces, and that it would potentially encourage either a narrowing of provincial curriculum or a common national curriculum (Manzer, 1994; Robertson & Barlow, 1995). In 1991, Ontario withdrew from participation in the testing program when the provincial government's minister of education agreed that the tests were not based on the provincial curriculum. As a result, in late 1991 the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada reviewed and redefined the SAIP program guidelines. Ontario rejoined the program, but Saskatchewan withdrew, arguing that focusing educational efforts on standardized testing was inappropriate at that time (Manzer, 1994).

The emphasis on basic knowledge and skills and standardized outcomes in education also resulted in initiatives for regional and national curriculum guidelines and standards. For example, in 1993, the four western provinces and two territories proposed the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, the Atlantic provinces began plans for a regional curriculum, and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada initiated the pan-Canadian project for the development of a national science curriculum for all grades in all provinces except Quebec. These curriculum frameworks were intended to provide students across regions and the nation with similar knowledge and skills and a common educational background (Dunning, 1997).

Federal government involvement in Canadian education also increased in the early 1990s. In 1991, the Mulroney government made a commitment to concentrate on education, with specific reference to the importance of educational outcomes. The 1991 *Learning Well...Living Well* (Canada, Prosperity Secretariat, 1991) paper of the federal ministers of industry, science and technology, and employment and immigration advocated that Canadians work towards shared educational goals. The intention was not to interfere with provincial jurisdiction, but to encourage discussion regarding the potential link between education and national prosperity. It pushed for an increase in the level of basic skills as well as an increase in specialized and advanced skills related to science and technology, towards a goal of promoting lifelong learning at home, school, and work (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Manzer, 1994).

Although the attempts at reform in Ontario and British Columbia caused much contention, by the early 1990s, reports such as those written in Ontario in the mood of the Radwanski's initial paper, the *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issues of Dropouts* (Radwanski, 1987), were shelved and, in British Columbia, the *Year 2000* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1988) project was, for all intents and purposes, set aside after periods of favor and disfavor. The most dramatic Canadian educational changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s occurred in New Brunswick and Alberta, where provincial governments were prepared to consistently commit to agendas which emphasized content-oriented education (Manzer, 1994).

In order to reduce educational costs in New Brunswick, the McKenna Liberal government introduced a series of reforms by significantly reducing the number of school districts from 42 to 18. Shortly thereafter, the New Brunswick Commission on Excellence in Education followed this lead to further reduce operating costs and to also strengthen the role of school boards in decision-making and leadership. General funding to education was cut, but funding for special programs was increased. These programs included monitoring student achievement by means of provincial testing in core subject areas at Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 to 12; the restructuring of high school to include Grade 9; and an increased focus on mathematics and science in high school (Manzer, 1994).

In Alberta, secondary education curriculum reforms were underway as early as 1985 with a focus on a content-oriented provincial curriculum. In 1991, the Alberta Department of Education released *Vision for the '90s...A Plan for Action* (Alberta Education, 1991), which initiated policy development and implementation for six purposes: (a) to ensure Alberta educational standards were among the highest in the world, and that the public be informed about these standards and the results achieved at each level; (b) to introduce a results-based common curriculum with specified levels and expectations; (c) to focus on basic skills in all areas; (d) to reduce the dropout rate; (e) to integrate special needs students into regular classrooms; and (f) to enhance science programs for increased achievement, skills, and interest (Manzer, 1994). These initiatives represented only the tip of the iceberg of Alberta's education reform movement. They were a precursor to the massive educational restructuring of the early 1990s, the "most comprehensive changes ever introduced to a provincial education system" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p. 219).

Alberta

Large fiscal surpluses from resource revenues and an expansive provincial government bureaucracy epitomized the high point of an unprecedented economic boom in Alberta during the 1970s. From this high point, the advent of the national and global economic recession of the 1980s saw Albertans take a hard fall. Revenues plummeted as oil and grain prices collapsed, and the provincial government's financial status quickly shifted from a surplus position to a deficit position. By the 1992-1993 fiscal year, increasingly unable to close the gap between revenues and expenditures and having amassed a $3.4 billion deficit, Alberta faced fiscal disaster (Cooper, 1996; Mansell, 1997). In December 1992, Ralph Klein won the Conservative Party leadership to become the Premier of Alberta, and immediately began plans for an aggressive attack on the provincial deficit which involved major budget cuts and massive public sector restructuring. This marked the beginnings of "The Klein Revolution" (Mansell, 1997).

On June 15, 1993, with a mandate to eliminate the deficit within three years, Klein's Conservative government won the provincial election with 44% of the popular vote and a

majority in the legislature. Without delay, Provincial Treasurer Jim Dinning announced that provincial spending would be cut by 20% over the next two years, that there would be no further provincial tax increases, and that an agenda of restructuring for efficiency and accountability would be a government priority (Bruce & Schwartz, 1997; Mansell, 1997). These deficit elimination and restructuring measures were to have a profound effect on education in Alberta.

Anticipating resistance to severe spending cuts, the government's Department of Education, under Minister of Education Halvar Jonson, quickly initiated a consultation process of roundtable meetings and discussions for "obtaining broad-based input into the decision-making process" (Bruce & Schwartz, 1997, p. 385). In October 1993, in addition to two public roundtable gatherings, eight regional meetings brought together stakeholder representatives from school boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, school trustees' organizations, and parents' associations to discuss financial planning for education. As well, the government received thousands of letters and responses to a call for feedback regarding educational change. This input was used to develop a number of recommendations. Bruce and Schwartz (1997) summarized the common themes of these recommendations in two categories: those related to reducing the Department of Education budget, and those related to restructuring the education system.

In terms of budget reduction, spending cuts were recommended, but not to the extent of the originally recommended 20%. It was also recommended that the "over-administered" education system and the number of school boards be reduced, and that support services be contracted out to the private sector. In addition, it was suggested that wages of provincial civil servants be reduced by 5% "across-the-board," and that programs not considered "basic" be eliminated. In terms of restructuring, it was recommended that evaluation of both teachers and students be improved and increased, that education tax inequities be illuminated and reduced, that school councils be implemented for decision-making at the local level, and that education funding be based on a system of "per pupil" grants (Bruce & Schwartz, 1997).

Plans for reform were outlined in the 1994 Alberta Education document, *Meeting the Challenge: The Three-year Business Plan* (Alberta Education, 1994). This document stated that reforms would significantly change the nature of the public education system, and it signalled the beginning of an era in which partnerships between schools and businesses were seen as a means by which competitiveness in a global economy would be ensured (Alberta Education, 1994).

The Three-year Business Plan (Alberta Education, 1994), along with the recommendations from public feedback and the roundtable discussions, resulted in a number of significant initiatives and programs. In January 1994, funding cuts to education were announced at 12.4%, a decrease from the originally proposed 20%. All provincial civil servants were asked to take a voluntary 5% salary rollback to help alleviate the local budget shortfalls that were caused by cuts at the provincial level. The number of school boards was reduced from 141 to approximately 60. Funding support for Early Childhood Services (Kindergarten) was cut from 400 hours (half days throughout the year) to 200 hours. (Due to extreme criticism and public pressure, the 1994/1995 budget restored funding to provide for 240 hours of instruction at the Kindergarten level.) "Block funding" was instituted for instruction, support, and capital budgets so that controls against transferring or moving funds among blocks were in place and, thus, disproportionate cuts to the classroom were prevented. Revenue collection for education was to be centralized by equalizing mill rates across districts and collecting municipal school taxes in a central fund. Subsequently, funds were to be redistributed to school boards based on levels of enrollment, numbers of students in special categories (for example, severely disabled, Native, English as a second language), and transportation costs. School councils consisting of students, parents, community representatives, teachers, and principals were to be formed to allow for local school control and decision-making. Provision for charter schools, an alternative to the public school system, was announced. Site-based management was instituted and schools received a "block" or lump sum for spending within provincial guidelines. Parental choice was promoted through a system where funding "followed" the student, and schools were funded according to the number of students enrolled. Key Performance Indicators were established

to enhance accountability, and schools were required to report information regarding parental satisfaction, student satisfaction, and student results on achievement tests and diploma examinations. Achievement testing was increased to include annual examinations in the Grade 3 core areas of reading, writing, arithmetic, in the Grade 6 and 9 core areas of Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science, and in the Grade 12 core areas of English, Social Studies, Math, and Science (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Bruce & Schwartz, 1997).

The themes of decentralization of governance and devolution of decision-making underlined Alberta's reforms of the early 1990s. Based on the imperative of fiscal responsibility and on the premise that Albertans wanted to be involved in educational decision-making, the implementation of site-based management and the introduction of school councils provided education stakeholders, particularly the principal, more local control over individual schools. In addition, decentralization and devolution were also seen as vehicles by which increased responsibility and accountability would increase student achievement and reduce costs (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Bruce & Schwartz, 1997).

An additional initiative to cut costs and to decentre and devolve control to the school was the dramatic reduction of the total number of school boards in the province by approximately 57%. Through the amalgamation and regionalization of school districts or divisions, a level of administration was restructured and, in many cases, eliminated. The newly formed larger boards included fewer trustees, senior administrators, and division or district office staff. In addition to a reduction in personnel costs, operating and facilities costs were also decreased. With the goals of economy and decentralization at the fore, the provincial Department of Education also closed two major regional offices and significantly reduced the number of staff in remaining department facilities (Bruce & Schwartz, 1997; Gallagher, 1995).

Another important theme underlining the 1990s education reforms was "school choice." This involved two major initiatives. First, by providing funding that "followed" the student, parents were able to send their child to the school of their choice. Second, the provision for charter schools allowed interested individuals or groups the right to establish their own

schools independent of local public school board authority and control but within provincial guidelines and supported by provincial funding (Wotherspoon, 1998). These initiatives were based on the premise that the introduction of competition in the public school system would encourage innovation and responsiveness at the school level (Bruce & Schwartz, 1997; Robertson & Barlow, 1995).

Summary

Whitty et al. (1998) suggested that an analysis of the reforms of various Western nations reveals "little doubt that some countries are having to respond to similar pressures and [are] introducing education policies which look remarkably alike" (p. 6). Whitty et al. (1998) cautioned that we must "be especially careful about using the experience of one context and applying it to others" (p. 7), and that we must not compare the reforms of countries without considering the "working out of those tendencies in very different social and cultural contexts," (p. 7) the "different origins and antecedents" (p. 9), and the "complex combinations" (p. 9) of the reforms. However, Whitty et al. (1998) did suggest that a cross-national comparative analysis helps to address the "question of the extent to which the emergence of similar policies may be interpreted as a universalizing tendency in educational reform, articulating with a specific ideological standpoint or a set of identifiable political and economic conditions" (p. 8). With this in mind, the following summary identifies some general parallels and striking similarities in the reform trends and initiatives of the countries examined.

To begin, without exception, the reform movements of the 1980s and early 1990s in England and Wales, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada were initiated in reaction to the increasing pressure on these nations to compete in a global economy. More specifically, all of these countries experienced restructuring in education as a result of concerns over one or both of the alleged undesirable legacies of education of the 1960s and 1970s: First was the perception that schools had failed to produce students able to consistently rank among the world's best in international performance tests, or that schools had not prepared students for a highly challenging and competitive job market. Second was

the perception that centralized school bureaucracies had become inefficient and ineffective, top heavy and self-serving.

These concerns resulted in a range and variety of reform initiatives, but what was most common to the experiences of all countries was the strong tendency to restructure education for accountability. To some degree in all countries examined, accountability was to be achieved by decentralizing the control and administration of education to the school. Decentralization was intended to allow those at the local level the authority and latitude necessary to tailor schooling to the needs of the community and, in addition, was to be coupled with the introduction of competition in education through market principals, specifically in terms of choice. Initiatives such as voucher funding and charter and alternative schools were to increase choice and, therefore, promote accountability and responsiveness through competition.

Decentralization of school governance was also intended to devolve control over decision-making and, therefore, give greater independence to those at the local level - parents, students, educators, and business and community members. However, without exception in the countries studied, while schools were given greater autonomy, central control was strengthened to ensure the primary objective of accountability. Monitoring and measuring effectiveness became key to the reforms of all of the countries examined, and initiatives for common curricula focusing on core subject areas and established levels and objectives for measuring competency were adopted. This was also accompanied by an increase in common or standardized achievement testing and, in some cases more than others, the publication of test results in documents such as England's league tables. In England and Wales, the United States, and New Zealand, accountability also resulted in an heightened focus on teaching, either in terms of increased standards for training and qualification, or in terms of a concentration on supervision and inspection.

Thus, while central bureaucracies were dismantled and varying degrees of self-governance and autonomy were achieved through devolution and decentralization, there remained significant central control over accountability and over monitoring the achievement and effectiveness of schools. On one level, this arrangement honored choice and community

participation in education but, ironically, on another level it actually limited freedom and independence. According to Knight et al. (1993), educational autonomy had "more to do with means than with ends" (p. 4). Accountability required that clearly articulated outcomes be expected, and it was merely the means to achieve the outcomes over which those at the school level were given authority and control (Angus, 1995; Knight et al., 1993; Whitty et al., 1998). Referred to as a "loose-tight" coupling by Knight et al.(1993), this contradiction was at the heart of the reforms for accountability in all countries examined, and remains a central point of contention underlying educational change in Western nations.

The Public Education Debate

The educational reforms of Western nations in the 1980s and early 1990s were informed and influenced by an extensive and impassioned debate. This public education debate was not only the focus of much international policy analysis, it was also a subject of contention in the public forum. Newspapers and magazines featuring articles on the state of public education regularly appeared on newsstands, and books on the topic of education reform became bestsellers (Webb, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1998). The intensity of the debate was indicative of the societal importance placed on public education. Wotherspoon (1998) commented: "Whatever positions are advocated, widespread concern clearly exists over the necessity to maintain an accessible, equitable system of quality education in the face of significant social and economic changes" (p. 196).

The Failed School and the Public Education Crisis

The public education debate began in the early 1980s and was marked by a resounding proclamation: Public schools had failed and education was in crisis (Bloom, 1987; Bennett, 1988; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1991; Freedman 1995a; Gerstner, Semerad, Doyle, & Johnston, 1994; Hirsch, 1987; Lawton, 1995; Ravitch & Finn, 1987). This charge came from all fronts - parents, the general public, the media, businesses and corporations, and politicians - and resulted in a significant movement to rethink and reshape education (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Berliner, 1993a, 1993b; Bracey, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996; Henig, 1994; Kincheloe, 1993a). By the late 1980s,

response to the charge of the failed school was forthcoming. This rebuttal asserted that the public education crisis was a myth, fallacy, or hoax, deliberately endorsed by right-wing capitalists and politicians who had vested interests in reforms that supported a market economy or that preserved a traditional Western, white, and middle-class way of life. Leading the opposition to the charge of the failed school in the United States were authors such as Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), Bracey (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995), and Berliner (1993a, 1993b) and, in Canada, Barlow and Robertson (1994).

Bracey (1995) and Berliner (1993a) identified Bestor's (1953) *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* as the root of current perceptions of the ineptitude of public education: "The crest has never really receded. Baby-boomers have never heard anything except that the schools are failing" (Bracey, 1995, p. 159). Bracey (1995) and Berliner (1993a) also referred to the considerable influence of the Reagan administration's document, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983): "From 1983 on this nation has been told relentlessly by its leaders that we are a nation at risk because our schools and our teachers have failed us" (Berliner, 1993a, p. 38). In addition, Berliner (1993a) pointed to Ravitch and Finn's (1987) *What Our 17-Year-Olds Know*, Hirsch's (1987) *Cultural Literacy*, and Bloom's (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind* as being highly influential. According to Berliner (1993a), these works fueled the onslaught of criticism of public education and its teachers, and created a "nation at risk" panic. The authors of these books, among other American editorial writers, presented a bleak picture of doom which would inevitably result if the "halcyon days" and "old ways" (Berliner, 1995, p. 16) of a past America were not returned to.

According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), Ball (1998), Barlow and Robertson (1994), Bracey (1995), and Berliner (1993a), schools have undeservedly become the scapegoat for critics who are searching for something upon which to place the blame for societal and economic ills. Indeed, these authors claimed that the criticism of schools has become more of a cultural pastime, tradition, or cliché than a sound assessment based on evidence or data. Barlow and Robertson (1994) pointed to what they term "the politics of blame," explaining that the failure of public education has become "a given, a convenient

explanation for a host of late-twentieth-century events and anxieties" (p. 38). This, they asserted, is due to poorly conducted or misrepresented research and, perhaps, the result of "a consciously orchestrated campaign, a strategy with well-articulated goals, an agenda with a purpose" (p. 41). As such, Barlow and Robertson (1994) argued that the perpetuation of fallacies or misconceptions has been an effort in the interests of ultraconservative, right-wing corporations who have convinced the public that the threat of global competition renders the market ideals of business the only appropriate approach to educational reform.

Disillusionment and cynicism have left the American public ready and willing to accept, without question, the criticisms of public education (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Bracey, 1995). Barlow and Robertson (1994) acknowledged the popular perception that "things are not right at school" and suggested that, in the absence of alternative prospects for improvement, the public response is to willingly "accept the corporate diagnosis: schools are failing because they are monopolies exempt from competition. The remedy? Force schools to act like businesses and things will turn around" (pp. 1-2). Further, Barlow and Robertson (1994) argued that the perceived crisis has conveniently played into the hands of those for whom the vulnerability and concern of the public is advantageous:

> It is not surprising that such parents are open to critiques of education that appropriate their anxieties; moreover, many parents, too uncomfortable or busy to confront their schools directly, are more than happy to have business and the media do it for them. Parents with little awareness of the education interests of large corporations can be persuaded that business speaks for little Johnny's future as much as for the interests of profit. (p. 9)

Barlow and Robertson (1994), Bracey (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996), and Berliner (1993a, 1993b) suggested that media bias affirms the cynicism and criticism and sustains the "myths and hoaxes" (Bracey, 1995, p. 149) of the educational catastrophe. Data, in particular standardized tests scores, collected from studies are often misinterpreted and misreported in the media. These data become cause for widespread alarm when it suggests, in any way, that schools are failing. Ironically, however, data which casts schools in a favorable light is generally ignored. Barlow and Robertson (1994), Bracey (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996) and Berliner's (1993a, 1993b) efforts focused on presenting facts

and evidence and on reinterpreting data to counter incorrect assumptions and perceptions, particularly in cases where data were said to substantiate the relationship between student performance and the national economy and global competitiveness.

Barlow and Robertson (1994), Bracey (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996), and Berliner (1993a, 1993b) argued that the claims against the public education system do not stand up. Berliner (1993a) warned that any reforms based on incorrect assumptions and misinterpreted data will only serve to encourage disparity between schools districts. Moreover, he argued that educational change should not focus on issues such as "national tests, higher standards, increased accountability, or better math and science achievement" (Berliner, 1993b, p. 640) - issues which respond to the pressures of technological and economic competitiveness in a global marketplace. Rather, he proposed that attention be turned to issues of social concern, such as job creation, improved and increased provision of health care, reduction of family and neighborhood violence, and increased funding for day care, bilingual education, and youth programs.

The Debate

Although the accusations of the failed school and the alleged education crisis can be seen as the impetus or the catalyst of the public education debate, a closer look at the underlying issues of the opposing sides of the debate and at the philosophical perspectives of those involved is necessary. According to Berthelot (1995), the debate around recent educational reform has been influenced by two distinct ideologies or social visions, which have pitted "free market advocates" against "defenders of democracy" (p. 23). Carnoy and Levin (1985) framed the contradictory perspectives of the debate as "capitalist imperatives" opposing "democratic imperatives." Apple (1993) suggested that the ideological tensions of the debate can be seen between "property rights" and "person rights," or in terms of "the private" versus "the public." Ball (1994) referred to the work of Nagel (1991) to discuss the opposing sides of the debate as the "personal standpoint" and the "impersonal standpoint," and Goodlad (1997) discussed the contradictions in terms of "private purpose" and "common good." Giroux (1993) suggested that the debate lies between the realm of "values

and politics" and the realm of "management and economics," and Webb (1993) suggested that the discordant views of "power elite" positions and "pluralist" positions heighten the tension.

Wotherspoon (1998) cautioned that opposing or contending visions or perspectives for educational reforms are highly complex and should not be reduced to a simplistic polarization or dichotomy of opposing rights or imperatives. However, he also argued that there is a strong relationship between the tensions that underscore and drive both the educational debate and the dynamics that play out in the social, political, and economic context within which education operates. Thus, the debate analogy can serve as a helpful organizational framework under which the opposition, contradictions, and tensions of education reform topics such as increased choice, participation, accountability, and new structures for governance and finance can be examined (Berthelot, 1995; Wotherspoon, 1998).

The New Right

According to critics such as Apple (1993), Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), Brown, Halsey, Lauder and Wells (1997), and Knight et al. (1993), those who have advocated for economic or market imperatives or who have taken a traditionalist or conservative stance in the public education debate can be considered of the "New Right." Wotherspoon (1998) described the New Right as a broad movement "supporting principles of market-driven free enterprise, opposing State regulation, cynical about State officials, and fearful about loss of authority, tradition, and standards in personal and public life" (p. 198). He explained that the New Right does not operate as a united force or entity; rather, he suggested it is best understood as an "amalgam of disparate forces such as the pro-family movement, business lobbyists, opponents of the welfare state, neo-liberal and neo-conservation groups, and other populist forces that seek a return to 'traditional' values" (p. 198).

Whitty (1997) suggested that the New Right can be seen as a coalition of neo-conservative factions of contemporary conservatism and neo-liberal advocates of market forces. Although New Right manifestations vary somewhat between and within Western

nations, it has become recognized that the New Right represents a dominant perspective, and that "current ideological debates are deployed upon a terrain whose features generally favour aspects of New Right views and practices" (Knight et al., 1993). According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), the New Right has taken the initiative in the public education debate and has put progressives and liberals on the defensive.

In understanding the public education debate, it is important to analyze what have come to be seen as the two dominant ideologies or perspectives of the New Right: neo-conservatism and the neo-liberalism. It is helpful to first consider the neo-conservative position and to examine perspectives which oppose this stance and, second, to consider the neo-liberal position and its respective opposition.

The Neo-conservative Position

On the New Right side of the public education debate, neo-conservatism, which endorses social traditionalism - the popular values of the work ethic, law and order, morality, and the preservation of the family and church (McBride & Shields, 1993) - has represented a strong position. In the United States, for example, supported by documents such as *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and armed with the assertion that schools were failing and that students were not able to demonstrate competency in core subject areas, neo-conservative reformers pressed for the reduction of curricula to areas of basic or "common essential" learning (Wotherspoon, 1998). In addition, these critics argued for defined measures for specified learning standards in order to better determine achievement and appropriate placement in education programs, and to increase scrutiny and control of education and learners. Specifically, these recommendations were meant to ensure that students were able to "demonstrate recall of information that was determined by the reformers to be essential for cultural literacy, the socialization of American students, and the reproduction of the dominant values of American society" (Slattery, 1995, p. 42).

Neo-conservative arguments also included the assertion that governments should not and could not afford to continue to support a wide range of public sector programs when

such initiatives where targeted at what were considered special interest groups. Affirmative action, multicultural education, English as a second language (ESL), education equity, and inclusive curricula programs were areas identified by neo-conservatives as "frills" that were "costly , socially divisive, and counterproductive to educational needs in a highly competitive economic environment" (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 161).

Even more forceful than the argument for cost effectiveness was the neo-conservative call for education that fosters certain values or "cultural preferences" (Whitty, 1998, p. 38). A recurring theme of neo-conservative pressure groups was disdain for the liberal-progressive ideologies and reform movements of the 1960s and 1970s which were seen to be responsible for the decline of public education. Neo-conservatives advocated a return to traditional Christian, family, or American values in schooling, and for a "back-to-the-basics" concentration on prescribed content-based curriculum including clearly measurable standards for assessment. These objectives were to increase student performance and preparedness for a highly competitive economy and, moreover, were to promote a common and shared set of understandings and a body of knowledge for increased patriotism and the revitalization of a strong national identity (Whitty, 1997, 1998). Neo-conservative arguments were based on a commitment to the ideals of morality, truth, and tradition. Particularly representative of the neo-conservative stance were critics such as the Hillgate Group (1987) in Great Britain, Bennett (1988), Bloom (1987), Finn (1991), Hirsch (1987), and Ravitch and Finn (1987) in the United States, and Nikoforuk (1993) in Canada.

In England, the national curriculum reform of the 1980s was influenced by consistent pressure for schools to focus on British history, British geography and English literature. The Hillgate Group (1987), a highly regarded research organization, wary of pressure for a multicultural curriculum, recommended that traditional values of Western and British culture not be disregarded "for the sake of a misguided relativism, or out of a misplaced concern for those who might not yet be aware of its strengths and weaknesses" (cited in Whitty, 1998, p.38). Reform initiatives for a common, centralized curricula resulted in order to cultivate and regulate the values of self and nationhood which were alleged to have been threatened (Whitty, 1998, p. 79).

In the United States, Hirsch (1987) suggested that in recent decades Americans have not promoted the teaching of specific knowledge and that schools have focused on content-neutral and fragmented curricula. Central to Hirsch's argument was that there is a lack of shared knowledge or that a body of foundational information common to all Americans does not exist. This, he suggested, has resulted in the decline of national literacy. Claiming that a literate culture is the "only available ticket to full citizenship"(p. 22), Hirsch proposed education for "cultural literacy" on the premise that the connection between mainstream culture and the national written language "justifies calling mainstream culture *the* basic culture of the nation" (p. 22). With this understanding of cultural literacy, Hirsch argued for traditional curriculum content as opposed to "disorderly, uncertain, and fragmented education" (p. 126). He suggested that the curriculum reforms of cultural literacy be based on "traditional literate knowledge, the information, attitudes, and assumptions that literate Americans share" (p. 127). Specifically, Hirsch advocated for an intensive curriculum of prescribed content, based predominantly on the "classics" of American and Western literature and history for the promotion of a common intellectual and moral heritage. Reforms such as these, he asserted, are a "welcome course correction" indicative of the "good sense of the American people" (p. 125).

Ravitch and Finn (1987) suggested that the initial reforms of the early 1980s resulted in a strengthened focus on academics and basic skills. This, they argued, was appropriate; however, they felt that while emphasis was being placed on the subject areas of math and science because of the obvious utilitarian value in their link to jobs and careers, for example, in engineering and technical fields, attention to the humanities was lacking - not simply in terms of English and Social Studies but, specifically, in terms of the traditional subject areas of literature and history. Echoing Hirsch's (1987) position, Ravitch and Finn (1987) suggested that this was of particular concern since the move of the 1960s away from the "classics" and from a concentration on American and world history had resulted in a "cafeteria-style" curriculum, consisting of the "written equivalent of junk food" (p. 11). They advocated for a content-based curriculum returning to "superior" historical and literary texts, arguing that this type of curriculum, offered from early grades, fosters an

understanding in young people about how the culture was formed and shaped and about which writers redefined and influenced it, thereby changing the way the nation and its citizens see themselves. Ravitch and Finn believed that the "old tradition" taught students the importance of "who we were as a people, what battles we had fought, [and] what self-knowledge we had gained" (p. 11) in a way that was much more appropriate than the "concepts" presently taught in social studies classes or the "language arts" presently taught in English classes.

Finn (1991) and former Secretary of Education for the Reagan administration, Bennett (1988), invoked the words of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) to suggest, as Ravitch and Finn (1987) and Hirsch (1987) had, that the school curriculum had been homogenized, diluted, and fragmented. Similar to Ravitich and Finn (1987), they also argued for a return to content with a focus on the American literary tradition. According to Bennett (1988), "at present American education is long on technique and short on tradition" (p. 16). Finn (1991) wrote: "Today we want evidence of learning, not just of teaching. We look at outcomes. Unsatisfactory results were what led the Excellence Commission to exclaim that we were threatened by a 'rising tide of mediocrity'"(p. 3). Finn opposed the "student-centered curriculum" and the "educational relativism" (p. 3) of progressive education movements, and argued for standards in a content-based curriculum. He called for a "no frills," basic educational program and a system of free choice so that students could attend public or nonpublic schools by means of voucher funding.

According to Bennett (1988), a return to the traditional texts and literature of the nation as advocated by Finn (1991), Hirsch (1987), and Ravitich and Finn (1987), would also promote the teaching of character and values. Arguing that the decline of the traditional American family has the potential to be the greatest threat to the nation's children, Bennett (1988) pointed to specific texts of moral stories, historical events, and famous lives. He suggested that these texts, taught in a certain sequence throughout a student's school life, would teach ideals and convictions through value "authorities" (p. 18). These authorities would also be reflected in principals and teachers "who know the difference between right

and wrong, good and bad, and who themselves exemplify high moral purpose" (p. 18). Bennett argued that it is through the Western historical and literary texts that we come to understand the social, political, and intellectual story of Western civilization, the basis of American democratic life. According to Bennett, these texts instill a sense of history and, therefore, develop good citizenship based on "common principles, common memories, and common language in which to discuss our common affairs. Our common language is of course, English" (p. 180). He offered the following advice: "As we strive for success in the future, let us first look to our past, to the values we share in common, and let us remain true to that past and those values" (p. 56).

In response to what he saw as the widespread frustration of parents in realizing that children are not learning enough or that, in school, students are unlearning the important lessons they are taught at home, Bennett (1988) also argued for parental choice in and between public and private school systems. Accountability would be promoted in the public system "through instruments of choice - instruments that will, in turn, enable parents to fulfill *their* responsibility for their children's education" (p. 21). Bennett argued that competition would eliminate discrimination by encouraging responsiveness and, therefore, promote school success. Bennett's concept of success required that schools have six essential attributes. The first of these attributes is good principals who stress the second attribute, discipline. The third attribute is good teachers of sound character who are content specialists able to communicate with students. The fourth attribute is high expectations and high standards, and the fifth is parental and community involvement. The sixth and most important attribute, Bennett argued, is a positive school climate. In addition, successful schools would focus on what he considered the fundamental principles of education reform: achievement, assessment, and accountability for results.

Bloom's (1987) arguments supported the neo-conservative positions of Finn (1991), Hirsch (1987), and Ravitch and Finn (1987), and his recommendations were particularly akin to Bennett's (1988) focus on American values. Bloom advocated for an education of moral virtue and a curriculum that produces a "certain kind of human being" (p. 26), supportive of a democracy where citizens are "truly brothers" (p. 27). He argued that "the recent

education of openness has rejected all that. It pays no attention to natural rights or the historical origins of our regime, which are now thought to have been essentially flawed and regressive. It is progressive and forward-looking" (p. 27). He continued by suggesting that educational "openness" embraces all kinds of men, all kinds of lives, and all kinds of ideologies and, although he did not suggest that this is necessarily undesirable, he posed the following question: "But when there are no shared goals or vision of the public good, is the social contract any longer possible?" (p. 27). Bloom argued that liberalism and "openness" have eroded the dominant American culture "with its traditions, its literature, its tastes, its special claim to know and supervise the language, and its Protestant religions" (p. 31). Further, he contended that "much of the intellectual machinery of twentieth-century American political thought and social science was constructed for the purposes of making an assault on the majority" (p. 31). Bloom argued that students have been taught to accept that truth is relative, ethnocentrism is undesirable, and that it is undemocratic to be critical and judgmental. He proposed that schooling and curricula concentrate on American history and American heroes and promote cultural heritage as a way of instilling the values needed in a good society which preserves the American way of life.

In Canada, Nikiforuk (1993) represented a neo-conservative stance not unlike that of Bennett (1988), Bloom (1987), Finn (1991), Hirsch (1987), and Ravitch and Finn (1987). He argued for a "back-to-the-basics" reform project promoting the ideals of democracy in education. To begin, he claimed:

> North America's educational system has fallen from grace, not with an angelic flutter but with a thud. If the U.S. school system resembles a homeless beggar on the streets of New York, Canada's counterpart defensively limps along in a state of humiliation and confusion. Our schools are far from what people expect them to be. (p. xi)

Nikiforuk (1993) did not advocate the destruction of the present system for one of vouchers or the "vague and vain requirements" (p. xii) of global competitiveness; rather, he called for the restoration of the "purpose and clarity to what was once a noble idea: schooling on common ground for the common good" (p. xii). According to Nikiforuk, the catastrophe in public education can be attributed to the intentions of John Dewey, whose progressive education philosophy has been misconstrued by today's educators to include the

study of any subject in the pursuit of self-realization and a life of social change. Nikiforuk believed this "anti-intellectualism" (p. 31) has led to the "pollution of the school day with often mindless activities" (p. 26), to the "dumbing of texts" and a "debasement" of school readers (pp. 31-33), to a dominance of images that has "diluted reading classes and overpowered instruction" (p. 35), to an "abandonment of literacy," which stands to be central to the destruction of western civilization (pp. 36-37), to writing which has been, in many schools, "reduced...to the keeping of journals in which students 'discover' themselves or 'explore a subject'" (p. 37), to science which focuses on experiential learning for "'science appreciation' rather than building knowledge" (p. 40), to math teaching "fixed in a maddening spiral curriculum that repeats topics *ad nauseam* from year to year" (p. 43) and, finally, to a system that results in "dramatic social results, but not the kind any true democrat could admire" (p. 49). According to Nikiforuk, schools that spend most of the day "educating for living" - encouraging students to think about global peace, media literacy, and values clarification - engender predictably idiotic results" (p. 49).

Nikiforuk (1993) offered some suggestions for escaping what he terms the "tragedy of the commons." He argued that schools should (a) focus on teaching and learning, (b) assign regular and meaningful homework, (c) provide an environment of order and safety, (d) boast assertive, on-the-spot leadership, (e) be accountable to parents and students, and (f) employ dedicated, "good" teachers who believe that they have failed if the minimum mastery of a subject has not been achieved by even one student (pp. 85-88). Nikiforuk also called for educators to develop manifestos of guiding principles, but only after agreeing to:

> end the lie and admit that they have largely failed in the performance of their duties; that the progressive experiment has robbed children, particularly poor children, of a proper education in a democratic society; that child-centred schooling has created a generation of self-centred narcissists; and that our schools operate as fiefdoms unaccountable to the communities that fund them. (p. 93)

Nikiforuk argued that no worthwhile reform will happen unless "educators stop using the schools to promote their own welfare and careers and recognize that their first duty is to serve the public interest" (p. 94).

Opposition to the Neo-conservative Position

Authors such as Apple (1993), Aronowitz and Giroux (1991, 1993), Giroux (1993), Kincheloe (1993a, 1993b), Webb (1993), and Greene (1993) have responded to the arguments of the neo-conservative faction of the New Right. They have suggested that the newly popular conservative point of view is unfounded in its charges that the progressive educational reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s has produced a crisis in education and has contributed to the decline of economy and civilization in Western nations. They argued that the works of those such as Bennett (1988), Bloom (1987), Finn (1991), Hirsch (1987), Nikiforuk (1993), Ravitch and Finn (1987), and the Hillgate Group (1987) serve to promote and privilege the dominant white, male, capitalist, Eurocentric ideologies of Western nations. They argued for opposition to what they consider the repressive right-wing ideals of a definitive "Tradition" and a definitive "Truth."

According to Aronowtiz and Giroux (1993), the views of the new conservative reformers have very little to do with a pursuit of the American ideals of social equality and justice. They have suggested that the strength of the neo-conservatives "lies in their bold invocation of morality in education, their hubris that declares they know what truth and the good life really are" (p. 17). Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) argued that neo-conservative reformers attempt to hang on to modernist educational values - "back-to-the-basics" and "classical" curriculum, morality, and a traditional view of democracy - out of anxiety and uncertainty. The views of the neo-conservatives represent those of the "critic who fears the indeterminacy of the future and who, in an attempt to escape the messy web of everyday life, purges the past of its contradictions, its paradoxes, and ultimately, of its injustices" (p. 52). Avoided are the "disquieting, disrupting, interrupting" (p. 52) problems of the present: sexism, racism, and class exploitation. According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1993), neo-conservative ideology ignores the "complexity, terror, and possibilities of the present" (p. 52), and presents an obstacle in the quest for a collective future founded on democratic possibilities.

Kincheloe (1993a) echoed the views of Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) in suggesting that neo-conservative reformers are misguided in their efforts. He argued that the crisis of

education is not the result of a failure to teach "Tradition" or a negligence in preparing students for the workplace, nor is the solution to the crisis increasing standardized test scores and teaching facts about civilization for rote memorization. Rather, Kincheloe (1993a), along with other critical theorists (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Giroux, 1993; Greene, 1993; McLaren, 1993), urged schools to "help students develop wisdom - i.e., the cognitive ability and the contextual grounding to make intelligent choices and commitments in the way they shape their lives" (Kincheloe, 1993a, pp. 16-17). These aims, he asserted, are not addressed by the rhetoric put forth by neo-conservative reformers.

The Neo-liberal Position

In addition to the position of the neo-conservatives of the New Right, the neo-liberals of the New Right have also presented a particularly strong position in the public education debate. To begin, neo-liberalism, built on the classical liberal notions of individualism and choice, endorses values of competition, the free market, and capitalism. It purports that "economic and social renewal does not depend on state-led initiatives or changes to the underlying structures of society in terms of class, patriarchy, or racism, but on the changing incentives for individuals" (Brown et al., 1997, p. 21). Neo-liberalism argues that the development of a culture of individual enterprise will ensure economic success in a new economy, and reform for global competitiveness will be achieved through deregulation for the purpose of releasing market forces (Brown et al., 1997).

In terms of education, the primary neo-liberal policy has been to introduce market competition to all education sectors. Brown et al. (1997) suggested that this has taken the form of three trends. The first trend necessitates the devolution and decentralization of control over finances and policy to the level of the individual institution in order that public schools become, in effect, self-managing businesses. This trend is based on the argument that once a market system is introduced to education, the competition between schools will result in increased standards or, conversely, will cause schools to close down as a result of the inability to attract and keep "clients" or "customers." The second trend is to educational "quality," and is based on the assumption that improving the quality of education by

increasing the educational standards for all students is determined by the effectiveness of a school's management and teachers. The third trend involves parental choice, and assumes that the incentives for schools - the desire to attract and maintain student enrollment - and the incentives for parents and students - the opportunity to select and remain in schools of their choice - will increase responsiveness, accountability and, therefore, student achievement and opportunity.

Furthering the original arguments of Friedman (1962), the most influential of those taking the neo-liberal stance in the public education debate were a group of American critics lead by authors such as Chubb and Moe (1990), Boaz (1991), Gerstner et al. (1994), and Gintis (1994). Neo-liberal arguments have also been offered by Tooley (1994) in Great Britain, and by Lawton (1995) and Freedman (1995a, 1995b) in Canada. These authors have advocated for a free or quasi-market system of choice in education, arguing that private property rights include the right of individuals to engage with others to obtain or offer goods or services without the interference of third parties: "Markets in education would require effective 'demand' from the 'consumers' (through having money or vouchers to pay for education); and a reasonable diverse 'supply' side of schools and other educational opportunities" (Tooley, 1994, p. 139).

Chubb and Moe (1990), Boaz (1991), and Gerstner et al. (1994) have based their assertions on the premise that schools are failing in their academic purpose, particularly in the subject areas of math, science, and foreign languages which are "crucial to a future of sophisticated technology and international competition" (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p. 1) and, moreover, that schools lack mechanisms for self-renewal. Unlike businesses or other institutions "that are periodically forced to respond to new technologies, new demands from their markets, or the obsolescence of products, no external forces have demanded that schools change" (Gerstner et al., 1994, p. 11).

American economists Chubb and Moe (1990) did not advocate for privatization, per se; they argued for radical, transformational reform in public education that embraces the institutional market features of private organizations - decentralization, competition, and choice. They proposed a new public system of "democratic choice." In this system,

governments would still have a role in providing funding, approving applications for new schools, regulating the choice process, gathering comprehensive information about schools, providing transportation to students, supervising and monitoring so that laws and guidelines are followed, and developing and administering tests of student performance. School districts would continue to collect local taxes and would have the option of operating their own schools. However, the important difference would lay in the control of the schools themselves. Authority would be withdrawn from those who previously held it, and would be given to educators, parents, and students. Schools would operate autonomously, governing themselves according to their own goals, programs, and methods. School organizations would develop their own constitutions, and would select their student bodies and their personnel. Through a system where funding for a child would be provided by the state to parents in the form of a credit voucher, parents and students would be empowered, by law, to choose among alternatives, and would be assisted by institutions and structures aimed at promoting fairness, participation and involvement, and informed decision-making.

Chubb and Moe (1990) and Boaz (1991) suggested that an educational market of competition and profit motives would lead to greater quality and efficiency. It would also eliminate the monopoly control of education which is to blame for unresponsiveness and indifference to the needs of students, and for stagnation in the method and content of instruction. Schools not able to survive the competition in a market system of choice would, quite simply, cease to exist.

American economist, Gintis (cited in Glass, 1994), took a position less extreme than the more radical choice plans of Chubb and Moe (1990) and Boaz (1991). He argued for the introduction of the element of competition in education, but proposed a system of "market socialism" (p. 5). He suggested that there is room within a capitalist system for an approach which "differs from capitalism in not promoting private ownership of productive capital" (p. 4). Market socialism accepts market competition "on a level playing field" wherein "the state intervenes to constitute rules of the game favorable to growth, equity, environmental stability, etc." (p. 3). Competition was seen, by Gintis, as necessary and desirable in a system which includes "a good deal of both competition and democracy" (p. 6).

Gintis (cited in Glass, 1994) advocated for an economic model for education to enforce educational accountability, responsiveness, flexibility, and creativity through the introduction of competition which would give communities, parents, and entrepreneurs control of educational resources, encourage diversity in school choice, allow parents, as agents for their children, to choose schools suitable to their needs and values. Gintis promoted a type of "egalitarian, democratic voucher system" (p. 6) in which adequately funded "full" vouchers would be allotted equally to all children, with adjustments for children with special needs. In this way, communities could set up their own schools and schools would be forced to stay competitive and accountable to the parents and students they serve. In addition, this system would be highly regulated by carefully constructed rules, regulations, accreditation procedures, and standardized tests. Gintis promoted such reform as a feasible alternative in a time requiring "iconoclasts" and "brainstormers" who are willing to give competition in education a chance (p. 32).

From a Canadian perspective, in many ways Lawton's (1995) arguments can be seen as a counterpart to those of Chubb and Moe (1990), Boaz (1991), and Gintis (cited in Glass, 1994). Lawton (1995) built a case for an educational market based on public choice theory, which argues that "consumers, in spending money, are presumed to maximize - or try to maximize - their personal satisfaction" (p. 49), and on agency theory, wherein the consumer "contracts with a second person or group, the agent, to provide some good or service" and the agent, likewise, is "free to contract the best price for his services" (p. 51-54). Lawton did not specifically argue for a full free market in education, but rather he argued for "market-like exchanges" (p. 14). He suggested that "competition, choice, alternatives, experimentation, survival and growth - or rejection and decline - are part of this new approach that we need to breathe both dynamism and meaning into education" (p. 14).

Though a proponent of charter schools rather than of a voucher system, Lawton's (1995) arguments for public education reform are very similar to those of Chubb and Moe (1990) and Boaz (1991) in two important ways. First, Lawton (1995) argued for a free-market more responsive to parents and students as consumers. Through the competition and choice of a system of charter schools, parents are empowered "to realize their own

values in the education of their children" (p. 83). Second, he argued that the bureaucracy of present public education institutions has hindered and interfered with education: "From kindergartens to graduate schools, administrative hierarchies and organized unions rule over government-granted monopolies, endowed with subsidies our country can no longer afford. Educational systems must be reinvented for the next century" (p. 13).

Lawton's (1995) position was strongly supported by Freedman (1995a) who also agreed with the claims of Chubb and Moe (1990) and Boaz (1991) regarding the current state of public education: "The system itself is a good part of the problem.... The current public education monopoly must be opened to new dynamics" (p. 133). Freedman (1995a) concurred with Lawton (1995) in what he argued is Canada's serious and persistent problem with educational quality, and he suggested that the economic concerns of globalization should be a driving factor in educational reform.

Freedman (1995a), a proponent of charter schools, saw Lawton's (1995) advocacy of the charter school idea as a "gentler, safer concept" (p. 136) than the voucher system advocated by Chubb and Moe (1990). He suggested that charter schools would allow the public system to remain largely intact, but would encourage a much needed catalyst for choice and diversity. According to Freedman (1995b), charter schools would be successful by revoking the "exclusive franchise from school boards, creating choice for parent clients, providing a focus on outcomes, establishing real autonomy through school status as a legal entity, and creating genuine accountability through the threat of school closure or loss of teaching position" (p. 40).

Businessmen Gerstner et al. (1994) agreed with Chubb and Moe (1990), Boaz (1991), Lawton (1995), and Freedman (1995b): Schools must reform radically to "meet change, or fold" (Gerstner et al., 1994, p. 14). However, Gerstner et al. (1994) envisioned the full embodiment of entrepreneurial and business ideals in education, arguing for market principles to an even greater degree than recommended by choice advocates such as Chubb and Moe (1990), Boaz (1991), Gintis, Lawton (1995), and Freedman (1995a, 1995b). According to Gerstner et al. (1994), restructuring would incorporate the techniques and disciplines of business to enable schools to adapt to change and continually improve through

responsiveness and accountability to "customers." These strategies, they argued, have had unquestionable success in the business world and, therefore, are appropriate for education. By making schools more businesslike and results-oriented, quality education can be achieved.

Specifically, Gerstner et al. (1994) envisioned a system of standards and measures for accountability including standardized tests "worth teaching to" (p. 265). In addition, restructuring would involve radical decentralization of control to the principal who would have the freedom and authority to lead according to his or her educational vision and an established set of clearly measurable goals. Principals would also have complete control over budgets, spending, and staffing. Teachers, directly responsible for the production of "human capital" (p. 265), would be pivotal to a school's performance and success and, as such, would be hired by school leaders based on demonstrated teaching ability. Teachers would not be licensed, but would be certified by national competency-based standards. Students would be "workers - engaged, enthusiastic, and hard-working" (p. 256) - and would be involved, along with school personnel and parents, in setting performance goals for the school.

The "public-sector market mechanisms" Gerstner et al. (1994) advocated would serve the same function as they do in the private sector by "sending signals about good and bad practice; rewarding success; penalizing failure; guaranteeing the sovereignty of the customer; and providing a continuing responsibility to benchmark" (p. 273). Benchmarking, key to Gerstner et al.'s (1994) understanding of quality education, "requires merciless and regular self-examination; it requires providers to meet the needs and demands of the customer; it sets the stage for fruitful, not invidious, comparison" (p. 273).

Opposition to the Neo-liberal Position

Opposing the position of the neo-liberal reformers in the public education debate is the position that argues against the economic rationalist approach of introducing market forces to education. This position calls for educational reform based on the ideals of democracy: liberty, justice, equity, and equality.

Policy analysts such as Ball (1990, 1994), Brown (1997), Henig (1994), Lauder (1997), Olssen (1997), Thrupp (1997), and Wringe (1994) have argued that market forces, specifically in terms of parental choice, whereby a variety of types of schooling are offered, are not only inappropriate for education, they do not take into consideration issues of equity and equal opportunity: "'Choice' of the sort that the market-liberal advocates tends to exacerbate inequality, undermine community integration and promote sectarian divisions in terms of class, race and creed" (Olssen, 1997, p. 415). Moreover, Wringe (1994) argued that an educational market jeopardizes equal outcomes and equal opportunity - issues which cannot be ignored in a time when education must be seen as absolutely necessary - and, as such, must be considered a welfare right, equally offered and accessible to all.

Supporting this argument was the work done in Britain (Ball, 1994; Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1997; Gewirtz et al., 1995), in New Zealand (Thrupp, 1997; Waslander & Thrupp, 1997), and in Canada (Dehli, 1996) which suggested that proponents of educational markets or quasi-markets have ignored class dimensions. Specifically, they reported that middle-class parents "will always be most inclined to engage with the market and best skilled to exploit it to their children's advantage" (Gewirtz et al., 1995, p. 189). Thus, the market sees the middle-classes continuing to take advantage of their ability to access education and, thus, allows them to "re-establish their historic economic advantages" (Ball et al., p. 419). On the other hand, working-class and minority families are not as able or inclined to exercise choice within a market. Children of these groups, left behind in unpopular working-class schools, re-establish their historic disadvantages.

According to Ball et al. (1997) and Thrupp (1997), this uneven access and opportunity has resulted in a polarization of pupil intake in schools, and has further increased the ability of popular middle-class schools to select their pupil population. Ironically and unfortunately, the market system of education has also resulted in resources shifting from those with most need to those with least need (Gewirtz et al., 1995). To add to the situation, in order to survive, schools with the greatest educational needs are compelled to spend limited time and resources on marketing. This has further burdened already disadvantaged schools and their students (Waslander & Thrupp, 1997). What results is an

"inequality of access to the quality provision necessary for children to succeed educationally" (Gewirtz et al., 1995, p. 189), an uneven distribution of resources between schools causing "production and reproduction of educational and social inequalities" (Brown, 1997, p. 404) and, consequently, growing social differentiation and stratification.

Further, Henig (1994) argued that the concept of educational markets is not only philosophically flawed, but that the evidence supporting school choice under this model is also weak. Henig found that the success of school choice projects has been based on claims not substantiated by adequate data or on studies that lacked controls allowing for appropriate interpretation. Henig specifically pointed to the work of Chubb and Moe (1990) as problematic, arguing that incorrect analysis of test scores misrepresented achievement. Moreover, Henig concluded that when projects of school choice are successful, they are successful not because of an adherence to the ideals of free-market competitiveness, but rather because of the same structures, such as bureaucratic and central governments, that are often criticized by proponents of choice: "The expanded use of choice...is better understood as having arisen from collective negotiation, public leadership, and authoritative government, rather than from an unleashing of individual interests and market forces" (p. 150). Further, all choice experiments have been public and political - "mediated through collective institutions and made to work through the application of authoritative government action" (p. 150).

Darling-Hammond (1997), Henig (1994), and Olssen (1997) offered yet another strong position against the argument for school choice in a market-driven system. They asserted that the democratic ideal of a collective or common good must be the foundation of public education. Henig (1994)suggested that these democratic ideals have been forgotten in an attempt to draw the "wagons around the even smaller circle of the family or individual" (p. 9). According to Henig, this tendency has eroded a social consciousness and has encouraged an understanding of the government and its citizens as analogous to a corporation or firm and its consumers or clients. Henig (1994) and Olssen (1997) argued that the market metaphor is highly inappropriate when applied to education since it models the goals of schooling after the goals of client or consumer satisfaction - goals incompatible

with an education system that should value democratic citizenship as a primary objective. Henig (1994) argued that proponents of markets and choice have erred, not in that "they might allow some students to attend privately run schools at public expense, but that they will erode the public forums in which decisions with societal consequences can democratically be resolved" (p. 200). Olssen (1997) concurred, and offered the following opinion of the market: "Not only does it promote some private interests at the expense of others, but given the competitive context within with which it operates, it insulates community sub-groups from communicating with those who hold alternative perspectives" (p. 415). In this way, markets discourage the promotion of shared goals in education and the social understanding and experience of multiple perspectives in an education which has as its foundation the common good of all members of a community (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Olssen, 1997).

Most emphatic of the arguments against choice in an educational market is the assertion that education should be a public good equally provided and available to all citizens (Brown, 1997; Grace, 1994; Lauder, 1997). Schooling should represent a democratic right and public service for the development of the "intellectual and creative potential of all citizens-in-the-making, with a formal commitment that this enhancement process should not the related to class, race or gender of the students or to his or her ability to pay for it" (Grace, 1994, p. 135). Markets, on the other hand, which necessarily promote individual advantage and view citizens as consumers, disregard the values of morality and ethics and are not appropriate for the promotion of education for the public good (Grace, 1994).

In terms of choice, White (1994) and Gutmann (1987) also suggested that, in a democracy, all citizens should be collectively accountable for education. Parents alone should not have the sole right or, for that matter, be left with the sole responsibility for making educational choices for their children. Therefore, in a democracy, the market and its choice provision are not appropriate for determining educational decisions (White, 1994).

Although McLaughlin (1994) conceded that market forces have a degree of legitimacy in public education, he emphasized that arguments for educational markets are morally limited or flawed in their regard for personal autonomy over civic virtue. McLaughlin

suggested that perhaps the most important challenge of the public education debate is to ensure educational entitlement for all children. In the face of diverse and contradictory educational values, he suggested that this will be achieved only after an educational ideal is established, clarified, and justified. In opposition to neo-liberal, economic rationalist arguments and pressure for educational markets, strong arguments for the educational ideals such as McLaughlin (1994) suggested have been asserted and revisited in the name of democracy and democratic education.

Advocates for democratic schooling are authors such as Gutmann (1987), Darling-Hammond (1997), Fenstermacher (1995; 1997), Glickman (1995), and Goodlad (1997), who have argued for a strong connection between education and democracy whereby a public responsibility for educating all children for citizenship shapes the future of a society. Education for democracy "provides a vehicle for all citizens, regardless of wealth or circumstances of birth, to aspire to the rights and benefits of this society and create a community with shared purpose," and it must "educate us not only for economic fitness or for the ability to make decisions in a voting booth, but also for a shared social life and the pursuit of human possibility" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 42).

Key to Darling-Hammond's (1997) conception of education for democracy is social and political participation in an inclusive society: "Democracy cannot be sustained if its members do not connect with one another in productive ways" (p. 42). Students must be given opportunities to share experiences, to talk, work, and make decisions together, and to develop humane and decent democratic communication and understandings where all views of all participants are valued. Further, Darling-Hammond (1997) argued that "we cannot secure this agenda by privatizing or voucherizing schools to protect the children of the rich in ways that increase their distance from the children of ordinary Americans," nor can we restructure "some schools while others continue to function as inhumane, antidemocratic, and unprotected detention centers" (p. 52). Without education for democracy, Darling-Hammond (1997) maintained, society stands to suffer serious consequences as social dysfunction will certainly undermine any goals we might have for economic advancement.

Fenstermacher (1995) and Glickman (1995) argued in favor of revisiting a nation's constitutional principals - in their case the American Declaration of Independence - as a foundation for educational reform. Fenstermacher (1995) identified what he believed to be the essential problem: that the talk of the last decade concerning educational reform has ignored the ideas and ideals of democracy. Fenstermacher feared that those who have been influencing and developing educational policy are motivated solely by the pressure of global competition which calls for a higher level of student achievement in certain subject areas. He argued that this pursuit has failed to attend to democratic and educational matters. Fenstermacher believed that democracy and education mirror one another, and that to answer the hard questions about what has happened to the ideas and ideals of one will answer the same for the other. He called for a return to what he refers to as liberal democracies, "democracies that vest the powers and responsibilities of government in the people as a whole, rather than in a particular political party or ruling elite" (p. 71). That said, Fenstermacher acknowledged that a problem lies in the fact that all people do not have the capability to exercise the considerable responsibility of governing themselves. He suggested that the best way to address this problem is through mass, popular, and common public education that prepares all students for their place in a liberal democracy where all citizens are enabled to "to achieve a fitness to govern and to be governed" (p. 71).

Fenstermacher (1995) called for a change in the present course of educational reform through two efforts. First, he suggested that Americans regain a true understanding of democracy and how it is relevant at present. This, he argued, can only be achieved through total democratic participation which, in turn, can only be achieved through a common search and resolution. This search and resolution is attainable through education only if the following is embraced: "[What] must engage us today and in the future is how to form common space and common speech and common commitments while respecting and preserving our differences in heritage, race, language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual values, and political ideologies" (p. 76).

Glickman's (1995) work complimented Fenstermacher's (1995) views. Glickman saw value in the democratic nature of a process where "everyone works toward what is believed

by all to be right for students. What is right (or morally good) should never, in our democracy, be justified by power or status" (p. 82). Glickman proposed that the fundamental imperative in public education reform is not to find a new vision or focus for education, but rather to refocus or recenter on an original vision founded on the principles of democracy. To this end, he argued that the primary challenge of schools is not to achieve global economic superiority or to increase subject area achievement: "The challenge is to rise to the far more demanding and crucially important standard of educating all students to be knowledgeable, proactive, resourceful, and responsible members of our democratic society" (p. 85).

Authors Aronowitz and Giroux (1991, 1993), Gutmann (1987), Kincheloe (1993a), and McLaren (1993) have furthered the argument for a democratic education by advocating for a pedagogy of critical social inquiry "to develop in children the deliberate capacity to evaluate competing conceptions of good lives and good societies. Democratic education, thus, appreciates the value of education as a means of creating (or re-creating) cohesive communities and fostering deliberate choice" (Gutmann, 1987, p. 46). Democratic education should happen in classrooms where cooperation, sharing, community, solidarity, social justice, and the public good are promoted (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Giroux, 1993; McLaren, 1993). It should develop in students the ability to think critically, make choices, and believe that they can make a difference, and it should encourage students to envision alternatives and possibilities for society beyond existing configurations and structures of power (Giroux, 1993). McLaren (1993) argued that a critical pedagogy is necessary "to contest the hegemony of prevailing definitions of the everyday as the 'way things are'" (p. 259).

According to Aronowtiz and Giroux (1993), the public education debate has centred around the wrong crisis. They suggested that the debate should address the need to broaden the current conception of democratic citizenship to "promote an ethic of civic responsibility that holds in check those privatized and narrow interests that constantly threaten the public good" (p. 217). Giroux (1993) challenged educational reformers to address "fundamental concerns of purpose and meaning such as those implied in the questions: What kind of

citizens do we hope to produce through public education? What kind of society do we want to create?" (p. 279).

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991, 1993) proposed a philosophy of educational reform based on the notions of radical democracy and political resistance. Key to this approach is a "commitment to developing forms of knowledge, pedagogy, evaluation, and research that promote critical literacy and civic courage" and the use of "financial and political resources to promote absolute commitment to public schools as sites of learning, of social interaction, and of human emancipation" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, p. 220). Within this paradigm, teachers are viewed as "intellectuals and moral leaders rather that mere technicians," students are viewed as "critical thinkers and active citizens rather than simply future participants in the industrial-military order," and schools are viewed as "centers of critical literacy and civic courage rather than merely training sites of occupational positions in the corporate order" (p. 220). According to Giroux (1993), a critical pedagogy of democratic education should reject the "current conservative call to make schools adjuncts or the corporation or bastions of Eurocentrism" (p. 280). Progressives must "reclaim the importance of educating all students with the knowledge, skills, and values they will need in a democracy for the responsibilities of learning how to govern" (p. 280).

Summary

The public education reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s were initiated by powerful government edicts such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) in the United States, Australia's *Quality of Education in Australia* (Quality of Education Review Commission, 1985), New Zealand's *Tomorrow's Schools* (Minister of Education, 1988), and Britain's 1988 Education Reform Act. Paralleling these compelling documents was a highly charged and influential debate. On one side of this debate were the views of the New Right, which asserted that public education had failed and that schools were in crisis. Of this side, those of a neo-conservative stance called for reforms based on traditional values, a "back-to-the-basics" approach to education, and decreased public sector spending. Those of a neo-liberal stance called for economic or

market approaches to education reform, and advocated for deregulation, the introduction of competition, and increased standards.

On the other side of the debate were those such as the critical theorists, who argued that the alleged education crisis was simply a myth or a hoax propagated by capitalist elites whose agendas stood to be furthered by a "nation at risk" panic. This position was reinforced by others who argued that New Right interests are incompatible with the democratic ideals of liberty, justice, and equality. Educational markets, they maintained, increase social stratification and inequality. Competition should not drive education; rather, public education should be preserved in the name of democratic citizenship and a collective or common good.

This public education debate continues today. It emerges in our discussions about education and educational change. It takes place in the background and moves to the fore in decision and policy-making arenas and, most importantly, to a great degree, it informs our reforms.

Reflections on Chapter 1

The previous sections, entitled "The Global Context" and "The Public Education Debate," are the result of my initial survey of the literature appropriate to my research project. This inquiry was guided by my broad interest in the topic of educational reform and the somewhat general questions I had developed to begin the research process. The reading was to provide me with a context beyond that of my personal experiences as a teacher in Alberta. I encountered huge amounts of information, and the enormity and the weight of the topic soon became apparent. The subsequent organization, synthesis, and writing of these sections was perhaps the most challenging of the entire project. However, what resulted in "The Global Context" and "The Public Education Debate" serves as a contextual or theoretical overview or frame within which the rest of the thesis sits. These sections provide a place 'outside' or 'above' - a macro-level from which to view the micro-level of my specific and local research and its findings.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH

Methodology

The term "methodology" refers to the "general logic and theoretical perspective for a research project" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 29). From the beginning, my research project was to be a holistic, in-depth inquiry into beliefs and attitudes about public education and education reform. My aim, in accordance with the views of Denzin and Lincoln (1994a), was to "seek to examine major public and private issues and personal troubles that define a particular historical moment" (p.199). Specifically, the intent of the study was to answer questions about how people feel about public education and the reform initiatives that have recently changed the landscape of schools and schooling - a particular phenomenon in a particular historical time and place. I needed to gain insights into the "big picture" of public education in my attempt to better understand a particular aspect of human experience. I wanted to know what those who are interested and involved in education believe, how they feel, what they think about the way things are, how they make sense of what they do, and how they understand their experiences in and with regard to public education. My main concern in studying attitudes and beliefs, as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Merriam (1988) explained, was with participant perspectives or, in other words, with meaning, which can be defined as how people make sense of their lives. In sum, the purpose of my study and the questions that were to guide my research were conceived in order to better understand human behavior and, more importantly, human experience. These are goals which define qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). So, with the above considered, a qualitative research approach was the appropriate choice for my project. I proceeded in my work with the following qualitative research perspectives or theoretical underpinnings.

To begin with, I understood my research project to be a naturalistic study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988). The Center for Leadership in Learning seminars, as an extension of the professional and personal lives of those involved, were a facet of the lived experiences of the participants, including myself as a participant observer. The 1998

Seminar Series was a venue within a larger social context for which the issues, problems, and possibilities of public education and reform were concerns. In this way, the context or setting within which the study's phenomenon occurred was natural. It was a direct data source which was not seen as separate from the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b; Gay, 1996); nor was the researcher, considered the instrument for data collection and analysis, seen as outside the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988).

I also understood my research inquiry as a phenomenological "attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 23). I was interested in description - what people said and the multiple realities of their stories - as the concrete incidents of how meaning was constructed by the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This description was recorded in the form of interview notes and field notes which became the research data. As a qualitative researcher, I was concerned that the notes were, as much as possible, true to the original intent of the participants' comments and to the context and setting in which they were recorded. This type of "rich" or "thick" description was important because, in the ethnographic tradition described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), every word would be scrutinized, every detail would be considered, and nothing would be taken for granted when all data were later examined as potential clues to greater understanding. The data were considered "renderings" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) or representations, a "complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b, p. 3).

In its qualitative approach, my study was also highly inductive. Unlike quantitative researchers, I was not interested in controlling anything, nor was I interested in exploring or seeking out data or evidence to prove or disprove a predetermined hypotheses; rather, I was interested in building or constructing abstractions and interpretations based upon the details and particulars of the data I had gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b; Gay, 1996; Merriam, 1988). As a qualitative researcher, I tried to derive and

describe findings that would allow a better understanding of the human condition as it relates to public education and reform.

Because I was interested in answering questions about how social experience was given meaning, I assumed the qualitative nature of my study to be value-laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b). As I have mentioned above, data are mediated through the researcher and, with this in mind, I was cognizant of the importance of the role I played in the inquiry (Merriam, 1988). In addition, I needed to embrace the multiple realities of the participants of my study and to acknowledge that our perceptions were based on beliefs, not facts (Merriam, 1988). I was also aware that, as a researcher, coming to the inquiry as a clean slate was "neither possible nor desirable" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 33), and that my own experiences were potentially both a "resource" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a, p. 199) and a biasing influence in my study. Because of this, I continually tried to be self-conscious and self-reflective about how who I am can shape and enrich what I do (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a). Further, as a researcher, I see human perspectives and behavior as complex and, in the spirit of qualitative inquiry, I do not purport to know the single interpretive "truth" or the "right" answers; rather, I am comfortable offering particular interpretations which I hope are seen as plausible, authentic, and trustworthy in their accuracy and consistence with the data I collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a; Gay, 1996). I do not profess to present the findings of my study as anything more than tentative suggestions about what I think is going on (Gay, 1996). That said, I hope, as is the desire of all qualitative researchers, that my work "produces an interpretation of reality that is useful in understanding the human condition" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 23).

Process, as opposed to mere outcomes or products, was also an important underlying tenet of this project. Qualitative research is recursive, reiterative, and interactive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b; Gay, 1996; Merriam, 1988). In this light, my study was developed as an ongoing and emergent process whereby the whole was shaped *as* each step was negotiated and *as* the parts were collected and examined.

In order to progress through this qualitative process, I was required to use a variety of methods and strategies in what is often referred to as a multimethod approach (Denzin and

Lincoln, 1994b; Gay, 1996). Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) explained qualitative research as a set of interpretive practices, privileging no single methodology and having no distinct set of methods entirely its own. The qualitative researcher uses whatever strategies, methods, or materials are available in order to achieve the best understanding of a subject or topic. This sometimes requires researchers to be flexible and creative in inventing or piecing together research tools and tasks appropriate to the questions that they ask and to the context and setting of their study. This, indeed, was my experience. The details of my multimethod approach are explained in the following sections on research design, methods, and data analysis. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994b), this combination of multiple methods and materials assists in securing the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. This, of course, was my hope.

Design and Methods

The term "design" is used to refer to the researcher's general procedural plan. The term "methods" refers to the practical aspects of the research process, the specific techniques used, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The purpose of this section of my thesis is to provide a general description or outline of the design and methods of my research project. I will begin by discussing concerns of design and then will move to the more pragmatic concerns of methods. However, from a qualitative research viewpoint, I do not see these two aspects of the research process as necessarily separate. For this reason, my discussion does not organize "design" and "methods" into two mutually exclusive sections or categories; rather, the discussion of these aspects is meant to be somewhat overlapping and recurring, as is the nature of qualitative inquiry.

Design

The naturalistic, inductive, and recursive characteristics of qualitative inquiry make it both inappropriate and impossible to specify a rigid and highly structured research plan at the beginning of the process, in advance of the fieldwork. A qualitative research design emerges and unfolds *as* the study occurs (Patton, 1990). This is not to say that qualitative

researchers do not have some definite ideas about initial focus, general guiding research questions, and plans for observations and interviews. They do. However, they are willing to be flexible, letting their plans evolve and be modified throughout the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 1990). This is the spirit in which I completed my research project. To begin with, I was willing to see my research strategy as simply qualitative. I was very open to having the specifics of my design and method unfold for me as my fieldwork unfolded. I also did not want to control or manipulate my research in any unnatural way, and I was therefore open to change, comfortable with anticipating the unanticipated, and willing to go with the flow of the process. I saw my project as an inductive discovery and I was amenable to whatever emerged as I proceeded.

In terms of research design, my research project in some ways resembles what is referred to as a "case study." However, it does not fit the case study definition in the strictest sense. A case study is a close, systematic investigation of a phenomenon identified as a "bounded system": a single setting, a single subject, a single set of documents, or a single event. According to Stake (1994), most case studies are "intrinsic," focusing on one unit of analysis, and are concerned with illuminating the uniqueness and complexities of that one unit through the examination of data collected from a combination of observations, interviews, and documents (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1989). Taking into account these descriptions, my research project does not qualify as a case study in all regards. The Centre for Leadership in Learning can be considered a "bounded system" by virtue of its status as an institution or organization and, moreover, by the purpose its membership shares in attending seminars - an interest and involvement in educational matters. Although many CLL participants attend every seminar, the majority of those in attendance on any given evening do not attend consistently, and many may be attending for the first time. However, even in its loose and dynamic "boundedness," the CLL membership or organizational structure was not the unit or subject I was interested in studying closely for its uniqueness. I was interested in an investigation of the attitudes and beliefs of its participants. The CLL seminar series itself, important as it was as a venue for the presentation and discussion of

these attitudes and beliefs, was not the phenomenon I wanted to explore. In this regard, my project was not a case study.

Stake (1994), however, offered another understanding of the case study that may be more applicable to my research than the stricter definitions provided above. As an alternative to the "intrinsic" case study, which focuses on the "particular" and on the unique qualities or features of the "bounded" unit or system studied, the "instrumental" case study is sometimes carried out, not because of an interest in a particular or unique case, but because that case provides insight into a larger issue external to or beyond the "bounds" of the case. In the instrumental case study, the case itself plays a secondary or supportive role in facilitating, framing, or advancing the understanding of something else. In my research, the CLL seminar series, although a potentially interesting case in itself, was secondary and supportive to its offering the means by which I was able to gain an understanding of a larger or broader issue or concern - the perspectives and beliefs of its participants. In this way, my study fits the description of the instrumental case study.

Another way in which my project does not fit into a strict case study model is in its departure from the traditional three modes of data collection - observation, interviewing, and data analysis. I did record observations and reflections in the form of fieldnotes but, as is the case in the more general conception of qualitative research, my main methodological tool and data source was the interview, specifically, the group interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a; Merriam, 1988). Similar to Stake (1994), however, Merriam (1988) offered a looser understanding of the case study and suggested that, in contemporary educational case study research, interviewing is sometimes the predominant mode of data collection, and group or panel interviews can be used for this purpose. Because of its focus on the group interview as a means of learning about the perspectives of participants, my research design fits this less exact description of the case study.

Site

The Centre for Leadership in Learning is a consortium of educational organizations in Southern Alberta supported, in part, by the University of Calgary Faculty of Education.

During 1998 the CLL was also sponsored by the Calgary Board of Education, the Calgary Catholic School Board, the Calgary Regional Consortium, Christ the Reedeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division, Foothills School Division, and Golden Hills Regional Division. The CLL employs a part-time coordinator and is governed by an appointed board of directors which, in 1998, was representative of university faculty, school teachers and administrators, school board trustees, faculty of education students, and the membership of the Alberta Home and School Association and the Alberta Education Calgary Area In-Service Consortium. The CLL office is located on the University of Calgary campus.

The two main goals of the CLL are to provide opportunities for all stakeholders in education to participate in meaningful cross-role dialogue about education, and to model processes and activities that can be utilized in a wide variety of educational settings. One of the many ways in which the CLL achieves these goals is by sponsoring and organizing an annual seminar series which is developed around a theme of current interest or importance in education. Each of the seminars, in turn, is organized around a focus topic or specific issue of that general theme. The 1998 seminar series was entitled "Why Public Education?" and offered the following seminar topics: "Public Education: Myths and Realities," "Community Involvement: Beyond the Classroom," "Shared Decision-Making: What Should It Look Like?" and "Exploring Public Education in the 21st Century."

The seminar series is advertised and promoted primarily in what Alberta Education would identify as Zone 5, which encompasses Calgary and a large area surrounding the city. On the average, approximately 100 people attend these evening events, which include dinner. Participants are seated at round tables consisting of six to eight places. Those in attendance represent a wide variety of groups: school students, parents, community members, school trustees, members of the business community, teachers, school support staff, administrators at all levels, Alberta Education, undergraduate and graduate students, and professors.

During any given year, with slight variations, each of the four seminars follows a similar format or agenda. The evening begins with some type of presentation which addresses that seminar's focus topic. These presentations are usually talks by guest speakers, or panel

discussions or debates, and they are intended to promote discussion. The presentations are followed by table discussions of about one hour in length which are guided by a predetermined set of open-ended questions (usually three or four), designed to encourage meaningful, relevant talk on the evening's topic. Each table is chaired by a facilitator and the discussion is recorded by a recorder. The facilitator and the recorder are usually graduate students who have been selected and instructed for their roles in advance of the seminar.

All participants are informed in advance, via promotional and registration materials, that the round table discussions will be recorded for research purposes. They are asked, on arrival, to sign a consent form which includes information about how the discussion data will be used. Participants are also asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of each seminar.

Participants

From the beginning, it was not my intent to interview members of the general public. I was interested in the perspectives and perceptions of those who had some vested interest or were somehow involved in education or educational matters. Therefore, I needed to consider how I might work with participants with whom I could learn the most (Merriam, 1988). The CLL seminars offered a particularly appropriate research site for my interview purposes. Although my participant sampling was somewhat random in that participants of my study were the registrants of the seminars and, with the exception of those who were asked to be guest speakers or panelists, were not specifically chosen or invited to be involved in my research, the fact that participants had come together for the purpose of discussing educational issues - specifically, issues related to public education reform - made my participant sampling more "purposeful" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 1990), "purposive" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a), or "criterion-based" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Patton, 1990). Goetz and LeCompte (1984) explained: "The researcher develops a profile of an instance that would be the best, most efficient, most effective, or most desirable of

some population and then finds a real-world case that most closely matches the profile" (p. 82).

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, those who registered for the seminars knew, in advance, that they would be involved in a research project and that what they discussed during the evening would be recorded. As well, those interested in participating were also required to pay a registration fee of $25.00 (students paid $15.00) to cover the cost of the dinner which was included in the evening's program. As such, it is important to acknowledge that, by virtue of their interest, their registration, and their payment, the participants of my study were "self-selecting" (Gay, 1996) and, moreover, had come together for the common purpose of discussing the topics outlined in advance by each seminar's promotional materials. The implications of this type of participant sample must be noted.

To begin, data collected under circumstances where participants have made a deliberate choice to be involved because of personal or professional interests often reflect focused, in-depth, and rich responses and discussion. On the other hand, even though participants of this study represent a variety of stakeholder views, because of their commonality of interest in a particular seminar or the seminar series as a whole, they can be seen as a somewhat homogeneous group (Patton, 1990). As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the purpose of qualitative research is to better comprehend how participants understand or make meaning of events and experiences in their lives. In a qualitative study, that participants hold common interests or even common perspectives is not, in itself, an issue; indeed, as mentioned above, this commonality can be particularly illuminating. What is important, however, is that the participant sample be described in a way that sufficiently outlines who is involved in the study so that those interested in the findings can consider the data in this light. With this in mind, it is important that I report some specifics about the participants of my study. First, I will describe what was done in terms of promoting the CLL seminar series in order to explain where participants were from and how they learned about the research study. Second, I will describe the participant sample by identifying the stakeholder groups they represented.

Participants of my study were from Calgary and the city's surrounding area. Given that my research project was being developed as an integral aspect of the 1998 CLL seminar series, and because I was particularly concerned that every effort be made to encourage participation from all stakeholder groups, a fairly ambitious promotion and advertising plan was embarked upon, and an extensive computer data bank of contacts and mailing addresses was established. Because of the CLL's affiliation with its local Zone 5 school board sponsors, promotion within the Calgary area educational community had not been a major concern in the past. Even so, the mailing and contact list was extensively increased and refined in order that promotional materials and registration information for each of the four seminars reach specific individuals and stakeholder groups at the school division or district level and within individual schools. For example, in addition to information being sent to central or regional offices or schools for general distribution, to be posted in common areas, and to be included in local newsletters and information publications, materials were also specifically addressed to individual trustees, superintendents, department supervisors, consultants and specialists, and school administrators, as well as to many teachers and other school staff members, particularly those who had attended seminars in the past. In addition, specific areas within central offices, such as curriculum and communications departments, or specific groups within schools, such as parent councils and student councils and paraprofessional and teachers' associations, were sent packets of information and registration materials.

CLL seminar information was also sent to groups connected to but not necessarily contacted through Calgary areas school boards. For example, all Zone 5 Alberta Teachers' Association locals received materials, as did the Alberta Education Regional Office and the Alberta Education Professional Development Consortium, the Alberta Home and School Councils Association, the Alberta School Boards' Association, and the Calgary Board of Education Staff Association. All University of Calgary Faculty of Education departments, faculty members, and students associations received seminar promotional materials, and advertisements for the seminars appeared in the University of Calgary *Gazette* newspaper. In addition, all private schools in the Calgary area were also sent the seminar information.

Reaching stakeholder groups outside of the Zone 5 educational community was of primary concern in the advertising plan. Calgary area MPs and MLAs and their respective constituency offices received promotional materials and registration information for each seminar. Community organizations and social agencies were also targeted. For example, the YMCA, Catholic Family Services, Oxfam, and the Calgary Immigration Women's Association were among a number of organizations that were added to the updated mailing list. Contacts with members of Calgary's business community were also established, and the CLL seminar series was promoted by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Calgary Educational Partnership Foundation.

As a result of the promotion and advertising of the CLL seminar series, participants of the study represented several stakeholder groups. The list which follows is a breakdown of participant numbers by stakeholder group. In keeping with the philosophy of qualitative research, the list is not intended for the purpose of quantifying or measuring. In addition, it must be noted that, even though most participants identified themselves as a member of only one stakeholder group for registration purposes, many in attendance could very well have responded from more than one perspective. For example, many administrators are also teachers and parents, and many graduate students are also teachers or school administrators. Therefore, the numbers are included for the purpose of providing a general description or explanation of the participant "profile" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

During the 1998 CLL seminar series, a total of 421 participants attended. (Because those who were invited as guest speakers or panelists also consented to participate in the seminar discussions, they are included in the following breakdown.) Of those in attendance, 46 identified themselves on their registration forms as parents, 58 as school board trustees, 26 as business or community members or representatives (including corporate representatives, community organization and social agency representatives, 1 federal politician, 1 provincial politician, 1 member of the local press, and members of the community at large), 77 as teachers, 89 as school administrators, 12 as other school personnel (i.e. school secretaries, teacher aides), 29 as district or division educational

personnel (i.e. superintendents, specialists or consultants), 7 as school students, 57 as university students (undergraduate and graduate), and 20 as university faculty or personnel. Of the 421 participants, approximately 20% attended all seminars and approximately 34% attended more than one seminar. (See Appendix A for a more detailed breakdown of the number of participants of each stakeholder group in attendance at individual seminars.)

For each seminar evening, registrants were assigned to discussion tables in an attempt to ensure a "mix" among participants. My aim was to have representation from as many of the stakeholders groups as could be accommodated by the eight places at each table. The table discussions and conversations, for the intents and purposes of my study, were interviews. Specifically, the table discussions and conversations fit the definition of the group interview (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Though a suitable and viable approach for my study, I was aware of the pros and cons of this format. Fontana and Frey (1994) explained:

> The group interview has the advantages of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and collaborative, over and above individual responses. This type of interview is not, however, without problems. The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, the group may be dominated by one person, the group format makes it difficult to research sensitive topics, 'group-think' is a possible outcome, and the requirements of interviewers' skills are greater because of group dynamics. (p. 364)

Methods

During the 1997-1998 academic year, I assumed an integral role in the day-to-day operations of the CLL and its seminar series because of my research project. In October of 1997, my involvement began on three levels. First of all, because I was to be the chief investigator of the CLL's research initiative, it was particularly important for me to be highly involved in all aspects of the seminar planning. Working with the Centre's Coordinator, Sharon Kimmel, I immediately assumed the informal position of Secretary/Assistant Coordinator. In this role I became immersed in a range of duties and tasks over the year, including the following: promoting and advertising the seminar series and establishing a data bank for mailing purposes; designing and creating brochures and seminar programs; corresponding with planning committees, guest speakers, participants, and facilities

personnel; coordinating registration and the allocation of participants to table groups; and supervising the setup and cleanup on the actual seminar evenings.

On a second level, I was also a student in two graduate courses on educational leadership - one during the fall term of 1997 and one during the winter term of 1998 - which were designed, in part, to complement the CLL seminar series by exploring leadership issues related to the seminar topics. Students in these courses were given the opportunity to become involved by serving on one of the four seminar planning committees or by acting as a table facilitator or recorder for the seminars' discussions.

On a third level, my role as the CLL Secretary required that I be a member of each of the seminar planning teams or committees. These committees usually included seven or eight positions and, aside from the Centre Coordinator's position and my secretarial position, these positions were filled by a new contingent for each of the four seminars in order to ensure that each committee was comprised mainly of members with fresh and different ideas and perspectives. Committees included graduate students, faculty members, parent representatives, trustees, members of the business community and the community at large, and school teachers and administrators. In terms of my project, these committee members served as research assistants.

My constant presence on all planning committees was important to my research. Because of the involvement of a number of people in the conceptual and practical planning of the seminar series, I was able to couple my role as researcher with my roles as Secretary and graduate student in a way that maintained the degree of consistency needed in the research project. It also allowed me to participate, not as an outsider, but as a regular working team member. Over the year, my continual presence became accepted and expected. As is desirable on the part of the qualitative researcher, I believe I blended nicely into the CLL woodwork (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

In this three-leveled role in the seminar planning process, I was specifically involved and able to offer assistance and guidance in three ways. The first of these had particular implications for my research. As mentioned earlier, the format of the seminars was designed so that each evening included some kind of presentation which addressed the seminar's

focus topic. These presentations were intended to encourage the table discussion which followed and, as such, the potential of the presentations to inform and influence the research data became an important consideration in the planning for each seminar. A great deal of discussion and deliberation was devoted to deciding what might serve as an appropriate general topic for the introductory address and also to deciding who would be invited to speak. The following four paragraphs outline the focus of each seminar and identify the seminar's speakers and the topics or subjects of the presentations.

Seminar 1 had, as its focus topic, "Public Education: Myths and Realities." The introductory presentation consisted of a series of brief, 10 minute speeches delivered by a panel of five speakers, each of whom was asked to address the seminar's focus topic from his or her stakeholder perspective. The first speaker was a parent who spoke about the concerns those of his community had as a result of funding cuts to education and the new role parents play in school decision-making. The second speaker, a grade 12 student, talked about her positive experiences and successes in public schools, and explained that she had been provided with a "well-rounded" education, preparing her for life and the "real world." The third speaker was a superintendent of a Zone 5 school division. He spoke about the need to ignore the negative myths and focus on the positive realities of public education and of educational change. The fourth speaker, a senior manager of a major corporation, talked about what public education should focus on in order to prepare students for the workplace. The fifth speaker, a teacher, spoke about the changing role of the public school educator in the face of recent educational reforms in our province.

The Seminar 2 focus was on the topic of "Community Involvement: Beyond the Classroom." The evening's introductory presentation was a 30 minute keynote address delivered by a federal politician. The message of this speech was that public education cannot continue to survive in the 21st Century without establishing new partnerships and alliances with businesses, community organizations, and social agencies. The keynote address was followed by a brief discussion period and, then, dinner. After dinner, participants were invited to join one of the following 35 minute "breakout" sessions before returning to their tables for more discussion: (a) "Programs for Immigrant and Visible

Minority Children and Youth in the School System," presented by a manager of a community social services agency, (b) "Education/Business Partnerships," presented by a local school district school- business partnerships coordinator, (c) "Arts Partnerships in Education," presented by the educational coordinator of a Calgary area museum, (d) "Social Agency Involvement in Education," presented by a manager of an international not-for-profit organization.

The focus topic for Seminar 3 was "Shared Decision-Making: What Should It Look Like?" Presentations were given by a Zone 5 school district professional development coordinator, whose address was entitled "An Evolution of Shared Decision-Making," by the president of a local parents' association, who presented a "Parent Perspective on Shared Decision-Making," and by a principal of a Calgary area elementary/junior high school, who reported his "Research on Shared Decision-Making." In addition, members of the school-based decision-making team of a rural Zone 5 middle school came to share their experiences in a panel presentation entitled "Shared Decision-Making in Practice."

The final seminar of the series was entitled "Exploring Public Education in the 21ˢᵗ Century." The focus of the evening was a series of short presentations on the seminar's topic delivered by members of a panel of five. Panelists included a Calgary area superintendent, an official from the Alberta Teachers' Association, a University of Calgary Faculty of Education professor, a Calgary MLA, and a representative from the Alberta School Boards' Association. The presentations were followed by a panel discussion and a question period which was moderated by a journalist from a Calgary newspaper.

In addition to playing a role in the development of general presentation topics and in helping to select speakers, the second way in which I was able to offer assistance and guidance in the seminar planning process was also very important to my research. One of the many responsibilities of each planning committee was to brainstorm and decide upon a number of open-ended questions (usually three or four) appropriate as general guidelines for each of the seminar's table discussions. (See Appendix B for a list of the discussion questions for each seminar.) I gave direction and made suggestions and recommendations in the development of these questions. The purpose of these questions was twofold. To begin

with, they were to encourage meaningful and interesting table discussion. After all, participants did not attend the seminars solely to be a part of my research project; they came for their own personal and professional reasons and expected an opportunity for stimulating and informative conversation. In addition, these questions were, in essence, my study's interview questions. In this sense, they were to be a translation of my research objectives into the kind of language that would motivate participants to share their knowledge and perspectives (Merriam, 1988). The wording of these questions was a crucial consideration in ensuring that I gather information that was helpful to my study (Merriam, 1988). It was also important that our committees construct questions that would be clear and understandable to all participants (Patton, 1990). Although the discussion/interview questions were predetermined and somewhat structured in order to provide all seminar table groups with enough of a guide so that comparable data could be collected, in keeping with the traditions of qualitative research, they were also designed to be open-ended and flexible enough to encourage the kind of discussion and conversation the would produce rich research data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988). A good portion of our committee work, both at meetings and as individuals, was devoted to the careful development of these questions.

My consistent participation on all planning committees also allowed me to be involved in the kind of emergent planning important in qualitative inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1988). As qualitative research is an inductive process, the development of interview questions should occur on an ongoing basis and should be "products of data collection" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998 p. 49). I was able to offer feedback and suggestions to subsequent planning committees based on the degree of effectiveness and success of questions designed for previous seminars. The success and effectiveness of the interview/discussion questions was gauged according to my field observations, the participant feedback we were given on seminar evaluation forms, and my initial analysis of the data collected at each seminar.

Because my fellow classmates and colleagues became my research assistants by acting as facilitators and recorders for the seminar discussions, the third way in which I offered

guidance in the planning process was by providing verbal guidelines and feedback to those who had offered to assist. As suggested by Gay (1996), written guidelines for research assistants outlining facilitator and recorder responsibilities were also provided. These guidelines were given out with our course materials by the professor of our class at the beginning of the term and were also included in a packet of materials (consent forms, evaluation forms, etc.) that I prepared to be placed at all tables at the beginning of each seminar.

The facilitators and recorders played a key role in assisting me in my research project. Though obviously I was not able to be at all discussion tables at all times, over the course of the year I had ample opportunity in our class, on the planning committees, and as a fellow seminar participant to work with and get to know these people. My contact with them and the positive comments by other seminar participants both verbally and as written responses on evaluation forms assured me that these roles were taken seriously, with the utmost of professionalism and diligence.

Each seminar discussion group was chaired by a facilitator and, in terms of my research project, these facilitators were the interviewers of my study. According to Fontana and Frey (1994), the group interviewer should possess all of the skills of an interviewer of individuals and, at the same time, should also possess the interviewing skills unique to the group setting. Because of the group interview format of the table discussions, facilitators were appraised of the challenges they faced, not only as interviewers, but in their roles as leaders, chairpersons, and mediators.

The seminar facilitators were aware that the interviewer/respondent relationship is complex and that "both parties bring biases, predispositions, and attitudes that color the interaction and the data elicited" (Merriam, 1988, p. 76). Though impossible to ignore in the interview situation, facilitators were also aware that, as skilled interviewers, they would have to take the "human factor" of all involved into account in order to minimize potential "distortion" (p. 75). They attempted to be reflective listeners, neutral, nonjudgmental, and sensitive to verbal and nonverbal cues (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a; Merriam, 1988).

The facilitators knew that the open-ended questions provided were not only a starting point for the rich, meaningful discussion and conversation appreciated by participants, but also purposeful in their design to obtain the kind of information I, as a researcher, was interested in - the attitudes and beliefs of the participants. As Patton (1990) explained:

> The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind... but to access the perspectives of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe.... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions.... We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. (p. 278)

Facilitators were also told that the open-ended questions provided were to be considered a guide, and that they might be called upon to offer clarifying questions to allow rich information to emerge. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explained:

> Even when an interview guide is employed, qualitative interviews offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the contents of the interview. When the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range. (p. 94)

Facilitators were asked to try to construct clarifying questions that fit into the conversation in a way that seemed natural rather than contrived. They were also aware that sometimes a pause is the best way to facilitate conversation and, therefore, simply allowing silence, and waiting for people to collect their thoughts is more effective than feeling compelled to encourage continuous talk (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). They also understood that, if discussion and conversation were going well, they might have very little to do in the way of encouraging participant response. At the same time, if the conversation became more of a social visit, facilitators were asked to refocus the group as unobtrusively as possible.

The issues, topics, and questions of the seminar discussions were sometimes contentious. Heated debates were not unheard of. The facilitators knew to determine if the participants' exchange was resulting in the emergence of relevant information or if a

polarization of views was occurring. In case of the latter, facilitators were asked to highlight the similarities in the views to help to diffuse the tension or, alternatively, simply paraphrase the perspectives and then ask others who were not part of the original debate for their views in order to get the conversation going again. Facilitators were also asked to remind participants that the objective of the discussions was to highlight key points and issues rather than to reach consensus.

Facilitators understood that their role was to ensure, as much as possible, that everyone in their group had an opportunity to participate. Of course, as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggested, some subjects become key informants because of their willingness to talk, their greater degree of experience, or because of their particularly insightful or interesting comments or responses. Facilitators were aware that sometimes a group can include a strong leader other than themselves, and that the other person's lead can also generate good participation. At the same time, facilitators were also cautioned against strong leaders who dominated the talk and discouraged others from offering their perceptions. They were asked to ameliorate these negative effects by encouraging others to offer their views.

In qualitative research the most common method of recording interview data is to tape-record the interview. However, where this is not feasible, as was the case in my project due to the number of interviews occurring simultaneously and the nature of group discussion, taking notes during the interview is an alternative (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988). Thus, in addition to the facilitator, a recorder was assigned to each of the discussion tables. As was the case with facilitators, recorders were also cautioned to be cognizant of their personal perspectives, preconceptions, and biases. They were asked to try, as much as possible, to be neutral and to avoid predetermined notions of the kinds of comments they would record. They were instructed to simply record as the conversations unfolded.

Since it was impossible for table recorders to record everything said, especially in the group settings where discussion and conversation were encouraged, it was suggested that those who recorded capture, in point form, the main ideas of the participants and the main gist of the conversation. If someone made a particularly key comment or quote, however, recorders were asked to try to record the idea as it was spoken. To distinguish these

passages from comments paraphrased or noted in the point form, recorders were asked to put quotation marks around the verbatim comments they recorded. Where they thought it important or informative, they were asked to indicate after a particular point the role (i.e. trustee, student, or parent) of the person speaking.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the roles played by the seminar facilitators and recorders. The effectiveness of the table discussions - the interviews - and the recorded notes, which became raw data from which my study's findings later emerged, was a result of the skills of the facilitator/interviewers and recorders. Although facilitators and recorders were expected, to some extent, to participate in the discussions, they were aware that their roles would reduce the degree to which they could participate. When required, facilitators were willing to focus on issues of group communication rather than participating in the discussion, and recorders understood that, in order to accurately capture as much as possible in their notes, their participation in the discussion was secondary to their role as recorder. Their willingness to accept these roles with enthusiasm and commitment was greatly appreciated.

I saw my role during the seminars as moving between perspectives of participant observer and observer participant. According to Merriam (1988), the "participant as observer" is one whose "observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as participant," and the "observer as participant" is one whose "participation in the group is definitely secondary to his or her role of information gatherer" (pp. 92-93). Merriam (1988) referred to the researcher's role as a "schizophrenic activity" (p. 94) of participating while, at the same time, trying to remain detached enough to observe and analyze. While I acknowledge my shifting role as a researcher, for the purposes of this thesis I will refer to myself as a participant observer. Although in a difficult position, qualitative researchers believe that there is no substitute for the careful participant observer's ability to watch and listen and question and probe in situations where attitudes, beliefs, and values motivate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

I was aware that my presence as a participant observer had the potential to affect the behavior of the participants at the tables at which I sat. Referred to as "observer effect" by

qualitative researchers, this influence is not taken lightly (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I was particularly concerned that my presence be a natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening attempt to "blend into the woodwork" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 35). As all participants were aware of the research component of the seminars, I made a point of introducing myself as a researcher and explaining that I would be participating but also taking fieldnotes as a written record of the evening's presentation and my general impressions, not necessarily impressions of what occurred at our particular table group or in our discussion. Though to a lesser degree, I participated in the discussions as I normally would have done. In all cases, my groups seemed unaffected by my presence and my activities. Perhaps because they were used to having a recorder present at seminar discussions, I was not seen as out of the ordinary.

The fieldnotes I took during the seminars became a record of not only what was said and the tone with which things were said, but also of my impressions of the mood and atmosphere of the evenings. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), I augmented these fieldnotes as soon as possible after each seminar by keeping a log as a more subjective record of the process. I noted my thoughts, feelings, speculations, biases, reactions, realizations, hunches, ideas, points of clarification, and strategies for continuing. In addition, I kept track of my research and CLL activities throughout the months. My fieldnotes, which included my log, became an important supplementary data source to the discussion records. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explained: "Fieldnotes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data" (p. 107).

The entire research process was exciting and satisfying. What I particularly enjoyed was the sense I had that my research project was shared, not only by those who were directly involved as research assistants on planning committees and as facilitators and recorders, but also by all who participated as regular registrants and guest presenters. As the promotional brochure for each seminar outlined the intent of the research, all seminar participants were aware, even before registering, that there was a research initiative attached

to the seminar series and that, by attending, they would be participants of the study. In addition, at the beginning of each seminar evening, all participants were asked to read and sign a consent form which included a statement of the intent of the inquiry and information about how to contact me, as the principal investigator, if questions arose. The consent form also outlined the role participants would play and mentioned that final reporting of the research findings would respect the anonymity of individuals and their professional organizations or affiliations.

Before each seminar, registration forms were carefully screened so that those who identified themselves as students could be contacted in advance. They were asked if they were under the age of 18 and, if so, in order to protect their rights as minors, they were supplied with a consent form in advance, to be signed by a parent or guardian and returned on arrival at the seminar (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988). In addition to complying with the University of Calgary's Ethics Committee guidelines, I saw the efforts related to informed consent as a means of establishing trust and as an invitation to participants to voluntarily share in the research process (Punch, 1994).

Participants were more than willing to be involved in the research, and I was often approached with questions about how the project was going, what I was learning, and how I intended to proceed. On several occasions participants commented, both verbally and on evaluation forms, about how they enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to tell their stories and share their ideas. As Merriam (1988) suggested: "This in itself is pleasurable and reinforcing. Moreover, some people enjoy the self-analysis, the opportunity to clarify their own thoughts and experiences" (p. 76). Many participants expressed an interest in reading my completed thesis, and some had intriguing and informative stories to share about their own research experiences.

I was grateful to have the opportunity to "piggyback" my project on the regular activities of the CLL and, as mentioned above, I was appreciative of the cooperation and assistance I got from those who acted as research assistants and was pleased with the degree to which participants accepted what I was doing as an integral part of the seminar series. The spirit of the CLL seminars and of the planning process was of collegiality and

collaboration. On all levels, those involved came together for the common purposes of creating opportunities for and participating in meaningful cross-role dialogue about the state of public education. Early in the research process I read what Reason (1994) wrote about participative inquiry. I was able to make some connections between my project and his explanation of co-operative inquiry. He defined research as an extension of a worldview that sees "human beings as cocreating their reality through participation: through their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action" (p. 324). He believed that research subjects are self-determining persons and, as such, should share in the decision-making, the inquiry process, and the knowledge gleaned from the research. Reason (1994) explained: "So in cooperative inquiry all those involved in the research are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision and making contribute to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience, and *also* co-subjects, participating in the activity being researched" (p. 326). He continued by explaining that participants become members of an inquiry group wherein, ideally, relationships are reciprocal. However, he conceded:

> An inquiry group, like any human group, has to struggle with the problems of inclusion, influence, and intimacy; people will take different roles, and there will be differences in both the quality and quantity of members' contributions. In particular, one or more members may have initiated the inquiry as part of their organizational role or more informally these members or others may act as facilitators of the inquiry process....
> (p. 326)

In many regards Reason's (1994) explanation applies to the CLL seminars and my research project. All who were involved seemed, to whatever degree and to whatever level they chose to participate, to be aware of their contribution to the inquiry. The issues we came together to ponder and discuss were seen to be relevant and timely and, although the seminar series offered an important social aspect, we felt our participation in such a venue was important work. Interestingly, Reason (1994) commented: "Co-operative inquiry is a strategy more likely to be successful with a group of people who experience themselves as relatively empowered and who wish to explore and develop their practice together" (p. 335). This, I would argue, is a fitting description of CLL seminar planners and participants. I see my project as the type of inquiry that many who are interested in educational issues are

continually involved in on either a formal or informal level. It is my hope that the findings of my research will be useful to participants and to those of our larger, extended educational community.

Data Analysis

The term "data" refers to the materials researchers gather during of their study based on observations, interviews, or documents. The data of my study were the seminar discussion records and my fieldnotes. Data are the particulars - the evidence and clues - that are the basis of the researcher's analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). "Gathered carefully, they serve as a stubborn fact that save the writing" a researcher does from "unfounded speculation" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 106). The term "data analysis" refers to the systematic process of consolidating, searching, arranging, reducing and, to some extent, interpreting to make sense of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), data analysis "involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p.157).

Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to data analysis as "data management," a process by which carefully constructed explanations can be accounted for through causal explanation and evidence which shows that each entity or event of the data is an instance of that explanation (p. 429). This approach to data analysis is embraced by researchers such as those developing grounded theory who are interested in careful and systematic data analysis (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and those involved in policy and evaluation research, for whom accountability to outside agencies is a guiding consideration (Punch, 1994; Patton, 1990). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994a), this model, which "argues for rigor in the collection, production, analysis, and presentation of qualitative empirical materials," is at the "postpositivist" end of a qualitative paradigmatic continuum which has, at its other end, an "interpretivist" or "constructivist" (p. 357) approach to analysis, which is not as concerned with an explicit, systematic, step-by-step process. In terms of data

analysis, the approach I used in my study was much closer to the postpositivist approach of Miles and Huberman's (1994) "data management" than to an interpretivist or constructivist approach (Schwandt, 1994). I proceeded with the task of data analysis based on the recommendations of Bogdan and Biklen (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (1988), and Patton (1990) which call for a somewhat sequential and lockstep plan. The suggestions and guidelines offered by these researchers were adapted and adjusted to fit my inquiry in the following way.

To begin with, as is desirable in the recursive, emergent, and dynamic nature of qualitative research, the initial stage of my data analysis began while data were being collected. After each seminar, I read the recorded notes and began thinking and speculating. I highlighted key words and phrases, and made note of my own hunches and ideas about patterns and regularities that I saw as potentially important or interesting at that point (Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These early reviews of the discussion records and my fieldnotes also became instrumental in the planning of subsequent seminars. For example, when it was apparent that a particular question had not elicited the degree or type of discussion expected, we were able to use this information in the development of future questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, the initial reviews of the discussion records and my fieldnotes also helped me in my continuing exploration of the literature pertinent to my study. I was able to investigate topics that were suggested by the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This reading became helpful not only in the continued planning of the seminars but, most important, in the final analysis of my data.

When the seminar series was over in May 1998 and I had finished the initial data review of the last seminar, I took a break from my project and my duties and activities of the CLL. Although this break was due more to circumstances than to choice, a break of this sort is recommended as it allows the researcher to gain distance from the details of the fieldwork and to have an opportunity to continue to read and process ideas (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

I returned to my study fresh and ready to begin the "mechanics" of working with the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This intensive period of my inquiry began with what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as organizing and processing. I brought together and

arranged the discussion records and my fieldnotes in a way that would allow me to easily read and retrieve the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988). Since the raw discussion records consisted of a vast number of handwritten documents which were, in some cases, difficult or awkward to read, this step included transcribing the written records into a master document on the computer for a consistent format. Fieldnotes already on the computer were also edited and modified for continuity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, my research design fits the description of an "instrumental" case study (Stake, 1994) because of my interest in the potential insights provided by the CLL seminars rather than in the "case" of the seminar series or the "cases" of the individual seminar. As such, although each seminar's format and program influenced the data collected during the seminar, I was more interested in discovering the larger issues and themes, external to the frame of each seminar, that emerged "across" or "over" the four seminars than I was in focusing on the findings of each seminar as an individual unit or mini-case. Therefore, in order to proceed, I began working with the discussion records as one unit rather than as four separate sets of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Merriam (1988), I read through the data in its entirety three times. I tried to do this during undisturbed blocks of time so as to concentrate and focus while noting patterns, regularities, and topics that would become a beginning outline or list of possible coding categories. After developing preliminary coding categories I began assigning an abbreviated form of these codes to what I thought of as "chunks" of the data. These chunks, referred to as "units," are the pieces or sections of the data that fall within a topic represented by a coding category (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988). The units of my data, usually defined by the comments of individual respondents, were passages consisting of a phrase, a sentence or a sequence of sentences, or a short paragraph.

As I continued, I modified and refined my initial coding scheme to include subcodes or subcategories more specific to the initial coding categories, and to also develop coding categories that moved beyond concrete description to a greater level of abstraction and conceptualization - the beginnings of interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). This stage of the process required intuition and speculation, but was also a systematic synthesis and analysis informed by the data (Merriam, 1988). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) explained further:

> The coding categories can be modified, new categories can be developed, and old ones discarded.... It is important to realize that you are not attempting to come up with the right coding system, or even the best. What is right or best differs according to your aims. (p. 183)

Once I was satisfied that my data were coded appropriately, I was able to use the "find" feature and the "copy and paste" capacity of my computer to identify, sort, and organize the units of data. Although easier and more efficient, this allowed me to proceed in a manner similar to the traditional methods which involved placing units of data on index cards, coding the cards, sorting the cards according to their codes, and then labeling the bundles of cards, or photocopying the original transcript pages, coding and cutting out the units of data, sorting the units according to their codes, and then placing the units in labeled folders (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988).

By using the computer, I was able to set up a new document for each code I had established, and name that document according to the code's theme or topic. I could then go to the master document, which included all data, to "find" the units of data labelled with the code I was attending to, "copy" the units of data from the master document, and then "paste" them into the new document. As a result of this procedure, I was able to develop a series of computer documents, each particular to a theme or topic. These documents allowed me to examine, together, all units of data particular to a specific theme or topic. For example, I was able to see, within what ended up being a 5 page document, all comments participants made pertaining to the topic of school-business partnerships. This helped me to gain a strong sense of what the participants, as an entire group, were thinking about the individual topic or theme.

I was then ready to begin the next step in analyzing my data - making interpretations and generating meaning. Although some researchers believe a concrete description of observable, reportable data is enough, many others argue that description should be balanced with interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Miles and Huberman

(1984) describe this process as moving "from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape.... no longer dealing just with observables but also with unobservables, and are connecting the two with successive layers of inferential glue" (p. 228). In order to do this, I followed many of the suggestions made by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Patton (1990). That is, I proceeded inductively, noting patterns and themes, topics, categories and clusters; thinking in terms of metaphors, analogies, contrasts, and comparisons; counting to see "what was there"; paying attention to logical or plausible relationships and linkages; and noting causes and consequences. This was perhaps the most challenging aspect of my work. I was obligated to construct and communicate the essence of what the data revealed. My purpose, of course, was to present the findings of my study in a way which would reveal their significance and importance. Patton (1990) commented:

> There are no formulas for determining significance. There are no ways of perfectly replicating the researcher's analytical thought processes. There are no straightforward tests for reliability and validity. In short, there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. (p. 372)

I proceeded with the best of intentions to the best of my ability. I was careful about the choices I made. In reporting my findings, I selected participant comments that seemed to best capture, reveal, or communicate the full range of participant ideas, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to all themes or topics discussed, and I was careful to explain whether the comments were representative of the views of many, of several, of some, or of few. I also deliberately included comments that presented a lone voice or a unique view or perspective not presented by others. In addition, in cases where I felt it might be helpful to the reader to know from what perspective the comment came, I identified the speaker's role or stakeholder label (e.g. parent, teacher, administrator, superintendent, trustee, etc.).

Issues of Validity and Reliability

In order for any aspect of my study to be considered important or significant, it must be seen as valid and reliable; the work must be believable, trustworthy, and credible. Issues of validity and reliability are of particular concern to the qualitative researcher. Because

"*understanding* is the primary rationale for the investigation," the guidelines for "trusting the study are going to be different than if the discovery of a law or testing a hypothesis is the study's objective, as is the case in positivist, quantitative experimental research designs" (Merriam, 1988, p. 166). Qualitative researchers base their studies on different assumptions about truth and reality and, therefore, have different understandings about validity and reliability (Merriam, 1998).

For example, validity, which assesses the degree to which the research findings match reality, should, in a qualitative study, be seen "in terms of interpreting the investigator's experience, rather than in terms of reality itself (which can never be grasped)" (Merriam, 1988, p. 167). This is based on the assumption that reality is "holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured. Assessing the isomorphism between data collected and the 'reality' from which they are derived is as an inappropriate determinant of validity" (p. 167). Therefore, internal validity is of primary concern in qualitative research and should be judged based on the investigator's ability to carefully construct and represent perspectives, rather than "reality" or "truth" per se (Merriam, 1988).

External validity, which assesses the degree to which the research findings are generalizable or applicable to other situations, should also be judged in a manner different from that which is appropriate for quantitative research. In a positivist research design, external validity is ensured through controlled conditions. This conception of generalizability is inappropriate to a qualitative inquiry which presupposes the multidimensional and dynamic nature of human experience. Specifically, the naturalistic understanding of qualitative research is concerned with offering perspectives rather than "truth" and, therefore, focuses on the particular rather than the general. This is not to say that findings of the particular are not generalizable or cannot be generalized. Eisner (1991), for example, argued that people learn to cope in the world through applying or transferring understandings gleaned from a particular event to subsequent situations. Miles and Huberman (1994) also argued that similarities found in a study of a number of particular cases from a variety of settings enhance generalizability and external validity. This, for

example, occurred in my study where many participants from a multitude of diverse settings came together to respond to the same topics and interviews/discussion questions. Similarities across cases, in particular responses, allowed me to generalize in my findings and may allow others to generalize beyond my study. In this sense, my participant sample ensured a degree of built-in external validity.

Reliability, which assesses the degree to which the research findings can be replicated, should also be judged differently from how it is assessed in quantitative studies. Reliability, in a positivist, experimental research design, is based on the premise that there is a single reality which, if studied repeatedly, will yield consistent results. On the other hand, qualitative research is based on the assumption that human behavior is not static. It has, as its aim, to describe and explain the perceptions and interpretations its subjects have of their experiences in the world. Therefore, to assess a qualitative study based on a positivist understanding of reliability is inappropriate. Instead of "reliability," Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested the terms "dependability" and "consistency" (p. 288) and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) used the terms "accuracy" and "comprehensiveness" (p. 36). Merriam (1988) elaborated: "That is, rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, one wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense - they are consistent and dependable" (p. 172).

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested a "transparency" of method as the best way for qualitative researchers to deal with issues of reliability and validity. They argued that, as is expected in quantitative research, the conventions of qualitative research should also "require clear, explicit reporting of data and procedures" (p. 439). In this regard, some researchers recommend documenting the details of data collection and analysis in an "audit" trail (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1988). With this advice in mind, my intention throughout the inquiry was to be continually self-conscious and reflexive, to follow through with my data analysis carefully and systematically, and to log not only details of the process but instances where choices and decisions were made. I suspect that the length and detail of this chapter alone is a result and, hopefully, an appropriate demonstration of the degree of importance I placed on the process of this inquiry.

Writing the Findings

As one would expect, the result of asking a large number of participants a series of fairly broad and general questions about public education and public education reform was that the findings of my study were vast. The data collected at each seminar represented a substantial pile of papers and, even after transcription and collation, I was faced with an enormous amount of information. The discussion notes revealed what, at first, seemed to be an overwhelming breadth and an endless depth of issues and topics - from the philosophical and ideological, to the pragmatic and practical; from the global and macro, to the local and micro; and from reminders of the past, to conceptions of the future. I knew the task of analyses and interpretation would be challenging, but it wasn't until I started to categorize and code the data that I also began to realize that I faced another major chore. How was I to organize this mass of findings so that I could write about them in a way that was both comprehensive and coherent?

As I worked through the process by reading and skimming through the data and my notes again and again, I was repeatedly struck by the way those of the study presented their thoughts and ideas and framed their own experiences, and I was compelled by what emerged in the logic of the discussions themselves. Underlying the words of the participants was a sense of temporality - an understanding or recognition of being situated in a particular place at a particular time. What came across very strongly was that participants saw themselves at a critical or pivotal point where their talk about public education carried with it consequence and weight, and where the landscape of reform was shifting and moving even as they spoke. For this reason, it began to make sense to me to organize the findings with this realization in mind.

To begin, participants located themselves in the "here and now." They were particularly interested in the socio-political and economic context in which public education in Alberta is embedded, and they discussed, at length, the impact of this factor on today's schools. Although participants acknowledged the past, these references were made primarily to shed light on the present. Hence, the first of the three chapters that include the study's findings is entitled "Where We Are." Second, participants talked extensively about the potential

consequences of educational reform and expressed a sense of urgency at "getting it right." They explored and grappled with the complexities of gaining support for public education, establishing a clear vision or focus, and coming to terms with what the purposes or functions of public education ought to be - issues they felt needed attention *before* and *as* decisions for change are made. The second of the "findings" chapters is, therefore, entitled "Contemplating Change." Finally, participants understood themselves to be in the midst of many important changes and reforms that have already begun. The ball - so to speak - is rolling and, in many cases, participants felt that they are scrambling not only to keep up, but also to understand both the immediate and far-reaching implications of such changes. At the same time, participants were also looking forward, realizing the necessity of seeing public education beyond the present, to possibilities for the future. For these reasons, the third of the following chapters is entitled "Moving Ahead."

CHAPTER 3

WHERE WE ARE

Canadian scholars Young and Levin (1998) have noted that "while immediate changes in education policy tend to get a great deal of attention, the most important influences on schooling come from larger and longer-term shifts in Canada and the world" (p. 285). Changes in demographics, social structures, technology, and economics significantly impact public education (Gallagher, 1995; Wotherspoon, 1998; Young & Levin, 1998), and these issues were of central concern to this study's participants. They repeatedly acknowledged the magnitude and significance of this broader context, and saw themselves and public education as important parts of a bigger picture. Of particular interest to participants were the challenges faced by those in schools as a result of pressures from outside or external change forces.

The Impact of Social and Demographic Change

The participants of this study were particularly concerned about issues they saw as outside of the school, but as having profound and troubling consequences for students and educators in the school. These issues included poverty, the effects of diversity on communities and student populations and, perhaps most disconcerting to participants, the problems caused by increased pressure on families and the resulting demands on educators to provide parental care and guidance to students for whom parental support at home is lacking. Participant's remarks agreed with the sentiments of Young and Levin (1998): "Schools and classrooms/teachers are inextricably linked to the wider social settings within which they are embedded," and that "the influences of these external realities invade the classroom in both obvious and subtle ways" (p. 198).

To begin, the amount of participant discussion around the issue of poverty as an increasing concern to public education was noteworthy. One professor commented on the growing problem: "Walking through downtown Calgary is totally different from downtown Chicago.... There is real poverty in Chicago. We are not that bad, but we are stepping toward it." A trustee argued that "children who live in poverty in this province do not have

their basic needs met. In Canada this should not be an issue," and a superintendent asserted that, as a result of poverty and social disparity, "Calgary has significant needs." These comments were particularly poignant given that they were spoken at a time when Calgary was recognized by Canadians for its affluence and thriving economy (Nemeth, 1997; Reynold & Silcoff, 1998). However, these remarks were not so surprising when considered in light of some recent statistics. Although there is some disagreement about what constitutes the poverty line and about what the definition of poverty in Canada is, the research, nevertheless, is troubling (Canadian Council of Social Development, 1999). For example, the most significant current demographic trend in Canada is the consistent increase in the number of Canadians whose annual income is below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off, and approximately one in five Canadian children live in poverty (Canadian Council of Social Development, 1993). According to Human Resources Development Canada (1995), the number of poor children in Canada is 1.6 million, 1.1 million of whom live in families for which social assistance is a major source of support.

Closer to home, recent research revealed that, in 1996, Calgary's child poverty rate was 23.7 % - 2 % higher than the national child poverty rate (Feeding Calgary's Children - A Committee of Social Service, Education, Health and Volunteer Agencies, 1999). It was estimated that 45,000 Calgarian children are affected by hunger and malnutrition. According to the report, this is partly due to the widening gap between the rich and the poor. The average family income in Calgary remained static between 1994 and 1996, while the difference in income between rich and poor families grew by more than $3,000 in the same time period. In addition, the provincial minimum wage does not cover the living expenses in a city of high housing costs, and welfare allowances have also fallen to about 45 % below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off point. The report concludes that health, school, and social problems increase when children are hungry or undernourished.

Given this information, it is no wonder that participants of this study were concerned. Family income is a significant predictor of a child's school success and poverty is one of the most powerful, yet neglected, influences on education. Students who are poor often do not have their physical and emotional needs met and, therefore, are challenged in their

opportunity to learn (Canadian Council of Social Development, 1999; Gallagher, 1995; Hargreaves, 1997a; Young & Levin, 1998). Schools often respond by organizing programs such as "breakfast" or "headstart" plans to provide the necessary support to disadvantaged children, but the extensive requirements or commitments of labour, time, and money for these programs are often not met, prohibiting poor children from accessing needed resources (Olsen, 1991). Moreover, as Barlow and Robertson (1994) argued, by trying to deal with hunger merely as a "learning impediment" (p. 8), such programs are only a band-aid solution or a feeble attempt on behalf of educators to address poverty, a far-reaching societal problem beyond the scope of the school to fix.

In addition to the concerns of participants regarding the effects of poverty on school children, particularly striking was the significant number of comments about the issues and problems facing families and parents in our communities. Participants acknowledged that "families have changed," and that they are up against "multiple pressures." As one participant commented: "Parents' crunch has parents stretched by jobs and family demands." Another participant surmised that parenting has gone by the wayside as "parents cannot parent because they are forced to work for financial reasons." "Parents don't know how to be parents," was the complaint of another. Particularly concerned with what seems to be a lack of parenting skills or a neglect of parental duties or responsibilities in today's families, participants had many comments and questions about the changing nature and structure of the family. This, they suggested, has a serious impact on children and, therefore, significant repercussions for schools.

Much of the literature focusing on the dynamic and complex nature of public education in North America and Canada pays particular attention to concerns of today's families and parents, and affirms the assertions of the participants of this study that a child's family life is inextricably linked to his or her school life. To start with, the very structure of the family has changed dramatically over the past 30 years (Elkind, 1994, 1997). Elkind (1997) argued that the notion of the modern nuclear family is being replaced by an understanding of the "postmodern permeable" family which "includes a variety of kinship patterns, including nuclear, two working parent, single parent, adoptive, and remarried families" (p. 36). Day

(1997) and Hargreaves (1997a) noted that there is a need to understand children in the complex contexts of the "fractured, blended, and lone-parent families" (Hargreaves, 1997a, p. 4) that are becoming the norm in Canada. Young and Levin (1998) explained that Canadian families and parents can no longer be seen as a "monolithic mass with a common set of characteristics" (p. 198). Indeed, the only thing today's families and parents have in common is their responsibility for children. When considering the diversity in "material circumstances, internal structure, and cultural location" of families, an important point comes to the fore: "As children enter the classroom, their families also come with them" (p. 198). With this in mind, it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge the range of family problems affecting many Canadian children: parental separation, divorce, abandonment by fathers; both parents working merely to make ends meet; an increased amount of parent time spent earning a living, leaving less time spent with children; parental responsibilities assumed by those outside of the family such as paid child-care workers or social service agency employees; inadequate day care and "latchkey" children; widespread alcohol and drug abuse; and increased family violence (Day, 1997; Gallagher, 1995; Young & Levin, 1988). Furthermore, we must continue to recognize the considerable challenges these family and parenting patterns, issues, and problems pose for our nation's schools (Day, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997a).

The acknowledgment of the challenges faced by parents and families led participants to some important observations. One educator, for example, claimed that "no one spends as much time with kids as we do" and, along with several other participants, wondered whose job it is to parent children. According to participants, two issues have emerged as a result of increased pressures on and problems within families. First, "over time schools have taken more responsibility because families have less time" and, second, "the needs of kids in classrooms are greater." For example, participants cited problems in areas such as early literacy: "Students come to school lacking experience with reading and books. How do we teach these skills without taking over the parenting skills?" Participants argued that parental responsibilities have also been downloaded to the school. According to one participant, at the high school level "teachers have taken over teaching many things such as CALM [Career

and Life Management Studies] and Driver's Ed." Elkind's (1997) views affirmed those of participants in arguing that the postmodern, permeable school sees educators assuming, among many other parenting roles, the responsibility for moral and character education and, moreover, emotional support and care. Several participants argued that parenting responsibilities should be relinquished by schools and given back to parents. Comments such as the following were repeated: "Parents have a responsibility to work in partnership with schools. Schools are having to take on all the roles." Nevertheless, as mentioned above, many participants acknowledged the inability of a growing number of parents to provide the type of stable home life often associated with our notion of the traditional, nuclear family.

In addition to the impact of poverty and the breakdown of the traditional family on schools, participants also repeatedly referred to the changing demographics of Canadian society and the increasing diversity of our nation's school population. In terms of ethnicity, cultural background, and other factors such as achievement and attitude toward school, Canadian classrooms are considerably more heterogeneous today than they were even a few decades ago (Statistics Canada, 1998). Participants specifically pointed to immigration as having significant implications for schools. Cultural and ethnic plurality, seen by participants on one hand to offer a richness and depth to our communities and schools was, on the other hand, seen as the source of a variety of challenges and difficulties for public education. According to Dunning (1997), immigration represents a major factor in Canada's population growth, and of the 200,000 immigrants who enter Canada yearly almost one quarter are school-age children. As a result, immigrant children make up a significant portion of school populations, particularly in large cities, and the impact on teachers and school organizations in having to meet the needs of diverse student bodies is increasing (Dunning, 1997; Gallagher, 1995; Hargreaves, 1997a; Wotherspoon, 1998; Young & Levin, 1998). More and more, public schools are required to educate students whose first language is not English and whose background is different than that of the dominant culture, and to enable these students to receive an "appropriate education from knowledgeable and concerned teachers. Cultural differences also create new issues for schools in their dealings with

parents and communities whose values may be quite different from those espoused by the school" (Young & Levin, 1998, p. 288).

The discussions around societal issues such as poverty, family pressures, and cultural diversity were accompanied by a tone of intense concern and, in some cases, futility and even despair. According to many participants, educators face a most difficult challenge: "The problem is that we are overwhelmed by societal needs." "There are greater problems in school, but these are societal issues which cannot be solved by the school." Several participants made comments such as the following: "Children are undervalued in our society." "There has been a loss in a sense of community. There is increased isolation. Education cannot be expected to redress this." One parent suggested that "schools are asked to be doing too much. They are not doing anything well." A trustee offered a similar argument:

> You are asked to do so much that shouldn't be on your plate. The danger, to me, is that the discontent of parents gets bigger and they remove kids from public schools. Our energies have to go into public education. Is anything more important than health and education?

According to participants, the social and demographic changes and shifts of the 1990s have placed immense stress on public schools in Alberta. In addition, as if the challenges and difficulties inherent in these dynamics have not been enough to contend with, the enormous role economic and political influences have also played in education in the past decade cannot be underestimated.

The Impact of Economic and Political Change

As outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the provincial Conservative government, under the leadership of Premier Ralph Klein, has initiated unprecedented and sweeping reforms to Alberta's public sector since 1993. Initially, fiscal considerations in the aftermath of a serious economic recession and its consequential provincial budget deficit were cited as the immediate concerns driving the reform agenda. Following these concerns was the government's commitment to creating an economic climate conducive to generating business and employment opportunities and to ensuring Alberta's economic viability in a

competitive global market. In the name of economy, reforms were embarked upon through a deficit reduction program involving significant restructuring for a leaner, more efficient, effective, and accountable public sector (Mansell, 1997). Alberta's case was no exception to Young and Levin's (1998) assertion that "criticism of schools and proposals for reform tend to follow broader economic cycles" (p. 288), and education became a primary target for renovation. Alberta Education's *Three-year Business Plan* (Alberta Education, 1994) initiated substantial funding and program cuts and extensive organizational restructuring and downsizing.

Since 1993, fiscal responsibility has been consistently held up by the Conservative government as the major impetus for recent reforms. However, some critics have argued that the agenda has more to do with right-wing politics than it has to do with economic concerns (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; McConaghy, 1994; Webber, 1995a). Barlow and Robertson (1994) offered the following analysis:

> The basis of these reforms is neither pedagogical nor fiscal, but ideological and political, consistent with ultraconservative beliefs about the role of government (as small as possible), the role of the private sector (as large as possible), and a deregulated marketplace. The deficit provided the Klein government with the opportunity to couch its extremism in the language of fiscal responsibility. (pp. 219-220)

Regardless of the motivation - economic or political - studies of the early effects of education reforms in Alberta have revealed notable consequences for school districts, individual schools, and classroom teachers (Webber, 1995a, 1995b). Issues such as site-based management, shared decision-making, increased province-wide standardized testing, outcomes-based curriculum initiatives, salary rollbacks, decreased resources and support, and budget constraints - to name only a few - have been dominant and daily concerns for those involved in public education at any level in Alberta since the mid-1990s.

These issues continue to be key concerns of this study's participants. Therefore, in the opinion of many, not only are schools expected to cure the social ills of the province, public education in Alberta has also been called upon to address economic concerns and, perhaps, even to further political agendas. Ironically, as is generally the case in North America, these demands are being made at the same time resources and support are being cut (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). The pressure on schools, according to participants, is intense and

unrelenting. Quite simply, schools have been called upon to "do too much," and to "be all things to all people." As Barlow and Robertson (1994) asserted, "schools have become anti-chaos rather than pro-social in their orientation" (p. 8) and, as Fullan (1993) argued, educators cannot do the task alone. Already too much is expected of them" (p. 5).

The Work of the Teacher

In the discussions around the dominant theme of overwhelming expectations, it is not surprising that many comments focused on the work of teachers. As Gallagher (1995) asserted, although the burdens on school administrators and school district personnel have increased substantially over recent years, it is the teachers who, on a daily basis, are "in the direct line of fire" (p. 54). However, it is interesting to note that, for the most part, comments made about the work of teachers were not made by teachers. For example, two superintendents offered the following remarks: "It takes a whole community to raise a child. There's too many things to do as a teacher." "Teachers need to be treated as professionals. They are too accommodating." An administrator asserted that "teachers can't do any more than they're doing," and a trustee added that "there are inappropriate public expectations. There are money issues. Teachers are required to facilitate special needs, be policemen, and day care." This concern was echoed by another trustee: "There are expectations of our public on teachers.... More responsibilities are being placed on teachers. But sometimes this is taken too far. There are some students who don't belong. For example, students who are tube-fed and need a nurse." Concerns were expressed by parents as well: "There is a gap between what teachers want to do for kids and what they can physically do." One parent was particularly sympathetic: "Teachers have the most stressful job. It is not recognized that they work year-round even when they are on holidays, picking up materials, etc. They don't turn off. People don't realize what a thing it is to be a teacher."

The above comments are consistent with recent studies about teaching in Canada which revealed that the expectations placed upon teachers have increased consistently in recent years. For instance, between 1982 and 1992, the Canadian teacher's average work week increased by 1.5 hours and, in Alberta, the teacher's average work week increased by 3

hours (Dunning, 1997; Wotherspoon, 1998). Even before the introduction of Alberta's major education reforms in 1994, interviews revealed that our province's teachers were already feeling the serious effects of the significant number of "top-down," "imposed innovations" of the late 1980's and early 1990's:

> The submissions, taken as a whole, paint a dramatic picture, one of schools and teachers pushed to their limits and, in some cases, beyond. It is difficult to overstate the concern, frustration and dissatisfaction that emerged in so many statements by so many individuals and groups of teachers. (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993, p. 5)

The few remarks made by participant teachers of this study about the work of teachers were interesting in that they seemed to be qualified by acknowledgments of personal limitations. For example, when speaking about working with special needs students, one teacher said, "It is the whole emotional side that goes with learning disabled kids that I am not equipped to handle." One participant was almost apologetic: "Too much is expected. Our hearts and heads are there, but...." It seemed that the challenges or concerns around teaching were internalized or personalized by those of the profession who offered comments - as if the problems were within the means of the individual to solve but, somehow, just beyond the teacher's reach. These comments pointed to what Lieberman and Miller (1984), Lieberman (1995), and Hargreaves (1997b) have referred to as the sense of isolation experienced by many teachers that disables them from seeing the problems and pressures associated with their work as beyond themselves - perhaps imposed by a larger context - and that prevents them from reaching out for support or assistance. Moreover, these comments were indicative of what authors such as Hargreaves (1994), Hargreaves and Tucker (1991), and Adelman and Walking-Eagle (1997) have identified as teacher guilt, "a central emotional preoccupation for teachers" which "recurs frequently when they are asked to talk about their work and their relations to it" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 142).

This guilt, according to Hargreaves (1994) and Hargreaves and Tucker (1991), comes from teachers' intense commitment to care and from personal tendencies of perfectionism, as well as from the open-ended, never ending nature of the job and the increased accountability and external expectations placed on educators. As one teacher participant remarked, "Teachers are resourceful. We will still carry on despite everything." Although

acknowledging the adversity of these challenging times, another teacher's comment indicated a determination to hang on to the positive: "We have to work very hard to make difficult situations better for students. We learn from this difficulty." Again, the tendency to turn the difficulty onto oneself, or to personalize or individualize the problem is evident in this statement. If not guilt, comments such as these surely convey the commitment to care that Hargreaves (1994) and Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) refer to. Herein, it seems, lies one of the paradoxes of teaching. On one hand, compelled by care and commitment, educators stand to experience guilt, frustration, and stress. On the other hand, it is care and commitment that authors such as Noddings (1992) and Sergiovanni (1994) have extolled as being of acute necessity in schools of today.

The Work of the Principal

Although the discussions around the theme of the overwhelming expectations placed on public schools centred on the work of teachers, there was also a fair amount of discussion about the role of principals and administrators within increasing social, demographic, economic, and political change and challenge. Many comments focused on the significant changes in the work of the administrator in the past few years. According to participants, administrators are increasingly "sharing the teaching load" yet, at the same time, "everything the job is now takes us away from teaching and learning." Initiatives such as site-based management and shared decision-making "often just mean more work for the principal." One participant reported the following: "I've read about the new role of principals to go out and solicit money." Simply put, the skills principals require "are different now." In addition to the role of educational leader, participants discussed the principal's job as involving budget and financial planning, facility and project management, fund-raising and entrepreneurship, communications and public and community relations, team, relationship, and community building, human resource and professional development, shared decision-making, change facilitation and policy implementation, and vision-building. On top of all of this, administrators are to be flexible, open-minded and proactive, in addition to being positive and caring - offering nothing less than service with a smile!

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the literature and research on the new role of the school administrator is extensive. Authors such as Ball (1994), Barth (1990), Chapman (1990), Dimmock (1996), Fullan (1996), Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991), and Murray (1994) - to mention a few - have examined the difficulties principals face in negotiating the dramatic changes and reforms in today's public school systems. According to Barth (1990) and Murray (1994), one of the most troublesome issues for the "new" principal is that the authority administrators once enjoyed must now be shared with teachers, parents, students, and other community members. In addition, the principal must address the concerns of teachers who are worried about maintaining control over their working conditions, and the public and politicians who demand more accountability and more evidence that education is producing desired results. As well, principals must follow legislative guidelines and policies which require more attention and time than ever and, to top it off, decreases in resources for staffing and programs require that "principals must do more with less" (Barth, p. 65). In addition, these institutional concerns are compounded by the plethora of social and demographic issues faced by schools such as those discussed at the beginning of this chapter: poverty, family pressures, and cultural diversity.

The work of Dimmock (1996), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), and Murray (1994) also concurred with the participants' descriptions of the role of today's principal as being onerous and complex. In effect, principals are middle managers and, "as such, they face a classical organizational dilemma" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 152). The demands and expectations from "above" and from "below" are often contradictory and, therefore, especially difficult to deal with. Furthermore, particularly disconcerting is the notion that principals should facilitate or lead in the implementation of externally imposed changes that they have not even been involved in initiating. According to Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), considering the demands they have always faced, "it is no wonder that most principals do not approach their change responsibilities with enthusiasm. In the best of times very few of us go out of our way to do something that is both complex and unclear" (p. 152).

Participants of this study were in agreement with authors such as Barth (1990), Dimmock (1996), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), and Murray (1994). Administrators of

today's schools not only attempt to balance innumerable tasks and duties and assume a myriad of roles, they exist in a particularly paradoxical and contentious space as both team members and leaders. They are torn between sharing authority and control and answering to and meeting demands from all quarters while, at the same time, being ultimately responsible and accountable.

Alberta's Political Climate

Those involved in public education in Alberta during the past decade have persevered during some especially difficult and trying times (Webber, 1995a; 1995b). Many of the participants of this study expressed their continued feelings of frustration and disappointment as a result of rapid and far-reaching changes and reforms. In this regard, most notable was how strongly participants felt about what they see as a lack of support for public education, its teachers, and its administrators. Participants primarily pointed to the issues of insufficient financial support, the depletion of other resources such as support personnel and services, and the lack of enough time on the part of educators to comfortably and appropriately meet the demands of their jobs. Extremely common in discussions were remarks such as "resources keep getting cut back," "resources and specialist are gone from the public system," and "schools are needy." These responses were most often related to issues of increased pressure to meet new challenges and expectations: "There are not the resources in the public system to address the needs of all students." "Further influx of ESL students makes second languages an issue. Their needs need to be addressed, and where does the funding come from?" "We need flexibility and resources - teachers, resource and specialist teachers, support for technology."

The words of one participant were indicative of the concerns of many: "Money isn't the only resource. Time is also a resource." Participants identified time as a chief factor and as obviously lacking for those who work in public education. According to participants, time is a crucial concern in light of the increased responsibilities and pressures of the consistent changes and reforms experienced by educators in recent years. Participants agreed with Johnson (1990) that, particularly in the dynamic and complex school settings of today,

problems of time are twofold: "First, in most schools, time is rigidly structured. Second, there simply is not enough of it" (p. 144). As Hargreaves (1994) explained, time is a fundamental feature of the educator's work and, as such, it is not surprising that the shortage of time is repeatedly cited in studies of educational change as a major complaint and key impediment of innovation and reform. Hargreaves' (1994) summary echoes the concerns of participants of this study: "Scarcity of time makes it difficult to plan more thoroughly, to commit oneself to the effort of innovation, to get together with colleagues, or to sit back and reflect on one's purposes and progress" (p. 15).

Although a lack of financial support for public education was not the only complaint of participants, it was certainly a major point of contention. Many conversations turned from the specific concerns of a lack of sufficient funds at the school level to the more general issue of public education funding. Numerous participants argued that appropriate investment in public education is crucial to the future of today's students, and concern over a lagging commitment to the funding of public education was noteworthy. Questions such as "Don't you invest in the youth of the future?" were repeated. One graduate student went as far as to suggest that "due to budget cuts, this generation will be no smarter than the last one." There was a great deal of concern about how and by whom public education should be funded. Corporate involvement and fundraising were seen by many as suspect and inappropriate. "Public education should be funded publicly," one participant argued. Many agreed; however, as one parent suggested, the fact remains that the "government doesn't provide funding for what education should be."

A few comments about the demographic issue of an aging population came into play in the discussion around funding and the responsibility of the taxpaying public. For example, one participant offered the following argument: "The public doesn't seem to want to pay for the education of the masses. There is no direct benefit personally, therefore, there is no need to contribute continually." An increasing number of Canadians are not parents of school children but are required to continue to pay taxes in support of public education. Although this contribution is necessary, what becomes problematic is that it comes from those who do not have an immediate stake or direct contact, interest, or involvement in

schools (Young & Levin, 1998). According to some participants, what results is not only apathy and a lack of interest or uninformed and misinformed criticism but, more disturbing, also a lack of commitment to funding public education at an appropriate level.

Even when the consequences of a lack of funds for education were considered, a representative from the business sector added: "I don't think a crisis will bring dollars to education more than there is now." The will to fund public education was a theme in other discussions. "Public education can't be all things to all people. With funding limitations we might need to realize this." One trustee was adamant: "Where is this headed? We will bleed the public purse dry through the costs of specialized programs, technology, and technology maintenance. But we get tied up and see money as the answer." In spite of views such as these, the general tone of the discussions seemed to indicate that, in public education as in life, the adage "you get what you pay for" applies. With only a few exceptions, participants agreed that Albertans ought to advocate for public education as a spending priority. The concerns over public education funding seemed to be summed up in an exchange between two administrators. The first asked, "Do we have the will to invest?" The second replied with another question, "Do we have the resources?" The first responded, "If we have the will, then we have the resources."

When considering resources, participants' discussions about time and money were accompanied by discussions about human resources. According to one parent, public education has been most remiss in not recognizing the value of its organizations' people. It has "missed business's greatest strength of putting resources into their people." As well, one Calgary school administrator urged participants to keep people in the forefront of discussion and debates about change and reform:

> We have done well because we had great support in our Calgary Board of Education.
> We are still seeing residuals. We will see a decline without this infrastructure. It was
> successful when the resources were available. The energy is about people - they need
> to be supported.

This opinion was reiterated by the others. For example, comments such as the following acknowledged the importance of emotional support: "Are we truly learning cultures when

we are not supported financially *and* spiritually?" "Innovation can die very quickly without support - without hope."

On the topic of support for public education, participants also expressed a great deal of concern over what was viewed as an absence of voices which advocate and defend public education. In the opinion of many participants, the lack of support on the part of the provincial government is particularly disconcerting and difficult to come to terms with. To begin, many participants felt the government's commitment to education is questionable in the first place. A federal politician in attendance at one seminar confirmed that "problems in education take a back seat." Several participants wondered why there seems to be more interest in and support for private and charter schools than there is for public schools. "The government is still in the business of supporting private industry," was the response of one participant, and an administrator asserted that the provincial government has a mandate for international business, but not for public education and health care. The "big business, competitive agenda" of the Klein government was identified by several participants as being promoted at the expense of the province's social interests and programs. The influence of the financial "bottom line," participants argued, drives policy in Alberta: The "government seems to be asking, 'How do we maximize profit with minimum expense?'"

Some participants felt that the provincial government actually presented an antagonistic front to those in support of public education. One participant offered the following: "The government has been very negative towards education in general. In the country I was trained in the Ministry of Education propelled people into new things. Here the Ministry of Education is the critic." Some participants went as far as to say that the government deliberately ignores existing support for public education, and one administrator was particularly suspect of the government's motives: "Believe it - this is an issue of power and control and has nothing to do with children and learning." A parent was also especially concerned about the government's lack of commitment: "Their stance is 'you'll get only what we'll give you and you'll do the best you can.' This is no way to lead." These comments seem to agree with Barlow and Robertson's (1994) opinion about the position of Canadian provincial governments in general: "Rather than challenging the downloading

mentality that holds schools accountable for matters well beyond their reach, provincial governments appear to have welcomed the perception that schools are the problem, as an opportunity to download political heat" (p. 14).

The issue of trust was also often noted by participants:

> The government is eroding funding and pitting each other against each other. The Public Board vs. other boards, parents vs. teachers, etc. Trust is gone. It is divide and conquer.... The government has set up the model, yet everyone is affected and everyone is feeling like they're being shot at and devalued.

Some participants felt that if it was the government's intent to promote distrust among stakeholders, the plan has backfired. What has resulted is stakeholder distrust of the government. A high school student's comments were indicative of this sentiment. Referring to the provincial MLA who was a panelist at one seminar, this participant said, "I didn't like what the politician had to say. He was pathetic. He did not acknowledge the difficulties." Many participants felt that a lack of trust on all levels is a key detriment to dealing with the difficulties those concerned about public education face: "Honesty, communication, and respect are important. A teacher voiced the following opinion: "Trust is important in any relationship. There is no trust with the government. Communication and respect are conditions of success." A number of participants concluded that this climate of distrust and suspicion has left parents, teachers, and trustees feeling defensive and powerless.

Participants also expressed particular concern over the lack of support from the media. For example, one trustee offered the following: "I am upset about myths perpetuated by the media. How often does a reporter come into a school? But they write about problems. They talk to disgruntled parents and others." Another participant argued that "the media has had a tremendous influence in deciding what to cover or not," and asked an important question: "What is the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of public education?" This question reflects concerns about the powerful media influence discussed in recent commentary on the politics and sociology of Canadian education. Persistent media reports or stories about "what's wrong" - the inadequacies and problems of schools - reinforce perceptions and myths of the incompetent teacher and the failure of public education. In addition, media coverage of education is often more abbreviated and episodic than it is

complete and thorough, and it is this limited view of education that has become the regular source of information for the majority of Canadian adults who do not have children in school (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Wotherspoon, 1998; Young & Levin, 1998).

However, according to participants, politicians and the media are not solely responsible for the lack of support of public schools or the antagonism many educators feel. In the concise statement of one participant, "Public support could be better." It seemed to several participants that many Albertans are dissatisfied with public education and, particularly, with educators. Opinions such as the following were held by several participants: "An anti-professional climate exists in the province as part of the parent community. Doctors are attacked and under criticism, as are teachers. Parents feel they pay taxes, therefore, they have the right to tell you how to do your job." Another spoke more specifically: "There is a lot of personal denial on the part of corporate successes as to the good public education they received." According to one trustee, "Teachers have students for 12.5 % of the year, but get 100 % of the blame." Several participants maintained that a lack of support has gone hand in hand with the devaluation of the teaching profession and this, in turn, has placed additional pressure on teachers who are already stretched to the limit: "A challenge for educators is to face the community. Parents, the press, and the larger community's negativity can demoralize us."

An acknowledgment of the demoralized, devalued, and unappreciated educator is not new in the literature concerning the work of those in public education, particularly when that work must be done in the midst of change and reform. This literature substantiates the concerns outlined by participants of this study. For example, reporting on the status of the teachers in the United States, both the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) identified the significant deterioration of the conditions under which educators work, and argued that an erosion of the teaching profession poses a major threat to the stability and success of public schools. According to some education analysts (Ball, 1998; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Beare & Slaughter, 1993; Berliner, 1993a; Bracey, 1995), educators have become scapegoats or victims of the "politics of blame," wherein public perceptions of the "incompetent teacher" and the "failed

school" are fueled by fear and anxiety in times of instability, uncertainty, and change. Hargreaves and Evans (1997), Sikes (1992), and Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) recognized that teachers have become especially demoralized as a result of being a target in recent reform movements - a failing entity to *be* changed - as opposed to a proactive group with the potential to *effect* change.

A significant amount has also been written on the topic of the deprofessionalized educator. Although most of this work focuses specifically on the work of teachers, it explores the notion of teaching in general terms, as a profession or role, rather than as "the teacher" separate from, for example, "the principal." Thus, this work can be applied to all involved in schools for whom teaching or education is a central occupation. Authors such as Hargreaves (1994), Kanpol (1992), Sikes (1992), and Wotherspoon (1998) explained the deterioration and denigration of the teaching profession in terms of the intensification and deskilling of teachers' work as a result of heightened pressures and demands associated with the job and the imposition of outside controls or "top-down" initiatives in educational reforms. Specifically, Hargreaves (1994) summarized these conditions in terms of what Apple (1989) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) referred to as proletarianization, "the growing dependence on an externally produced and imposed apparatus of behavioral objectives, in-class assessments and accountability instruments, and classroom management technologies" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 119). Proletarianization leads to an increase in administrative and assessment tasks, a lengthened work day, and decreased opportunities for more creative and imaginative work. In addition to being a major cause of teacher burnout and guilt, this intensification and deskilling erodes professional freedom and autonomy and leaves educators feeling devalued and demoralized (Hargreaves, 1994).

Authors such as Hargreaves and Evans (1997), Sikes (1992), Sykes (1990), and Tyack and Cuban (1995) have argued that educators have also felt demoralized and devalued as a result of not having a voice or not being involved in decisions of reform and change that ultimately affect, more than anyone else, them and the students they teach: "In planning reforms in recent years, policy elites have often bypassed teachers and discounted their knowledge of what schools are like today" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 135). In addition,

"the voices of teachers have been absent in the debate about current reforms, a result of the marked antagonism between organized teachers and public officials" (Sykes, 1990, p. 91). For example, educators in Alberta are often dismissed as whiners or as a special interest group (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Webber, 1995b). These concerns were alluded to by participants in several remarks which suggested that Alberta educators are not valued, taken seriously, or even considered by senior policy makers in reform decision-making: "Teachers aren't consulted." "Teachers feel undervalued and more so devalued. This has gone on since the Round Tables." "The government wants to break the back of the ATA."

It is interesting to note that, although participants overwhelmingly recognized that there was little concern or understanding on the part of politicians and the media of the plight of educators in our province, and that public support for public education was less than adequate, these sentiments were not indicative of the position of participants of this study who were, almost without exception, supportive of educators and considerate of the difficulties faced in public education today. According to Wotherspoon (1998), what results from contradictions of this sort is that educators find themselves in an uncomfortable position: "Regardless of whether teachers are blamed for educational failure or treated sympathetically for their awkward position within the education system, there is the sense of powerlessness that has a demoralizing impact on teachers" (p. 109).

In the face of challenging societal issues, high expectations, and a lack of support for public education, participants wondered about what the future holds for the educators' professions. Participants felt there were some important issues to be addressed: "Why would someone enter education today? There is a new and difficult protocol." "How do we induct new teachers into the profession? The demands of the profession are all together different than they were." Other concerns about a "drain" of expertise and wisdom were voiced. That administrators were particularly concerned is reflected in the following comments: "Nobody mentioned early retirement and the lack of administrators to fill the positions." "Our district technician left the school system to go into private industry. This is a really big problem."

Issues of attracting, preparing, retaining, and supporting talented and enthusiastic professionals in education has been a topic of importance and concern in recent research and related literature (Barth, 1990; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Gallagher, 1995; Holmes Group, 1986). For example, Barth (1990) pointed to a "sobering in-school message: The best and the brightest are leaving public education. And a huge number of the educators who remain will serve their time only until something more lucrative, socially valued, personally fulfilling, and less consuming comes along" (p. 14). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) and Gallagher (1995) noted that an inordinately high percentage of teachers - between one-third and one-half - leave the profession before their eighth year of teaching. Barth (1990) reported specifically on the consequences of stress associated with the number and variety of problems confronting principals in the United States and suggested that a profession that was once very stable now faces a massive turnover: "Two-thirds of the nation's 100,000 principals intend to quit or retire by the turn of the century. More disturbing, the very best principals appear to be the ones most likely to abandon their positions" (p. 65). According to these authors, issues such as difficult working conditions, the frustrations which accompany increasing expectations and demands, and little recognition and few rewards have caused a crisis by forcing good people out and by discouraging good people from entering the education professions. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) asserted that this will potentially result in the "fundamental deterioration" (p. 126) of public education.

Reflections on Chapter 3

In concluding this section entitled "Where We Are" - the context of social, demographic, economic, and political change, and the challenging climate of tension and uncertainty in Alberta - it is important to note the significant degree to which participants of this study recognized the mounting pressures and problems faced by public education and by those working in today's schools. Moreover, participants were adamant that schools and educators cannot continue to address increasing societal or political expectations or to live up to the heightened demands of addressing or solving social and economic problems. This

argument agrees with the conclusions of Canadian authors such as Fullan (1993), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), Gallagher (1995), Hargreaves (1999), and Young and Levin (1998): Schools cannot meet these challenges alone or in isolation.

Although schools cannot do the work alone, a strong opinion among participants was also that public schools are powerful institutions of influence and change and that educators must be seen as a strong force for affecting reform. Moreover, as Young and Levin (1998) explained, "public schools are important institutions whose goals require them to be involved in the development of Canada as a whole" (p. 296). Schools, however, must be seen as one of many important dimensions within an immensely complicated and complex system of interrelated change forces and societal institutions, all of which affect and are affected by one another. The responsibility for change can be assumed by schools, but not without that same responsibility also being shouldered by those of all other societal spheres (Young & Levin, 1998). As a key starting point in moving toward a more ecological understanding of public education, as within a larger context of shared responsibility, participants of this study identified, over and over again, the need to gain, encourage, and nurture support for public education.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPLATING CHANGE

As discussed in the previous section entitled "Where We Are," the influences of a changing society on education were of significant concern to this study's participants. Issues of poverty, cultural diversity, and changes in family structures have resulted in profound and complicated pressures on the public school, its teachers, and its administrators. In addition, political and economic forces have also impacted education in significant ways. Within the larger contexts of society and change, the fact that public education is being pushed, pulled, and reshaped in an attempt to make it meet a magnitude of diverse expectations cannot be ignored. The vast amount of literature written about public education reform presents a clear message: Change is inevitable and necessary in meeting the needs of our youth as we prepare for a new millennium. Beyond this message, however, little else is clear or certain. The topic of change becomes a muddled and complicated debate, fraught with tension, contradiction, and ambiguity. Important questions emerge: If it is necessary to change public education, *how* might we go about it and *what* is it that we hope to achieve?

Gaining Support

Very important to the participants of this study was the realization that in order to effect positive change, support for public education must be strengthened, the public must be educated and aware of the complex and difficult issues facing schools, and all stakeholder groups must accept responsibility and become involved. In this regard, several participants pointed specifically to concerns about the lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of the general public. For example, one trustee offered the following: "The first thing I learned as a trustee is how ignorant people are. Where are we failing to educate the public?" Other participants shared the same opinion: "The public doesn't make the link between schooling and society." "How do we inform and educate others that our future well-being depends on our public education?"

A significant amount of participant discussion centred around the role of parents in swaying the public perception of schools and, more importantly, in influencing the level or degree of support for public education in our communities. Indeed, the power of "grassroots" parental advocacy should not be underestimated (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Hargreaves, 1999). It was very clear that participants recognized the potential of parents as key players in gaining, maintaining or, conversely, losing support for public education. One superintendent argued that "we do not to do a good job as educators of letting parents know what we do, therefore, the knowledge base of parents is lacking. I am shocked at the undermining of the expertise of teachers." Another participant asked, "How do we get the message out [when], typically, satisfied and responsible parents are not the vocal type?" Several participants suggested that when parents are "on side" and involved, they serve as the most effective advocates for education. One administrator argued that involving parents and "tapping parental strengths and expertise" bodes well for public education, and suggested that parents who are involved in schools know that public education is doing well. Several participants suggested that we should not be afraid to ask parents to speak on behalf of public education and to explain that a lot of "good things are happening" in our schools. A representative of a school council association, S.P.E.A.K. (Support Public Education - Act for Kids), reported that all of the initiatives of this organization have been guided by the imperative of supporting public education.

Although parents were seen as a most powerful advocate group, participants felt that support for public education must also come from the wider community. However, this level of support, according to some participants, is much more difficult to gain. One superintendent's question was indicative of this concern: "How do we educate the 70 % of the population who do not have children in the schools?" Responses to this question and others like it were offered by some. A professor and a professional development consultant both suggested that "we must start on an incremental basis - one person at a time" - because, after all, "it is about people." Connections to the wider community were seen as important links in encouraging support for schools. As one trustee suggested, "Reconnecting community to public education helps in the understanding of the schools.

We need to let other people in." Moreover, according to an administrator, if taxpayers are able to exercise their right of knowing what is going on in schools they are more apt to fulfill their responsibility of supporting public education.

Many participants suggested that "we could promote ourselves better," and that "we should celebrate the accomplishments of the students and educators in a way that is not self-serving." Some participants argued that the best way to improve the image of public education is, quite simply, "to do a good job teaching." A few participants suggested that educators might actually need to market themselves and advertise in a way similar to that of the private sector. However, one teacher responded by asserting that "we are not good marketers. Teachers are not trained to do this."

Several participants pointed to the initiatives of the Alberta Teachers' Association as being effective in promoting public education in the province. One trustee commented that the "'Public Education Works' campaign lets people know of the successes." Another participant suggested that "in the past few years, with the 'Save Public Education' campaign, we have improved our profile as a profession." The "March for Education" in Edmonton was also referred to as bringing attention to funding concerns and the working conditions of teachers. A superintendent also remembered the ATA bumper sticker: "If you can read this, thank a teacher."

Several other participants identified the key role of trustees in informing the public of educational matters and, more importantly, of educating the critics. A trustee offered the following comment: "Four out of the 5 years of my work as trustee has been spent educating the public as to the importance of public education.... The more closely people are related to the school the better advocates they are for public education."

As the media was also seen as having an important influence on the image of public education, some participants argued that "our responsibility is to educate the media" as well. One superintendent suggested that "advocacy could come from involvement with the press." As one trustee mentioned, education "is the number one issue discussed in the papers. Calgarians are getting to know education" through the media.

Vision and Focus

Much of the literature on educational reform suggests that the best way to initiate change and to gain stakeholder support, particularly during turbulent times, is through vision-building, a process by which the stakeholders of an organization have the opportunity to share in the development of a collective ideal or a focus for improvement and the attainment of a more desirable future (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992; Wallace, Engel, & Mooney, 1997). Vision-building "permeates the organization with values, purpose, and integrity for both the what and how of improvement" (Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991, p. 81), yet it is not a simple process. Within any organization or community, the formation, implementation, shaping, and transformation of a vision must be dynamic, interactive, and constant. Barth (1990), Fullan (1993), Senge (1990), and Wallace et al. (1997) argued that vision-building must start with individual stakeholders such as teachers or school leaders. Only after personal visions have been established should individuals come together to share, discuss, debate and, then, to merge personal ideals with collective ideals to formulate a shared vision.

In this light, some authors (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992) have suggested that the greatest promise for meaningful school reform lies within schools. It is for this reason that most literature on vision-building focuses on the process at the school or school district level, so that the unique context of the school and its community become primary considerations. However, Hargreaves (1994) has argued that vision-building can and should reach beyond the school and its immediate setting. A local vision should be embraced and, further, should be publicly contested at all levels, including the national level for the formulation of goals and frameworks for Canadian education. These goals and frameworks should not be detailed and content-specific; rather, they should reflect ethical principles such as equity, excellence, justice, partnership, care for others, and global awareness - moral standards and values Canadians can agree upon and commit to. Gallagher (1995) has also argued that Canadians must be willing to build a national vision for education that goes beyond the individual school and its locality. He asserted that

Canadian citizens, not politicians, should initiate the deep, transformational policy reforms of a vision for a true learning society in which education and training are valued and invested in and in which individuals, young and old, are supported in continuous, lifelong learning.

This concept of a larger, broader vision is one that was on the minds of participants of this study. They believed that educational stakeholders in our province must be involved in vision-building that goes beyond the school and school district levels to at least the provincial level and, then, perhaps to the national level. In the words of Tyack and Cuban (1995), participants called for the negotiation of "a common ground of purpose sufficiently generous, compelling, and plausible that it can unify citizens in support of public schooling" (p. 140).

In the vein of the recommendations of Gallagher (1995) and Hargreaves (1994) mentioned above, some of the participant discussions regarding vision and focus in education started with conversations about values and about which values could be seen as common and important in our diverse, multicultural society. Comments pointed to a notion of universal values, rather than values that might have traditionally been associated with the religious or cultural background of particular citizen groups. For example, one participant suggested that "there are Canadian values that need to be respected. There is not always a religious aspect to this." Another argued that "there is some version of the Golden Rule prevalent in some form." Specifically, one participant suggested that "learning, sharing, and caring are values that many schools share." One administrator furthered the discussion by suggesting that if educational stakeholders could identify and commit to a set of common values, initiate a process of change, and move forward together, they would be in an advantageous position - the lead. In this way, educational stakeholders might actually influence society rather than finding themselves merely picking up the pieces after the fact, in fragmented and separate groups, as has often been the case.

Further to the consideration of shared values, remained the concern that seemed most important to participants - the need for a common and shared focus or vision for public education. Comments such as the following are indicative of those which started many discussions: "We need to look at the core of public education and then have a vision and

move forward." A teacher argued that "we have to know what we believe in and be confident about what we do." One superintendent asserted that "we need the leadership. We need to have a deeper philosophical view of what education is." Although these comments reflected a sense of certainty and confidence about the need for a focus or vision in education, this concern was more often expressed in the form of questions, such as the following:

> What is our society trying to a uphold in public education?... Have we forgotten what our focus is? What is the direction?... Where is the philosophical voice that pulls us up? Where is the vision and a place to go?... What should education look like?... How do we define education? What are we educating for? How do we develop a common vision?

Consequently, it is important to note that even as participants acknowledged the merits of a shared or common vision or focus, their many questions revealed a degree of uncertainty and perplexity about what this vision or focus might be. However, one thing was clear. Participants were adamant that the development of a vision for public education in our province is crucial, an important cornerstone to be laid before moving forward. Without this shared commitment or sense of common ownership, the focus and energy required for meaningful and lasting change is likely to be absent (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Leithwood et al., 1994; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992; Wallace et al., 1997). Several participants acknowledged that there exists a strong desire and commitment on the part of educational stakeholders to do what is necessary to develop such a shared vision. One comment, in particular, was indicative of this assertion: "At the heart of most people is the understanding that we are a part of a larger picture."

However, participants recognized that the process by which this challenge should be tackled is not necessarily understood in the same way by the various individuals and groups involved. Moreover, many participants agreed that the antagonism that exists between some stakeholders groups is a detriment that must be dealt with. As one participant concluded, "We will need to work together and not keep battling with Edmonton." Another suggested that "adults have not been having good discussions about schooling," and asked, "How are we going to live together?" As Hargreaves and Evans (1997) argued, visions are socially constructed and, reflective of this perspective, participants agreed that stakeholders must

pull together, continue the debate, acknowledge and consider differing perspectives and opinions, and work through the development of some common understandings - if only for the sake of the children of our province.

It is important to note that although participants did recognize a degree of antagonism underlying the development of a shared vision or purpose for public education, a number of participants also mentioned the importance of seeing conflict as potentially positive. "We need productive tension, not destroying one another," one participant argued. "People are afraid of conflict.... That need not be so." Another asserted that "conflict is important in the process as it gets at issues." As those who write about vision-building (Fullan, 1994; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Senge, 1990) have contended, this process is problematic, complex, and extremely difficult to sustain. Hargreaves (1994) paid particular attention to the tensions inherent in building vision when several different stakeholder groups are involved and when a multitude of voices must not only be heard, but also "engaged, reconciled and argued with" (p. 251). He asserted that the debate must be guided by the ethical principles that remind us of what the change is for and why the vision is important. Moreover, Barth (1990) argued that the debate can only be enriched by the wonderful learning opportunities offered by differences. Although difficult and contentious, continued and shared vision-building becomes a "reinforcing process of increasing clarity, enthusiasm, communication and commitment" (Senge, 1990, p. 227).

Purpose

As it only makes sense to consider aims and goals when talking about the importance of building a shared vision or a common focus, it is not surprising that the talk of participants of this study around vision-building for education in our province came with a great deal of discussion about what public education should offer and about whose interests it should serve. Participants asked what one graduate student referred to as the "bigger" questions: "Is education a public or a private good? There is the power issue of whose children - mine or ours?" An administrator framed the question as the debate over "my kid versus our kids." As discussed at length in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the public education debate is alive

and well, particularly as changes and reforms in education are examined and questioned. This study's discussions were indicative of this contention. As some agreement over what might be the purpose or purposes of education was sought, the contradictions inherent in the debate - the private versus the public, the individual versus the collective - were strongly reflected in the concerns of participants. Although one trustee acknowledged that "we are faced with the 'me' generation," and that we seem "intent on meeting our own needs," an administrator put forth the following challenge: "We need to ask ourselves, 'What does it mean to be human? What is best for children?'" As one participant argued, "It is the issue of the common good. Good education is good for everybody."

Statements related to what is best for children and to what is in the interest of the common good seemed to be important as baselines or touch points for much of the discussion about the purposes and aims of public education. That said, participants were equally aware that the notions of "best" and "common" have become problematic and complicated given the increasing heterogeneity of Canadian society and the diverse values and needs of parents, students, and other stakeholders, not to mention the impact of significant economic and technological changes in our lives. Coming to terms with or to an agreement about what is best and what is held in common proved easier said than done.

Contributions from some postmodern theorists (Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984) have suggested that the ambiguity and complexity inherent in today's world is the nature of the postmodern condition, and that achieving agreement or a sense of common purpose in a fractured and disjointed society is futile and, indeed, impossible. The postmodern understanding of multiple voices and multiple truths renders agreement and consensus-making unachievable and, moreover, undesirable. As a result, from some postmodernist perspectives, the public education project has become obsolete and irrelevant, and should be abandoned as we approach the 21st Century. New forms of schooling and alternative systems for delivering education should be attended to.

However, authors such as Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), Beare and Slaughter (1993), and Hargreaves (1994) have opposed this perspective or view as the "dark side" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 251) of postmodernism, which sees the world without community or

authority. These authors have suggested that the complexity of pluralism and its multiple voices does not simply constitute chaos and fragmentation. They argued that individuals can come together around certain values that are deemed important and that, even in a pluralistic and multivocalic context, these values can be the catalyst for political action. With a vision based upon ethical principles (Hargreaves, 1994) or on common interests in, for example, peace, the environment, and social justice (Beare & Slaughter, 1993), under conditions in which schools are places of democracy and popular political and social power (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991), public education can exist if authority is given first to those *in* public schools - the students, parents, and teachers - and if centralized administrative control is relaxed or relinquished (Hargreaves, 1994). Although a challenging prospect, Hargreaves (1994) explained that by trading bureaucratic control for empowerment in schools, a sense of common purpose and the commitment that accompanies purpose need not be lost. Community and shared vision are not exchanged for chaos; rather they are contested, worked through, and are built bottom-up, from within, not imposed top-down, from without.

Whether discussed in terms of postmodernism or not, as mentioned earlier, the participants of this study realized the difficulties involved in attempting to define or describe the purpose or purposes of public education. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the amount of related discussion and what seemed to be a high degree of intensity and concern, the debate about public education and reform needs to be accompanied by discussions about its purposes and aims. An analysis of the many participant comments on this topic or issue revealed that public education can, indeed, be seen as meeting certain goals or serving certain functions. In a way similar to the suggestions of authors such as Barber (1997), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), and Sizer (1997), these goals or functions - these purposes - can be grouped and examined in general categories. It must be noted that the participant discussions revealed that the lines between these categories are blurred; they are not mutually exclusive, and they often overlap. At the same time, they can also be seen as contradictory and incompatible. Therefore, the organization of the following sections is limiting in its structure; nevertheless, it serves as a way to look at what participants said

about the purposes or functions of public education. It is in no way meant to be definitive or conclusive.

First, participants talked about public education in terms of building community and establishing a collective public, and in terms of maintaining a democratic or civic ideal. In this regard, there was a lot of concern over the issues of equal access, equal opportunity, and equal provision in public education, and particular attention was paid to what participants saw as an increasing trend toward privatization in education. Second, participants talked about public education in terms of meeting an economic imperative in preparing students for the workforce, and in terms of fostering independent thinking and lifelong learning. In this regard, there was some concern over the tension between a liberal, "well-rounded" education and a practical or vocational education for employment. There was also much concern over the tension between the ideals of cooperation and competition in education.

Community, a Collective Public, and a Democratic Ideal

Participants were overwhelmingly committed to what they saw as the "public" in the "public versus private" controversy. They voiced strong arguments for public education as an institution reflective of the "real" world and, as such, honoring diversity, building community, and providing equal access and, therefore, equal opportunity to all children. These ideals, originally espoused by Dewey (1916) and, more recently, by scholars such as Barber (1997), Darling-Hammond (1997), Fenstermacher (1995, 1997), Giroux (1993), Glickman (1995), Goodlad (1997), Greene (1993), and Gutmann (1987) were reflected in the opinions of this study's participants about the purposes of public education. In short, according to participants, what is public is synonymous with what is diverse and plural. In today's society, diversity and plurality must be respected, accommodated, and celebrated. Indeed, paradoxically, it is this difference of experience that we share in common. Moreover, participants agreed with Darling-Hammond's (1997) assertion that it is a "commitment to communicate about and across our multiple perspectives that is the essence of a democracy and the glue that holds a democratic society together" (p. 48).

One teacher's statement reflected the opinion of most participants: "Public education is about balancing diversity, a range of people. We must bring together the diversity in our schools for the perpetuation of the common good." Many participants brought attention to another important ideal of public education. In honoring diversity, "public schools provide a good place to build community." One superintendent argued that "public education is diversity and values; a community builder or culture generator. It is our future." Another participant commented that, in public schools, "students are allowed to evolve together. We have created team players. Students are tolerant children, sensitive to others. Inclusion has promoted this." As one participant pointed out, public education is built on the premise that "ultimately we are all connected with each other." In this regard, a parent voiced a concern that was often repeated: "I don't think charter schools are bad, but I worry about public education becoming separate, rather than a meeting place." An administrator agreed: "We cannot reach a global community when we are cutting ourselves into tiny pieces."

It is interesting to note that most participants of this study felt that the ideals of a democratic community and of a collective public were inherent in public education, but not necessarily in the education of private or charter schools. This view was demonstrated in the significant number of the comments about the purposes or goals of public education that were presented as opposite, contradictory, or significantly different from the purposes or goals of charter or private education. In regards to diversity and inclusion, specifically, several participants raised questions about private and charter schooling. The following comment is indicative of this concern: "Why don't people want their children to go to public schools? They don't want their kids exposed to those less motivated." One participant suggested that charter and private schools are "seductive, away from the underclass, not just [away from] cultural diversity." Another argued that "parents want to shelter their children from the 'others' - the special needs, disadvantaged, behaviorally challenged kids, etc. Therefore, this leads to segregation of kids from school to school."

The value and importance of diversity and inclusion was mentioned numerous times by participants who believed that the make-up of a school's population should reflect the make-up of society or the "real" world. For example, one administrator's reminder was echoed by

others: "The scope of Calgary is multicultural and kids bring many cultures to school." One teacher related the following: "I know of 15 students who left to go to private school. Others chose not to go to private school because *this* is the real world - public education is the real world. Private schools are not the real world." One student argued that the value of public education is that it "does not censor the child's experience. It is not wrong for a child to see things that are bad." A teacher added: "How do you learn to deal with the less desirable facts of life if you are not exposed to them?"

In accordance with the views of authors such as Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), Darling-Hammond (1997), Fenstermacher (1995), Giroux (1993), Glickman (1995), Gutmann (1987), and Sergiovanni (1994), several participants of this study argued that public education is not only about building community and encouraging a collective public, it is also "about teaching democracy." Along with being diverse and inclusive, classrooms must be "places where we teach citizenship and public responsibility." As one participant suggested, "the classroom should model democracy." An administrator offered the following: "Who is the real client of public education? Society. The student is not actually the question. Our society's needs are to have citizens to build democracy." A trustee agreed: "Public education is a basis of democracy. Society depends on it to continue orderly conduct.... It does things beyond what private education does."

Equal Access, Equal Opportunity, and Equal Provision

"Education is a process of liberation," one participant argued and, according to many, public education is the system most likely to offer equal access and equal opportunity. "By opening the doors to all walks of life, learning will rise to the highest common denominator." One administrator commented that "the power of public education in Canada is that it's an enabler, a leveler, providing people with opportunities." Therefore, "the access public education provides is a fundamental."

In conversations about equality of access, opportunity, and provision, many participants were especially concerned about the potential consequences of a demise of public education. As one teacher pointed out, "There are implications for two to three generations down the

road" and, according to an administrator, "it's going to cost us later." A parent offered the following:

> The education part is self-evident. The public part is in disagreement. The idea is to provide education across the board... This creates a sense of belonging in all of us. If we make, for whatever reasons, separate pockets, we create a different society. The quality of education can be high, but the quality of society diminishes.

Specifically, participants worried that the increase in the number of private and charter schools might be indicative of a move towards the full privatization of education. According to many participants, any initiatives to privatize will result in "the erosion of equal opportunity," and they worried about the effects of an educational market. They expressed concerns about the emergence of a two-tiered or multi-tiered system, and many participants felt that a shift to more choice outside of the public system will continue to disadvantage those unable to pay for or to otherwise access what might come to be considered the "best" education. For example, one trustee voiced the following concerns: "What will happen to those who can't afford it? Will they be thrown aside? This will end up costing taxpayers more." Another participant agreed, and argued that the long term "problem or dilemma is in the outcome of extreme poverty."

Seen by many participants as a threat to equality of provision and the accompanying notion of the common good, charter and, especially, private schools were criticized. This opinion was reflected in comments such as the following:

> Elitism is driving the need for private schools.... Private schools have a narrow, hand-selected clientele.... Private schools promote the separate rather than the collective.... Private schools take exactly who they want. They are not opened to all.... Charter and private schools are exclusionary.... Private schools are driven by homogenous values.

One participant summed up the concern as follows: "Sending kids to private schools sends a message of intolerance."

Many participants feared that privatization will cause a splintering or fragmentation in society. This was contradictory to the desire held by participants, almost without exception, to see public education as promoting a common or collective good through equal access and opportunity. For example, an administrator felt that "pulling kids out of the public system reduces the quality of the system. Mixing provides the best education for all." A teacher

expounded on this argument: "If top kids - for example science kids - are pulled and gone from a class there will be a lower standard in the class." Further to the concern of the draw of private or charter schools of the "top" students away from the public system, an administrator's comment reflected a consideration voiced by others: "It is not equitable. Public schools are left with high needs children to educate who are not accepted in private schools."

Specifically, one administrator referred to this issue of polarization or segregation in terms of the potential funding and resource concerns that have been acknowledged in studies done in Britain (Ball, 1994; Ball et al., 1997; Gewirtz et al., 1995) and in New Zealand (Thrupp, 1997; Waslander & Thrupp, 1997):

> It increases intensity of high needs kids in the public system. Private school supports parents' choice but not choice for all. It is moving toward the "haves" and "have nots." The funding base for public and private schools is very different. Resources are stretched even farther.

A politician argued this point succinctly: "More dedicated parents are striving to have their kids go to private schools - and so are the resources." Using a more specific example, one teacher suggested that "if kids leave the public school there is a loss of fund raising resources." On the topic of public funding for private schooling, some participants were adamantly opposed. As one parent exclaimed, "Not a cent from public schools should go to private funding!"

In light of the discussions outlined above, specifically concerning comments about the erosion of equal access and equal opportunity as a result of the emergence of charter and private schools, a significant number of participants drew attention to the argument that public education, as *it* presently exists, does not offer equal provision and equity among schools. This opinion is substantiated by authors such as Barlow and Robertson (1994) and Young and Levin (1998) in Canada, and Kozol (1991) in the United States, who draw attention to examples of the inequality inherent in public systems, particularly in terms of the discrepancies in the quality of public education provided to those of different socioeconomic backgrounds. According to several of this study's participants, significant disparity exists among the schools and communities of our own public school systems: Even "within the

Calgary Board of Education there are inequities, for example, in the distribution of money, services, and resources." One teacher commented that "economics determine the kind of education. Better districts equal better education. The equity issues need to be addressed." Another participant argued that "the socioeconomic factor of the parents has to be considered in the debate about public education," and several participants referred to specific examples. Some talked about inequities in the ability of individual schools to fundraise. One superintendent remarked that "'have' schools hold auctions and casinos. 'Have not' schools aren't in that league. They have to be concerned about equity." Others talked about the differences in the ability of the parents of individual schools to offer support. One parent related the following: "In our school the parents have financed all the technology in the school," and another parent replied: "We have no resources." An administrator added the following: "There is a need for equality. Computer access for children in Calgary North is much more than for children in Calgary East." One participant commented on the inequity which results from business involvement in schools: "Partnerships are creating competition between schools - 'We got X number of dollars, why did you get so little?'" Yet another participant voiced a concern over discrepancies in the quality of teaching depending on where a school is located within the city: "There is still a 'pedagogy of poverty'. Different teaching goes on in different schools. We cannot address equity when we continue to ghettoize children."

Although participants were strongly committed to public education there was, again, a definite recognition that, in spite of the virtues we aspire to in public education, public education must change to address concerns such as those of equity and equal provision. Of public education, a key question was put forth by one participant: "How do we reshape it without destroying it?"

Preparation for the Workforce and for Lifelong Learning

More than any other topic of discussion, participants of this study had a difficult time trying to decide how public education might best prepare today's youth to be tomorrow's contributing citizens. A parent's question reflected the dilemma voiced by many

participants: "Is it the purpose of public education to prepare students for the workforce or for life? Or do we expect to continually learn and change?" In spite of the contention and uncertainty, one administrator concluded that "we need to debate the different sides of this issue more than ever in the past."

Although *what* students should be prepared for and *how* they might be prepared posed difficult and complex questions, one thing that many participants did agree on was that students could be better equipped for the world beyond public schooling. As one teacher stated, "Kids seem so clueless in terms of what is happening in the world." Without exception, and regardless of diverse and divergent opinions, when it came to deciding what it might mean to prepare students for the future, participants agreed on one important purpose of public education. To use one trustee's summation, the goal must be "to educate all students so they can have independence as adults."

Several participants were particularly concerned that "there is a problem of students not getting jobs when they finally graduate" and, therefore, many comments focused on the importance of preparing students for the challenges associated with securing employment in the dynamic and demanding environments of the workplace of the future. One trustee suggested that "we need to change the skill sets of kids so that they are trainable." This concern has often been referred to in the current literature which discusses the purposes of public education. Social and economic factors, specifically changes in our nation's population and demographics, regional variances in the labour force and fluctuations in employment and unemployment patterns, and the increase in new technologies and subsequent changes in job skills and competencies, require that schools respond to meet the demands of the post-industrial workplace in a global economy.

The relationship between education and employment, of particular concern to participants of this study, is also a prominent theme in discussions and debates about education reform which must deal, inevitably, with questions around the purposes of public education. This theme becomes increasingly important in light of studies that have revealed that over the past two decades securing employment has become more and more difficult for young Canadians (Crompton, 1996; Ministerial Task Force on Youth, 1996). In addition,

because North American understandings of the relationship between school and work are embedded in a history which has seen the economic success of our parent's and grandparent's generations as directly related to their education and training, there now exists a widely accepted belief that one's level of formal schooling is proportional to one's level of personal success (Livingstone & Hart, 1991; Tyack & Cuban 1995; Wotherspoon, 1998). This belief is further substantiated by current studies which also point to a strong link between high levels of education or broad and diverse educational backgrounds and success in the job market (Livingstone, 1993; Lowe & Krahn, 1994; Statistics Canada, 1996).

With this as a context, it is not difficult to understand that, as labour markets become increasingly competitive and unpredictable, the tendency to view greater levels of training and education as the key to employment and career opportunities becomes heightened (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Wotherspoon, 1998). Further, it is also not difficult to understand that in times of economic uncertainty and instability, as labour and employment issues loom at the fore, the tendency to discuss the purposes of public education in rather narrow and limited terms, focusing on job preparation and training as priorities, becomes increased as well (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Manzer, 1994; Marginson, 1993; Robertson, 1998; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As Wotherspoon (1998) explained, "Employers' concerns to have access to a supply of adequately qualified labour converge with individuals' expectations that education will lead them to a stable employment future" (p. 141). It was not surprising that these tendencies, then, were reflected in the concerns of participants of this study.

The argument that preparing students for the workplace should be a major purpose or function of public education assumes a strong relationship between school and work. This assumption is often tied to the assertion that education is an investment in the human resources of a nation. This is a major premise of human capital theory. Human capital theory suggests that the economic stability and growth of post-industrial nations depends not only on a requisite stronghold of material resources, but also on a highly trained, skilled, and disciplined workforce. Efforts to increase the ability of a nation to produce citizens who can contribute to advances in science and technology are paid off in that nation's enhanced

ability to compete in the global marketplace. The economic gains, it is argued, benefit the nation as a whole and, thus, benefit the individuals of the nation whose standard of living is also increased through continued improvements in education, employment opportunities, etc. (Marginson, 1993; Porter, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1998).

Further to this, Wotherspoon (1998) suggested that human capital theory goes beyond its abstract significance. It becomes highly influential through current reform "ideologies that emphasize competitiveness, human resource development, and the need to match skills with jobs. Business and government leaders draw on such arguments to promote programs to retrain workers, for example, or initiatives to increase productivity in the workplace" (pp. 20-?1). Specific to public education reform, the tenets of human capital theory are strongly reflected in the publications of many influential authors and organizations. For example, the Economic Council of Canada (1992) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1989) have espoused the importance of the links between education and the economy and school and work. Business organizations such as The Conference Board of Canada (1991) have been very convincing in calling for schools to prepare students for a highly skilled workforce and a highly technical workplace where employability is enhanced by a profile of specific skills in academics (communication, thinking, and learning), personal management (adaptability, initiative and responsibility, and positive attitudes and behaviour), and teamwork (cooperation and ability to work with others). Authors such as Gallagher (1995) and Gerstner et al. (1994) have also suggested that schools should teach a set of specific and fundamental skills similar to those outlined above. These "post-industrial basics" (Gallagher, 1995, p. 28) are thought to be essential in the preparation for the world of work and further learning.

Seeing a strong relationship between school and work, and advocating for preparation for the workforce as an important purpose of public education, some participants of this study argued that schools are too slow to respond to the labour market shifts that are influenced by Canada's changing economy. A substantial amount of discussion concerned what participants felt to be the need for vocational or practical training, such as apprenticeship and trades programs, in both public schools and post-secondary institutions.

The comments of one participant reflected this focus: "The service industry does not have the help it needs. It needs more responsible people." A member of the business sector offered the following: "There is a need for 560,000 trades people. Why are we ignoring this?" Another trustee argued that "there is no place where students can go and take these [trades] programs in school," and a teacher suggested that even beyond public school "there are not people going into apprenticeship programs." Several participants had explanations for this concern. For example, one teacher suggested that "this is not like Europe were trades are valued," and a parent explained that "our society does not value this type of program."

Some participants argued that in our country too much emphasis is placed on academic education and on acquiring a university degree, and that the value of alternative types of training offered at post-secondary institutions other than universities or within the public system are undervalued. One parent argued that it has become "heresy to suggest anything other than a three year or university plan." With this sentiment in mind, it is ironic that the practicality and benefits of a university degree were questioned by some. For example, one trustee argued that in order to be employable "many people take a four year university degree and then go to SAIT [Southern Alberta Institute of Technology] for two years." In accordance with these comments, studies have revealed that although vocational education and skilled manual work are talked about as important, most Canadians still believe that a university degree is the ticket to a financially promising future; therefore, an academic education is the preferred educational route for themselves and their children. These findings become particularly interesting considering that under 30 % of young people end up attending universities and only 12 % complete their studies in ways and within time periods traditionally considered to be the norm (Radwanski, 1987; Walsh, 1991).

One seminar's guest speaker, in particular, provoked a significant amount of debate. Presenting the business or corporate perspective, he argued that the public school system does not adequately prepare students for the world of work. Specifically, he suggested, young people entering the workforce lack the important skills for collaboration that are required for team building, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Some participants

agreed with the speaker. As one member of the business community related, "I work in a bank. We highly value team-building and peer-coaching. We are getting individuals that aren't equipped." An administrator offered the following:

> The skills necessary for development by the corporate world are not the skills being measured [in schools]. We have a huge communication problem between various groups. There is a huge contradiction in the speakers we heard tonight. Is it our [public education's] determination to provide something different for each and every one? It's specialist cheese store vs. regular shopping plaza.

Many participants agreed that skills for collaboration and cooperation are essential for today's youth. Moreover, they argued that these skills are for life, not just for the workplace. For example, one teacher suggested that these are important "transferable skills used in our families, sports teams, etc." That said, several participants disagreed with the speaker in his assertion that schools do not teach these skills. As one trustee maintained, "I do see students learning collaboratively and cooperatively." Another asked, "How can we say education does not prepare students to contribute?"

According to some participants, one thing that was particularly problematic was that the speaker's key message seemed quite contradictory. As one graduate student explained, "The speaker called for students who are prepared to collaborate and cooperate. In the same breath he argued that this is to ensure that businesses will be able to perform in a highly competitive global economy." Of this contradiction, a teacher asked, "Is this an oxymoron? Why are we promoting cooperative activity in school when the world is competitive?"

Opposing the position that a main thrust of public education should be to prepare students for the workplace, were the firm opinions of several participants. As one trustee argued, "Business has a right to expect that employees are responsible, but not that they be trained when they get there." An administrator concurred: "It is the company's job to train them for whatever the job is." One trustee offered the following: "Over time schools have taken more responsibility. Business expects more, yet their training role is diminished." In response to these concerns, one participant brought up an important consideration: "Be careful not to paint all business with the same brush. Many businesses are happy that students come out with a broad knowledge and then they train specifically."

Although a significant amount of discussion focused on the connection between education and the world of work, this thrust was balanced by the perspective of participants who came at the "purpose of education" question from another angle. These participants preferred to talk about education in terms of preparation for life as opposed to preparation for the workforce. "Schools are for more than preparing for business," one trustee argued, and another participant agreed that "education should be far broader than producing people who will be well-prepared for a corporate position." One participant asserted that "general studies give a well-rounded view." This opinion was echoed when a teacher asked, "Aren't we trying to produce thinkers, not just workers?" These views are supported by educational historians such as Carnoy and Levin (1985) and Tyack and Cuban (1995) who have suggested that the purposes of education have never been simply reduced to work preparation and economic imperatives. Moreover, several authors (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Beare & Slaughter, 1993; Levin, 1995, Marginson, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1998) have offered strong arguments against those, such as proponents of human capital theory, who have suggested that the connections between school and work and the links between education and the economy should drive what is taught in schools. Although education does contribute to a nation's economic development, this is not its sole function.

As such, the purposes of public education should be seen within a larger context, encompassing broader aims and goals. For example, according to many participants of this study, schools should also offer opportunities for personal and social growth and development. A joy and appreciation for lifelong learning should be instilled, a desire for achievement and excellence appropriate to one's personal preferences, aptitudes, and talents should be encouraged, self-esteem should be nurtured, and an internalized understanding and demonstration of positive social attitudes and behaviors should be fostered in public schools. As Beare and Slaughter (1993) argued, these goals are highly valued yet, because they cannot be measured or defined in terms of the market, they are often ignored within an economic paradigm that "imposes a vocabulary and a mode of viewing the world which puts some of the best aspects of education outside the frame of reference" (p. 38). The economic approach, they continued, encourages instrumentalism, whereby value is placed only on

things that are immediately useful or directly quantifiable: "It is exactly this process of reductionism which is so characteristic of the rationality of the industrial era; if something cannot be measured, it is either unimportant or imaginary" (p. 38).

Competition and Cooperation

Although the goals or purposes related to personal achievement and social development were seen by many participants as not only desirable, but also as priorities, they were acknowledged as being somewhat contradictory to the goals advocated by others. Specifically, participants who argued that education should be preparation for life, as opposed to preparation for work, suggested that the focus on education as a link to employment encourages less than desirable values - those associated with competition - instead of what, they argued, are more desirable values - those associated with cooperation. For example, according to one administrator, the economic perspective of business and industry has everything to do with competition and "this reflects the wrong values. For someone to be at the top, someone must be at the bottom." A teacher asked some important questions: "What do we want the kids to take forward into the next generation? What values? Only a Rolex? What if I have a Timex that I value?" Another participant argued that "competition doesn't work for everyone. We forget instilling a joy of living." Further, one participant voiced the following concerns: "The business model is inappropriate because it does not cater for majority needs. Who do corporations serve? Not the board or CEOs who eventually depart, and not employees because of downsizing. Is it about the maintenance of power?"

These participant comments and opinions echoed the sentiments of many authors (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Ball, 1994, 1998; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Bracey, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fenstermacher, 1995; Glickman, 1995; Marginson, 1993; Peters, 1995; Robertson, 1998) who have argued that recent public education reforms have tended to focus on the competitive and corporatist ideals which underpin economic goals and purposes, at the expense of the ideals of cooperation and teamwork and ethics of care which underpin broader social, personal and interpersonal objectives.

The tension between the ideals of competition and cooperation continued to be evident in participant discussions about the purposes of public education, especially in regards to the issue of global competitiveness. For example, one administrator voiced the following opinion: "I'm irritated when I go to the Math Department at U of C [University of Calgary] and see that foreign Math students teach classes. Where are the Canadians with the same credentials? We are being out-hustled by other countries." Other participants felt comfortable with the notion of competition. As one trustee asserted, "The government is telling us to compete. Competition is not a bad thing." Many other participants, however, were not in total agreement. One participant asked, "Is the dominant value of Alberta the notions of economics, business, and efficiency?" Another participant argued that "[Premier] Klein has a big business, competitive agenda. Global competitiveness is not appropriate for many students. Are children becoming economic commodities?" A superintendent held a similar opinion and argued that "we are still feeding our children to industry. We need to have a deeper philosophical view of what education is." One teacher bluntly stated, "I have a moral dilemma saying that technology and the Alberta Advantage is why I teach. Corporate dollars and good jobs is not why I teach children."

Again, some participants saw troubling contradictions within this discussion. For example, as one teacher explained, "The more we focus on global competition, the more we talk out of both sides of our mouth. On one hand we collaborate, on the other we compete." Another participant argued that "there is contradiction between our government's focus on competition and on interdependence in the Global Village." According to one participant, this is not surprising: "Competition is simple - one-on-one. Interdependence is harder, more complex."

Reflections on Chapter 4

It is not surprising that the competing forces which drive the debate about the purposes of public education on macro, national, and international levels are also apparent on micro levels, as reflected in the discussions of the participants of this study. Although participants, as a group, did agree that public education should have, as its main purposes, to build

community and establish a collective public, to maintain a democratic or civic ideal, to prepare students for the workforce and a competitive global economy, and to foster independent thinking and lifelong learning, the importance or priority that each of these purposes should be given was not agreed upon. As such, opinions reflected the diversity and range of perspectives held by the many individuals and stakeholder groups involved in the study. The contradiction, ambiguity, perplexity, and uncertainty of the discussions is indicative of the difficulty inherent in attempting to come to terms with what the purposes of public education are or should be. However, it must be noted that, on the whole, it seemed more important to participants to be discussing, questioning, and debating than it did to be finding answers, arriving at conclusions, or reaching a consensus. As was the case with the previous sections on gaining support for public education and on vision-building, participants recognized the contentious and complex nature of the debate and, indeed, acknowledged the importance of the contention itself.

This section of the study findings, entitled "Contemplating Change," reveals the willingness of participants to work together towards a common and shared vision for public education and towards an understanding of what the purposes and functions of public education should be. Participants overwhelmingly suggested that this beginning should be marked by a process of continued dialogue and debate. One participant asserted that "the invitation is important. The conversation is important. The dialogue is necessary to develop and define." Another suggested that "politicians, parents, teachers, and trustees need to sit down and dialogue more." A graduate student and teacher argued that "we need to have the conversations about what schooling should be and how students should be taught." Succinctly put, "meaningful communication is key."

Even as they spoke, several participants recognized the value of the dialogue and discussion they were presently participating in. One professor asked, "What strategies and skills would help increase involvement? Division-wide focus groups or discussion groups structured like the CLL?" The Centre for Leadership in Learning Seminar discussions were seen as an important venue for the continued debate of educational issues, particularly where all stakeholders are involved. "It is important to be proactive and more forward-thinking.

That is where the CLL needs to be profiled." One graduate student attested that "this type of dialogue is good." However, the comment was followed by an important reminder: "We need to be prepared to hear things we might not want to hear." Regardless of potential difficulty and discomfort, participants agreed that it is this type of interaction that serves as the important first step in the process of moving ahead in public education in the 21st Century.

CHAPTER 5

MOVING AHEAD

This chapter reflects the desire of participants to understand change; first, in terms of how it presently impacts public education and, second, in terms of how it drives conceptions of schools in the future. Recognizing their dynamic and challenging societal context, participants of this study were overwhelmingly cognizant of the role change plays in their lives and, on the whole, they saw change as a positive force. However, they were not willing to entirely turn their backs on the past. Although participants agreed that public education must continue to adapt in order be responsive to the needs of today's children, changes and reforms should not be at the expense of the many positive things that presently happen in schools.

According to participants, one of the most compelling reasons for change is that the responsibility for public education should be shared by all citizens. The burden of educating our children can no longer rest solely on the shoulders of the school. Given this, issues of shared governance and decision-making and school-community partnerships were topics of considerable concern to participants. According to participants, the notion of sharing responsibility and accountability is desirable and ideal; however, the practicality of such a conception is often problematic, contentious, and awkward. Nevertheless, in spite of its complexity and potential messiness, participants seemed ready and willing to embrace change. As one administrator exclaimed, "This is an exciting time to be in education. There is so much happening, so much change!"

Change

As mentioned above, participants acknowledged the need to change. However, it is perhaps appropriate to begin this section by reporting on the comments of the many participants who felt that we should not forget the successes of Alberta's public schools. In the face of societal challenges and decreases in resources and support, participants argued that public education is doing a lot of things well. Considering the diverse demographics of many communities, one participant argued that "public education is successful in taking

everyone, and we never give up," and another asserted that "we recognize the quality of our teachers who will welcome these [high needs] students with open arms."

Some participants alluded to the myth of the failed school, particularly in regards to educational standards and achievement, and wondered how this myth gets perpetuated when "exam results show we're doing well," and "graduation rates are better" than they ever have been. One participant offered the following: "Alberta has a lot to be proud of. For example, an article in the Global and Mail shows that in national testing Alberta scored consistently higher [than other provinces]." A trustee asserted the following:

> Students now are every bit as good as they ever were. Those at the top end can't be touched. Teachers are better. Our ability to keep kids in school is better. We have increased knowledge on how to help kids with special needs.

An administrator concurred: "We have better teachers today doing better things than we have ever had." Many participants were impressed by one of the seminar's speakers, a high school student who described how public education had served her particularly well. One trustee commented as follows:

> The student speaker did an excellent job today. I think that we have a multitude of students such as this. Public education is saying that you are not good for one thing, but for many diverse things. Academics is only one part of this. Public education offers opportunities for diversity of experience as well as academic excellence. Young people make their way very well and with great elegance. Public education teaches students how to ask "Why?"

Another participant wondered, "When parents are questioned about satisfaction with their school they are generally happy, so where do the myths start?" A parent reported the following: "We had the capacity to send our children to private school, but the public offering won hands down. For example, Outdoor Ed. programs."

Several participants referred to their own successes as testimony to the success of our province's public education system. As one administrator asserted, "The Alberta system is working. We have jobs, we have prosperity. It is all due to the success of our public education system." Another participant added: "Most of us started in public education and are successful. What are we doing well? I think we are educating thinkers." However, this comment was followed by an important consideration: "We can't judge people at the age of

15 to 17. We need to wait until they are 25 or 26. We goofed around but knew we'd get jobs after university. That's not the reality now."

The "reality now" was a major theme in the discussions about change. As mentioned above, successes are important to acknowledge; however, according to participants, the many merits of our public education system do not override the serious need for change in an changing world. According to many participants, public education does not have all the answers! As one teacher asserted, "We need to have real changes or public education is in trouble." One member of the business community argued that "we haven't changed enough to move into the future," and another asserted that "there must be huge, fundamental changes." Change was overwhelmingly seen by participants as not only crucial, but also desirable.

The topic of change was accompanied by the topic of uncertainty. It was not surprising that several participants expressed concern and wariness about what the future will bring. Comments such as the following were not uncommon:

> Things today are changing so quickly that the end results cannot be predicted.... It is so difficult to predict the future. No one could have accurately predicted what happened in this century. We can't foresee all of what the 21st Century will bring.... Public education will survive, but not in the form that we know it. In the 21st Century there will be a big change.

In spite of the concern over the uncertainty of change and of the future, there was an encouraging number of participant comments that suggested a strong willingness to embrace change: "We are not stagnant. We are willing to improve. We recognize there is room for improvement in the public education. We have to be careful about looking at education in closed ways." Moreover, many participants advocated for not only embracing change, they also argued for initiating change. As one parent pointed out, "We are never at the forefront of educational change." Many agreed, and emphasized that it is themselves who can potentially effect important change by assuming a leadership role in educational reform. For example, one graduate student offered the following opinion: "We have to take a look at where society is going and be leaders. We can't be one step behind. I believe that we can do this just because of sheer numbers."

The willingness of participants to embrace change also came with a number of realizations about the difficulties in facing change. For one thing, participants understood that "making change through people is very hard." Even the "word 'change' creates barriers." Specifically, "parents hate the words 'innovation' and 'change'. The language we use has negative connotations from where and whence we've all come." Some participants recognized that people are afraid of risk, and "some are threatened by change." According to some participants, "It's fear," and it is "not an isolated instance." One administrator offered the following: "Chaos theory tells us to think of education differently than the way we used to. We have been invited to a new reality. That's why we are so afraid."

Participants were not hesitant to identify what they felt to be the shortcomings of public education. One administrator suggested that "people are entrenched in the way things have always been. There is no way for reflective practice and, therefore, no way for change. Bureaucracy...has supported "old" practice. All bureaucracies need to look back and reflect and change in a positive sense." "Public schools have not been responsive," one trustee asserted, and an administrator argued that "the bigger picture is accountability." These issues - responsiveness and accountability - held a major place in the discussions of participants. According to many, even though schools have made some great strides in coping with the challenges in a changing and diverse society, public education must not be complacent to the demands for accountability and responsiveness. Some participants asked provoking questions: "What does a good school do and what does a good public school do?"

Participants acknowledged the significance place of the topics of private and charter schools in the discussions about accountability and responsiveness: "Why are so many parents dissatisfied and seeking private schools?" "People with kids in private schools demand accountability." One participant asked, "What is wrong with charter schools?" An administrator responded: "We come with language about them and positions about them and we cannot see their value." Other questions, such as the following, were asked: "Are there alternatives to public education?" "Do we, as educators, think public education is the only way to go? Do we ever think of other avenues?"

It was not surprising that the issues of accountability and responsiveness were also attached to discussions of choice. One teacher voiced the opinion that "some people want the quick fix of the private school. Some people don't want their kids to have "bad" teachers. We need to offer parents more choice and input, and to have better evaluation of teachers by kids and administration." Another participant argued that "private schools offer smaller class sizes. They cater to parents and there is increased parental knowledge." Yet another participant suggested that "parents are making choices. They shop around. Then high school students go shopping within the same system." An important question was put forth: "Within the public system do we have enough choice to meet diversity and needs? Commitment to choice is important."

Responsiveness

There was a great deal of agreement among participants that, under the complex conditions of change and diversity, public education must strive to be responsive, accessible, and relevant to its community, its parents, and its students. Client sensitivity and consumer consciousness have become key educational concerns (Gallagher, 1995; Hargreaves, 1997a). Important questions were on the minds of participants: "What if kids are not challenged enough in the public system and parents have the resources to move their children to a more desirable environment?" Statements such as the following were made: "The reason we have other schools is that our public system is not meeting the needs of all kids. Charter schools address these needs." Many participants recognized the need for choice within the public system: "Alternative settings, for example, the workplace school are based on eligibility and priority placement. They meet pockets of need." A trustee added: "They provide a better way to handle special needs, catering to an exclusive group." One parent voiced the following concern:

> We need to improve by offering flexibility for the family. For example, I put my child in afternoon rather than morning class. Safety is important. I want my child dropped off in front of the house. I'll probably move my child when he enters Junior High. But now it's not safe for my child to walk to school.

Although choice was seen as important, a number of participants voiced concerns in this regard. As one administrator wondered, "Toffler spoke of the boutique vs. the larger store concept. Has the public moved to boutique education?" Another offered the following opinion: "Are we not just segregating students and promoting intolerance? Is this discrimination? Parents as consumers and having choice leads to a multi-tiered system." One participant presented the following argument: "We are also talking about the rights of the society and not just the parents." In specific reference to the introduction of charter schools in Alberta, another participant argued that "the government believes that democracy means choice, but we need to remember that we don't all come to choice from the same level playing field." Regardless of the above concerns, it seemed that participants felt that offering choice within public education is an important means by which schools can become more responsive.

Participants of this study also felt that encouraging parental involvement in the instructional aspects of a child's education was an important means by which schools can be more responsive. However, according to some participants, public schools do not always do a good job of including parents. One participant related the following account: "I've heard a student say, 'My mom wants to come but she wasn't invited.' This is indicative of what is going on in that particular school." One parent argued that "we inflict innovation upon parents without explanations." "Parents need to know what's going on," and "they have the right to know" were comments made by participants. Another argued that "we need to understand what parents are looking for," and suggested that ignoring this would have serious consequences. As one professor asserted, "Ask the tough questions. Ask moms and dads what they think."

This view reflects the opinion that parental involvement is key and crucial to the success of the child. With few exceptions, a parent holds the greatest amount of knowledge and understanding about their child, has a vested interest in their child's success and, therefore, should been seen as expert and essential, in an advisory or consultative capacity (Dolan, 1994; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Sarason, 1995). Further to this, "acknowledging the critical educational role played by parents has implications for the structure of the

curriculum, for styles of learning and teaching, for homework and independent study, for teacher-parent information exchange and home-school collaboration" (MacBeath, Moos, & Riley, 1996, p. 232). Hargreaves (1997a) argued that a parent's interest in their own child's well-being and progress forges an important emotional link between the school and the community. Parent-teacher relationships, specifically, are key in developing the kind of communication and shared understandings required in increasing a school's level of responsiveness to its students and their learning needs. The connection between schools and parents and the community is the most powerful relationship for promoting responsiveness and the ensuring quality control in education (Chapman, 1996).

Participants felt strongly that the issue of responsiveness should focus on the child. Supported by authors such as Chapman (1996), Elmore (1990), Gardner (1991), and Tyack and Cuban (1995), many participants worried that public schools are stuck in an old, obsolete paradigm, wherein teacher-centred instruction and traditional school and classroom structures discourage interaction and cooperative learning, stifle independent thinking and problem solving, and limit opportunities for engaging and relevant learning experiences. For example, one undergraduate student argued that the "'read the chapter, answer questions, and watch the movie' [approach to teaching] is still around in the classroom." A professional development consultant suggested that "it is a mindset. Teaching has been an isolated activity and we need to change our conception of what teaching and learning is." Another participant offered the following: "The curriculum does not connect with or apply to the majority of students. How do we make connections? We teach our students in a fragmented way.... A lot of education is not relevant." Other problems were mentioned. One participant asked, "Do teachers have high enough expectations for students?" A politician remarked, "We water down programs to such an extent it is a wonder kids learn anything."

The importance of relevant and meaningful teaching and learning was most noteworthy in the comments participants made about the imperative of responsiveness. For example, one participant argued that "ESL students need the input of their own language." A teacher argued that "we only learn science and math or these bodies of knowledge in order to

understand the world. If we don't make the connection for students we haven't done our job." In response to a question about how to make education relevant, one professor suggested that "we cannot separate subjects. We need to integrate the subjects. More people need to be involved in that because we are all integrated." An administrator argued that "there is too much focus strictly on product. The value is in the process."

A teacher argued that school programs must be personalized to cater to the multiple intelligences of students and other participants advocated for programs which offer students choice. For example, one trustee pointed to the program at Viscount Bennett High School which "has options that allow you to come in and take one unit if you have missed it." Technology was also mentioned as offering potential for individualized programs. As one parent said, "print-based curriculum is moving toward technology-based curriculum. There are tools to personalize education, such as software for teachers to a virtually personalize curriculum to the individual." Another participant suggested that "computers offer an alternative method of structuring classes to give teachers more one-on-one time with students."

Participants also felt that schools must be responsive to the need of students to be interested and motivated. As one teacher asserted, "I had a teacher that got me excited about learning. We need to get kids excited about themselves and learning." Motivation, some suggested, has everything to do with being involved and responsible for one's own education. One teacher argued that "we don't honor the child's voice," and an administrator argued the following: "Students must be involved and consulted in the education process. What is happening now is akin to taking a puzzle, throwing the pieces on the floor and taking away the picture." Student participants related that they appreciate opportunities to make decisions about their own education. One student talked about what she most valued about her school, Alternative High: "It is small, works as a community, operates democratically, and staff and students make decisions together. It is very free." Of the same school, an administrator added: "Kids work on a mentorship system and work independently in small groups and meet with a mentor every week."

The sentiments of this study's participants echoed the recent literature written on the importance of understanding education within a new paradigm, appropriate to today's complex and dynamic context, wherein "education for understanding" is embraced, and continuous, lifelong learning is valued (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Gardner, 1991; Sarason, 1990). Based on the principles of experiential, interactive, and cooperative learning originally purported by theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, and Bruner, current learning philosophies and theories suggest that children construct their own knowledge and understanding through a process of directly experiencing and, then, reflecting upon the world they encounter. Brooks and Brooks (1993) suggested that such constructivist approaches to teaching and learning incorporate a number of principles, several of which were alluded to by this study's participants: (a) posing problems of emerging relevance to students; (b) structuring learning around primary concepts in a holistic, integrated manner; (c) seeking and valuing students' points of view; (d) adapting and developing curriculum to address students' suppositions and prior knowledge; and (e) assessing student learning within the context of teaching, in a way which is authentic and formative (p. 33). These principles are intended to encourage the kind of student-centred and student-directed involvement, engagement, and motivation that participants of this study suggested is necessary in the teaching and learning practices of a responsive public school system.

Complementing constructivist learning principles are Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences and new developments in brain-based learning (Caine & Caine, 1994). These theories have challenged traditional notions of intelligence by suggesting that the brain and one's ability to learn is not only highly complex but, moreover, uniquely individual. Consequently, learning should be contextual, authentic, and challenging, and curriculum should be designed to accommodate the diverse needs, interests, and talents of individual students. Ideally, as products of a system which embraces constructivist approaches to teaching and learning and recognizes the implications of research on multiple intelligences and brain-based learning, students will leave school as active and enthused inquirers, equipped with skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning. According to the participants of this study, this is the potential of a highly responsive public education system.

The importance of building relationships with children was also identified as a crucial means by which schools can be more responsive to students. One trustee argued that "personal contact is important for students. Teachers have a lot of influence on kids." An issue that was mentioned again and again was that of school size. Several participants felt that many schools, as they presently exist, are far too large, cold, impersonal, and frightening. One administrator offered the following: "Is it a question of community or a community feeling? Schools are too big. In a high school, my daughter has teachers writing report cards for kids they don't know." Other participants voiced the following concerns: "In the large schools kids are lost. People are scared." "Students in small schools are lucky. They are known on a first-name basis. In larger schools it is frightening. There are police officers full-time." Authors such as Darling-Hammond (1995), Noddings (1992), and Sergiovanni (1994, 1996) are in agreement with these participants, and have argued that, in order to be responsive, schools must be caring, personal, and humane communities where relationships are encouraged and nurtured. This can be best achieved in a small school, one in which everybody knows one another by name (Boyer, 1995). Thus, the traditional notion of the school must be challenged beyond the "traditional brick-and-mortar conception" (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 49) to take on other forms and arrangements.

Accountability

As mentioned earlier, the participants of this study acknowledged the virtues and successes of public education in our province; however, in addition to recommending that schools be more responsive to the needs of parents and, most importantly, students, participants also argued that schools could be more accountable. One administrator suggested that when the economy is failing, schools must be prepared to accept some of the blame. Accountability and "quality control," it was argued, are important in public education. Another administrator suggested that "teachers could take more ownership of the problem."

The topic of accountability, especially as it pertains to teaching, was most often directly related to the topic of student achievement. Participants felt strongly that public education

must be accountable, and some suggested that student achievement is an appropriate indicator of a school system's success. For example, one participant asserted the following: "I heartily support a set of competencies for all." By posing a pointed question, another supported this position and argued that clearly defined learning outcomes are necessary: "What, exactly, does literacy mean by Grade 4?" In accordance with these views, Earl and LeMahieu (1997) have acknowledged that accountability is often seen as closely related to standards and testing and that, indeed, one of the primary purposes of assessing student achievement is to ensure accountability. However, they have also cautioned that "while accountability and assessment are often seen as going together, even as synonymous, in practice they are not always the most comfortable of bedfellows" (p. 149). Assessment that is motivated solely by accountability does little to enhance teaching and learning (Chapman, 1996; Earl & LeMahieu, 1997). For this reason, assessment and its connection or relationship to school accountability is a topic of considerable concern, and this concern is reflected in a substantial amount of literature which has discussed the problems associated with the issue of accountability.

Assessment, as defined by Wallace et al. (1997), is but one component of an integrated set of evaluative activities used by the stakeholders in a school "to gather information to improve the effectiveness of the organization" (p. 95). Educators use assessment to reflect on learning processes and outcomes and to consider how student achievement can be enhanced. In this way, assessment is crucial to the improvement and success of a school. Ideally, this type of assessment is internally or locally developed and administered, and results are interpreted with an understanding of the context in which the assessment was used (Elmore, 1990; Earl & LeMahieu, 1997).

Many participants argued that assessment for accountability, in itself, is not really the problem. What does become the problem are the growing number of situations in which achievement exams are seen as the primary or most appropriate tool for measuring student achievement. While one graduate student argued that "we need to be more responsive to systems of accountability," this was not without a caution: "We must ask ourselves, 'What do we value?'" As one administrator argued, "Achievement tests put students into inflexible

boxes. You can only produce what you can crate. Where is it proven that standardized testing produces something better?" As one participant asserted, "When we talk about student achievement, what are we talking about? Schools are more than about achievement exams." Achievement exams "focus on measuring reading and writing, etc. We are not celebrating the special qualities of many students." Critics of standardized testing have also argued that not all important educational outcomes can be measured and, too often, forms of evaluation that assess narrow or limited objectives or outcomes are used to evaluate a child's achievement or success in school (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Earl & LeMahieu, 1997; Popham, 1999; Wallace et al., 1997; Wotherspoon, 1998).

These criticisms have resulted in a call for more authentic evaluative strategies and tools aimed at assessing performance not only within but, ultimately, beyond the learning process and context in a way that considers how learning connects to the student's world outside of the classroom and the school (Wallace et al., 1997). Many participants of this study also argued that assessments other than achievement exams should be considered more seriously. For example, one participant asked a key question: "how do people demonstrate learning?" A trustee argued: "In regard to accountability, which gives more information - an achievement test or an interview? The interview is better because it provides 'real' information for parents." This type of "authentic assessment is more appropriate," one teacher argued. Authentic assessments, such as those mentioned by participants, have been advocated by authors such as Earl and LeMahieu (1997) and Darling-Hammond (1993) who argued that tools such as portfolios and strategies such as the student-parent-teacher interview are appropriate evaluations of student achievement and, as such, indicate the type of results educators do not mind being held accountable for.

Other concerns over achievement exams and their connection to accountability were expressed. For example, a teacher cautioned: "What is the value of a test that is 'taught to'?" Another participant suggested that the type of accountability imposed by achievement tests "reduces risk-taking." While most critics concede that external standards for assessment can serve a useful purpose in establishing baselines for measuring performance across populations, problems arise when these standards begin to influence or dictate

teaching practice in individual schools or school districts. Standardized tests may result in standardized methods of instruction and a narrowed curriculum focus (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Wallace et al., 1997). In addition, as was a concern of this study's participants, the positive aspects of risk-taking, creativity, and spontaneity in teaching and learning may be curtailed by the imposition of heavily weighted external achievement exams (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993; Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

In addition to the problems related to the use of achievement exams as a focus for measuring student achievement, many participants were also particularly concerned that standardized testing has become an inappropriate means by which schools and school districts are evaluated and, moreover, held accountable. According to many, provincial achievement exams have become *the* "reflection of the school." As a result, one participant argued that "publishing exam results is very detrimental," and another agreed that the "ranking of provincial exam results has consequences for staff and the school system. All sorts of characteristics are attributed to both top and bottom ranking schools." Yet another suggested that "those tests are not about kids, they are for the system. Some of the excuses related to standardized tests are reasons and realities, not whining. We need to look at all of the contributing factors." Unfortunately, many argued, "the government has reduced education to 'wanting results,' and even parents are stressing achievement test scores." One parent was concerned that "people have embraced the publishing of provincial exam results. These are the values they like." Earl and LeMahieu (1997) referred to this as the "strong pull of accountability" and pointed to its "stranglehold on many politicians and members of the public" (p. 163).

Consistent with the concerns of participants, a survey of the literature revealed that what has become an international trend towards accountability and increased performance criteria in public education has manifested itself in Canada and, especially, in Alberta. This is evident in initiatives such as the provincial achievement exams and other forms of standardized testing and evaluation which can be externally administered or regulated, and which provide objective, quantifiable results (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Dunning, 1997; Wotherspoon, 1998). Within this climate of accountability, Myers and Goldstein (1997)

have suggested that a "fetish of information" (p. 120) has resulted in an inordinate amount of attention being paid to published exam results. Consequently, the worth or value of schools is being measured according to the types of information made available under the laws which ensure public disclosure. As was expressed by participants of this study, this tendency has caused significant concern among those who have warned that, in order to be useful or meaningful, test scores and data must be presented and interpreted with a great deal of care and caution. Unfortunately, data are sometimes misused or misinterpreted by uninformed or irresponsible parties. For example, the media publication of results in ways that rank or compare schools with little consideration of the highly disparate or diverse student populations from which the results are drawn has been especially contentious (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Myers & Goldstein, 1997; Wotherspoon, 1998). Moreover, Myers and Goldstein (1997) contended that schools which rank poorly are often unable to shed the "failure label" (p. 120) and continue to be disadvantaged under a "sinking ship" (p. 125) stigma which perpetuates poor results. As a consequence, those whose school's achievement exam results continue to be below average for a variety of legitimate reasons know all too well the frustrations associated with being judged and held accountable for circumstances beyond their control.

That accountability be of utmost importance in public schools was not at issue among participants of this study. As has been previously reported (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993), educators in Alberta accept that accountability is necessary and view the assessment and evaluation of students as "a vital and integral part of the educational process" (p. 16). As Popham (1999) argued, "the teaching of a nation's children is too important to be left unmonitored" and "educators need to produce valid evidence regarding their effectiveness." However, in tune with the arguments of this study's participants, he strongly qualified these assertions by concluding that "standardized achievement tests are the wrong tools for the task" (p. 15).

Hattie (1990) and Earl and LeMahieu (1997) have suggested that accountability must be seen to focus on more than testing and, indeed, must encompass a broader understanding than that of any of the narrow or limited views of student achievement that continue to be

held by many. They have called for a expanded notion of accountability that "uses assessment information along with other knowledge and the hard thinking required to inform judgments about current performance and improvement plans," and includes a "system of use" (Earl & LeMahieu, 1997, p. 164) approach to interpreting and acting on information. Specifically, Hattie (1990) argued that although accountability includes report cards and statistics, it involves much more, and suggested that portfolio evaluation be extended beyond student assessment to include assessment of the school itself. In this way, school profiles would be developed to include a range of information about the school - its course offerings, its goals and vision, student evaluations of courses and teaching, etc. Accountability must be seen as a "deeply human enterprise that depends on open sharing of information and continuing conversations among and between educators, students, parents, and the community as they interpret and make sense of available information and establish action plans" (Earl & LeMahieu, 1997, p. 164). In this way, accountability has, as its foundation, "genuine relationships that are based on trust and open sharing of information along with a willingness to engage in clear, candid, and considerate discussions together" (p. 164). It is in this spirit that participants of this study moved on to talk about how they envisioned accountability.

Shared Accountability and Responsibility

Participants felt strongly that the accountability for public education should be the accountability of all. For example, one participant began by asking a question which seemed on the minds of many: "Where is the 'public' in public education?" A trustee argued that society, in its entirety "needs to embrace schools. We have to let people know we have shared responsibility for our children." An administrator called for education to be seen as a partnership: As a society moving into a future of complex changes and challenges, we must "work collectively - the whole village raising a child. Partnerships make our definition of community bigger, larger, broader, and deeper than our traditional school definition." A trustee added, "That means looking at things differently. There is a need to bring

community, parent, and student voices into the school. Education is an intricate issue that cannot be wholly left to the teachers. We need community involvement."

Participants felt strongly that community involvement also meant "community responsibility." In this light, authors who have written extensively on the topic of educational change have called upon educators to share not only the authority, but also the burden of educating our children (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1997a, 1999; Sarason, 1996; Wallace et al., 1997). It is no longer appropriate, nor is it possible for schools to work in isolation. As Fullan (1993) has emphatically argued, there are potential allies and partners at every level, and "there are far more ideas 'out there' than 'in here'" (p. 39). Further, he has suggested that the things that any one societal group, agency, or organization does cannot but affect the others. More importantly, since stakeholder groups increasingly insist on being directly involved in education, the choice becomes whether this involvement occurs as "mutually isolated influences working randomly or at cross purposes" or whether this involvement is developed "through joint initiatives" (p. 93). According to Fullan (1993), there is not really a choice: "The complex difficulties of education for a learning society have no chance whatsoever of being addressed in the absence of alliances" (p. 93).

Although participants agreed with Fullan's (1993) assertions and acknowledged that sharing responsibility (and its accompanying accountability) for education is ideal, this goal was not seen as easily achievable or necessarily comfortable. For instance, one administrator offered the following: "When we ask who should be accountable for public education we get down to *shared* accountability issues which are really hard." As Darling-Hammond (1995) has reflected, one of the fundamental concerns of school restructuring and reform is "how to reconfigure who is responsible - and ultimately accountable - for what" (p. 166). According to participants, reexamining and renegotiating the roles of various stakeholder groups with the aim of meaningful involvement and partnerships poses many challenges, particularly in terms of authority and control. One participant offered the following: "We need to understand how communities form; and we need to extend our communities. We have not been good at this. Why? Are we afraid to give up control?" Another asked a

similar question: "Can we, as educators, open up to others and allow the community to become involved? The open door is not always there."

Bauch and Goldring (1998), Driscoll (1998), and Mawhinney (1998) pointed to the professional autonomy educators have enjoyed as a potential obstacle in redefining roles and relationships and redistributing power within a new paradigm that values community involvement and empowerment in education. As Fullan (1993) asserted, extending educational boundaries requires a willingness to relent control and give over power. This is particularly difficult for educators since it also requires that the messiness, complexity, and volatility of the world beyond the school be accepted and understood as part in parcel to new conceptions of an educational community - a scary prospect for those who have, traditionally, struggled to achieve and maintain a sense of control over their immediate environments.

According to the participants of this study, the first step in developing shared responsibility and accountability in public education is to involve all community stakeholders and, on that basis, form strong connections and alliances. As one administrator suggested, "A sense of community is developed by relationship building," and these key relationships are built by genuine efforts to include and involve all stakeholders groups. One participant related the following: "One principal created a community in which her school was core in the community, and talked about it. It was a place to gather. It was a place of common beliefs. Visiting parents were asked to invite others. Shared commitment comes with relationships." In order to develop relationships, one participant suggested, "we need to develop trust." In response, a trustee added, "This takes skill! We must start on an incremental basis - one person at a time, one step at a time. It is about people."

A professor suggested that "it would be nice to think we can get together and do all those things, but reality would present many challenges. Conflict resolution, decision-making, and collaboration all take skills that people must develop." Hargreaves' (1997a) recommendations reflected this concern. He listed openness, informality, care, attentiveness, lateral working relationships, reciprocal collaboration, candid and vibrant dialogue, and a willingness to face uncertainty together as the "ingredients of effective school-community

collaboration" (p. 22). Moreover, he argued that these ingredients are basic, they are " not merely the emotional icing that adorns" this type of endeavor (p.22). Partnerships must be "meaningful and moral" not "cosmetic and superficial" (p. 11). Further, he asserted that "work with others beyond the school to bring about positive change within it will require emotional maturity, openness, and assertiveness. It will need to rest on a firm moral platform where the children's needs are paramount" (pp. 11-12). This view was echoed by participants who suggested that building relationships not only takes time and patience, it also begins with finding and identifying common ground and shared expectations: "The dialogue is necessary to develop and define each community." Another added that "we need to define roles, responsibilities, and expectations up front."

The topic of developing shared responsibility and accountability for public education was discussed by the participants of this study in two main ways. First, they focused on the issues of shared governance and shared decision-making at the individual school level. Second, participants focused on building partnerships with outside agencies, organizations, and businesses. In both cases, discussion revolved around the benefits and difficulties associated with involving a variety of stakeholder groups in matters that have traditionally been the realm of the school and its personnel.

It is perhaps not surprising that discussions centred around these two main areas of concern. With recent provincial government provision for school councils, shared decision-making and parental and community involvement in education are not only areas of focus in our province's educational reforms, they are also areas of legislated change and restructuring (Alberta Education, 1994; 1996b). Mandated or not, with few exceptions, participants of this study were confident that public education must be a shared endeavor. Albeit important, they saw the traditional teacher-student relationship as only one factor in a larger or broader conception of education where all community members assume a role by taking some part in the instructional or noninstructional responsibilities of our children's education.

Shared Governance and Shared Decision-Making

Shared governance and shared decision-making were seen by participants as crucial and important in developing and nurturing responsiveness in public education as well encouraging the accountability for schooling that all members of society must share. Although participants clearly understood shared governance and shared decision-making to include all stakeholder groups, comments in this regard were predominantly concerned with parents, students, and educators - those most closely connected or involved in the day-to-day operations of the school. Participants often referred to the role of formalized school councils for shared governance and specific models and procedures for shared decision-making, but this was not always the case. There seemed to be an understanding that, formalized or not, the shared involvement and responsibility of all stakeholder groups is not only desirable, it is also necessary. Although the benefits of shared decision-making were outlined extensively, this focus was not without a great deal of attention to the challenges and problems associated with involving various parties in decisions and governance at the school level.

To begin, participants appreciated and valued shared decision-making for three main reasons. First, at the school level, it was seen as an extension of a larger understanding and appreciation of democracy or the democratic process. As one parent explained, "Our voices have a forum. Schools and teachers are more receptive to parent requests because of shared decision-making." An administrator argued that "the more people included in the decision, the more likely it will be successful." Another participant offered the following:

> A positive thing about shared decision-making is that more people are on the "flat topped mountain," to use the metaphor of one of tonight's speakers. More decisions are made by people who are affected by the decision. It is a more effective model.

One trustee even suggested that "shared decision-making gives teachers a stronger voice than a vote." According to this participant, "It goes beyond democracy."

Second, several participants argued that an important feeling of ownership results from shared decision-making. "It encourages a sense of accountability on the part of all that participate in decision-making." A trustee offered the following: "The community needs to be a watchdog for schools. School Councils have been the best thing." In addition,

participants believed that those involved in the shared decision-making process become more aware and appreciative of pertinent issues: "We have never had such good, informed involvement."

Third, according to several participants, commitment and support are also fostered by shared decision-making. As one administrator explained, "There is great power in a decision that we've all had a part in." Another concurred: "People value the input into decisions and, therefore, support the decision." As well, according to one participant, "Shared decision-making may facilitate a congruence in beliefs." Further, participants felt that shared decisions build trust and a sense of community. As one participant suggested, "Shared decision-making encourages participation of everybody and a feeling of belonging. It influences school climate by building trust among all those who participate."

Vision or Mission

According to many participants, effective shared governance and shared decision-making cannot happen without first establishing a shared vision or mission statement upon which judgments are based. As one participant explained, "Shared decision-making starts with a philosophy based on values. You have to establish your philosophy in order to start looking at shared decision-making." In this regard, an administrator explained, "There needs to be a stake in the ground so that the shared vision can be returned to. What beliefs do we all bring so that decisions can be put up against that? 'This is who we are and this is what we do.'" Referring to decision-making, another administrator agreed: "Everything needs to be filtered through shared beliefs and purposes."

Although some participants felt vision or mission statements are somewhat suspect and questioned the potential or effectiveness of their general and vague, yet irreproachable, "motherhood" quality, or took exception to the amount of time spent on words rather than actions, most agreed that some kind of a vision or purpose statement must be in place in order for appropriate or meaningful decisions and actions to occur. Further, as one participant argued, the value in a vision statement is that it "has to be put into practice and implemented. How this works is by revisiting it and using it as a guide in the decision-

making." In this way, the vision or mission grounds the decision-making process and, in turn, the decision-making tests and validates the vision or mission. Several participants commented on the importance of seeing vision or mission statements as dynamic, to be revisited and revised regularly. For example, one participant acknowledged that "a school is a culture which is always evolving," and a trustee added that "you need to revisit your vision as parents and staffs change."

The literature written on the importance of a clearly articulated and visible mission statement and of a process of vision-building is replete with references to shared governance and shared decision-making (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Leithwood et al., 1994; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992; Wallace et al., 1997). The opinions of this study's participants agreed with the literature in that mission statements serve as the important foundation upon which appropriate, effective, and worthwhile stakeholder involvement and decision-making occur. The crucial coherence and focus necessary for planning and change is provided by a solid and shared school vision. As Cohen (1990), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), and Wallace et al. (1997) have pointed out, in order to be successful, decision-making and shared involvement must be strongly linked to clearly defined and shared outcomes, goals, and purposes.

Parent and Student Involvement

Participants were particularly vocal about the important role of parents in school governance and decision-making. As one participant argued, "Parents have the significant power in schools. If they know what is going on in schools it may enhance change." There is a notable amount of literature which has pointed to the strong connection between parental involvement in the instructional aspects of a child's education and the child's achievement (Dolan, 1994; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; MacBeath et al., 1996; Sarason, 1995). However, according to Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991) there is little evidence to suggest that parental involvement in noninstructional areas such as school governance and decision-making has direct effects on student learning and achievement. Nevertheless, these authors maintained that there are other benefits or advantages associated with the

noninstructional involvement of parents that are not necessarily or immediately apparent or measurable. Participants of this study concurred, and mentioned the positive effects of having parents involved, for example, on school councils. Although not directly related to student achievement, this type of involvement is, nonetheless, important. According to one graduate student, "Parents can be very helpful in moving barriers. Some parents help to advocate for the school and troubleshoot for the principal." One superintendent asserted that "the most powerful schools are the schools that have brought parents in." Parent involvement was also seen as particularly important in setting an example for students and in reinforcing the importance of education. As one parent suggested, "When students see parents involved in shared decision-making, it puts value on the school and its work."

The role of the student in decision-making and school governance was also discussed at some length and, without exception, those who commented on the topic argued for involving students in matters concerning their schools and their education. One administrator's comments were indicative of this opinion: "All the adults in the world can make decisions for the child, but if they haven't included the student in the process, it doesn't matter." Another administrator suggested that "the biggest day will come when students are given the right to decide. It will be an evolution of roles." According to several participants, we have underestimated the ability and value of including students in decision-making. As one administrator suggested, "We are constantly amazed by what kids can do. Considering student abilities, why wouldn't there be a student on the site team?" Some argued that student councils, for example, "represent a valuable group of stakeholders." Participants concluded that by involving students in decisions an important process is modelled. One participant suggested that "it is a positive way for them to learn to view issues, problems, and challenges." In addition, involvement in decision-making encourages the development of leadership and team-building skills. Including "student voices," one teacher argued, gives our youth an "opportunity to develop necessary skills."

The literature on shared decision-making tends not to mention the importance of student voice and involvement. However, Rudduck, Day, and Wallace (1997) and Shields (1994) have argued that inviting students to talk about their learning and school

experiences - both positive and negative - is the step in the decision-making process which stands to be most significant in effecting change. Moreover, as the participants of this study mentioned, the importance of democratic student involvement for the development of social responsibility and an ethic of care should also be a fundamental educational goal (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Noddings, 1992). Aronowitz and Giroux (1991, 1993), Gutmann (1987), Kincheloe (1993a), and McLaren (1993) have furthered this view by advocating for a democratic education which promotes the ability to think critically and to make considered choices, which creates cohesive communities of cooperation, sharing, and social justice, and which encourages students to understand that they can be empowered to make a difference. Barth's (1990) work on student leadership concurred with these recommendations. He suggested that community service learning, the type of experience so crucial to building a sense of social responsibility, should begin with a student's involvement in a shared leadership role in their own school, a smaller community within a larger society. By being involved in the improvement of their own learning community, students develop the skills, attitudes, and values important for caring and responsible citizenship.

Leadership

The topic of leadership was particularly important to participants in the discussions concerning shared governance and shared decision-making. To begin, many participants mentioned the changing leadership role of the principal. As one administrator explained, "There is a new breed of administrator. The personality of the leader is critical." According to one trustee, "principals need training in aspects other than teaching and learning. Not only do they have "to have management skills and budgeting skills," they need "communication and team-building" skills. Principals need to be "flexible, proactive - not reactive - and accepting of change." According to one participant, the success of shared decision-making "lies within the heart, soul, and beliefs of the principal. They need to be transformational leaders. They need to be visionaries."

Other participants talked about the notion of leadership itself, and acknowledged that when considering shared governance and shared decision-making, the principal or those of

an administrative team are not the only stakeholders who assume leadership roles. As one participant commented, "Shared decision-making fits well with shared leadership." Another participant offered the following: "What I like about shared decision-making is that it takes a lot of unimportant issues off the 'heads' of people, for example administrators, who need to look at more major tasks and jobs." However, as one member of the business sector explained, "It requires a shift of attitude for the principal who is autocratic to go to shared decision-making." "Leaders need to remember not to get defensive," was a repeated caution. "The principal should be willing to trust." According to several participants, when shared decision-making is a priority, the acknowledgment and promotion of new paradigms or understandings of leadership by the administrators, themselves, is crucial. A graduate student argued that "if the principal keeps the power, the very place where change needs to occur won't."

One administrator's comments were indicative of the views of other participants whose words shed some light on how principals might become comfortable with shared decision-making and shared leadership:

> I don't want to make all the decisions at my school. It's not a good idea to make a decision without all the perspectives of those who are affected. Since I am accountable for any decision made, decisions must be informed and based on a shared vision.

The notion of the shared vision was central to much of the conversation around shared decision-making. Many participants felt that if stakeholder committees based decisions and changes on a shared, reinforced, and clearly articulated vision, and if trust and respect had been established in the school community, administrators would be more likely to relent control.

The ideas about leadership reflected in the comments of the participants of this study are also the topics of an enormous body of recent literature. Indeed, new understandings of the importance of shared school governance and shared decision-making, in many cases coupled with legislated directives for such initiatives, have resulted in a great deal of interest in the role of the educational leader in light of recent reform efforts. Of the numerous authors who have written on the topic of the new school leader, some who have become particularly recognized for their contributions have presented ideas and concerns which were

reflected in the discussions of this study's participants. For example, Leithwood (1992, 1994), following the original work of Burns (1978) and Bass (1987), took the concept of transformational leadership and applied it to the educational setting to suggest that group decision-making and problem-solving is most effective when facilitated by leaders who encourage a collaborative effort and accept a broad range of perspectives as important in the process.

Sergiovanni (1990, 1992, 1994) extended the notion of transformational leadership to emphasize the moral dimensions of the heart and spirit and the commitment to community building, a continual pursuit of excellence in practice, and value-added leadership and followership which emphasize "power to" rather than "power over" (1992, p. 133). His ideas included the notion of servant leadership, where leaders are, first and foremost, servants, and the notion of stewardship, where leaders are entrusted to fulfil certain duties and obligations on behalf of others in the organization (1992).

Sergiovanni's (1990, 1992, 1994) views agreed with Barth's (1990) ideal of a community of leaders in which all stakeholders are seen as equal members of a collegial and collaborative community and are empowered and entrusted with the responsibility of shared decision-making. Followers become leaders, and principals are enablers who involve people in decisions before the decisions are made, share the responsibility for failure and the credit for success, and are willing to take the risks involved in giving authority and control to others.

Senge (1990) proposed a "systems view" of schools as learning organizations "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3). This perspective emphasizes the importance of systems thinking whereby individuals of the organization are continually encouraged to develop personal mastery in the learning disciplines. The leader is a designer, who fosters a climate conducive to learning; a teacher, who helps others to develop systemic understandings; and a steward, who promotes the school vision and

overseas the broad purpose or direction of the organization. The leader is only one member of a system in which the "whole can exceed the sum of its parts" (p. 12).

When discussing the ideas of shared decision-making and shared school leadership, participants of this study, again and again, pointed to a specific concern. Shared or not, the final accountability and responsibility for decisions and for leadership lies with the principal. For example, one administrator asked an important question: "If the principal has the final say, then are committees making decisions based on what the principal will [ultimately] decide?" Another administrator offered the following: "It can be very negative when people bring something forward and they don't see any response. The same can be said about the principal as is said about the government. Why does the principal ask the question if nothing changes?" After all, as one participant pointed out, "Whose issue is it? Is it the principal's or the whole of the stakeholders? Maybe you need to trade off the control." A trustee argued that principals must accept responsible committee decisions.

In discussing the "bottom line" accountability of the principal, some participants were sympathetic to the difficult position school leaders sometimes find themselves in. For example, one participant related the following concern: "There are some risks involved. For example, considering the issue of accountability, how comfortable is the principal with a joint decision?" Other reminders emerged: "The principal is the most important person as far as accountability is concerned." The principal must ultimately take responsibility for the decisions made by others. This concern is the subject of the work of Chapman (1990) and Murphy (1994) which explored the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of the administrator's role, particularly in negotiating the pressures presented by reforms which call for both greater stakeholder involvement and increased accountability. On one hand, principals are called upon to share authority, leadership, and decision-making responsibilities with those in their school communities. This allows for a degree of school autonomy. On the other hand, principals are also ultimately held accountable by some very specific policies and directives, most of which are determined "above" or outside the school community. This imposes a degree of constraint and external control. Often, the principal ends up being caught in the middle. According to Chapman (1990) one of the major challenges facing public education

is in resolving the dilemmas and tensions inherent in the principal's work around school-based decision-making and the increased accountability required from central authorities.

Challenges in Facilitating Involvement

In addition to valuing involvement of all stakeholders in the decisions and governance of schools, participants recognized the many challenges associated with inviting a variety of diverse perspectives and voices into the process. Most clear was the understanding that successful shared decision-making does not happen without a good deal of encouragement and facilitation. As Fullan (1996) asserted, meaningful and purposeful involvement does not just happen, even by invitation. According to one administrator, providing a context or setting conducive to getting all stakeholders involved is of primary concern. Specifically, "everybody's attitude and input must be valued." For example, one participant's arguments for "understanding and honesty" and another's call for "trust, communication, and respect" as the main "ingredients for shared decision-making" were echoed by many.

According to participants, those involved in decision-making must be informed and aware. One administrator offered the following advice: "Present enough information so that informed decisions can be made. Anticipate where questions will come from and what information may be needed." Another administrator suggested that "data are our best friend. It is on the basis of data that decisions ought to be made." One participant recommended that information be accompanied by education and consultation because "when communication is not occurring it makes people suspicious."

Many participants agreed that all stakeholders have the skills and abilities to participate in shared decision-making, but some form of training, guidance, and support is necessary. For example, one participant suggested that "we need to know how to run a meeting, how to set an agenda, and how to come to consensus." A student teacher cautioned: "People need to be aware that shared decision-making is a sharing process. It isn't a snap decision-making process." These opinions are affirmed by Owens' (1998) recommendations which outlined the importance of ongoing support, consultation, and training for collaborative groups in skill areas such as trust-building, conflict management, problem solving, and open

communication: "The intention to collaborate in making decisions is simply not sufficient in itself" (p. 198).

Time

Other challenges and problems related to shared governance and shared decision-making were voiced. The issues of the extra time involved in such initiatives was particularly troubling to participants. As one parent argued, "A 'con' is the time involved. A 'con' is the people who want their voices heard but don't want to donate the time. We need to convert these people so that they make the time." An administrator related the following: "We spent a huge amount of time trying to implement collegial decision making. We have retreated due to time and energy." Another participant suggested that "shared decision-making works for some smaller issues, but this process takes time. Time is money. It is a very slow process when, in fact, a decision not dealt with through shared decision making does not require that time." Although time-consuming, some participants argued that "it is the quality of decisions being made that make the time worth it."

This view is in accordance with Spinks' (1990) argument that, although time is most often identified first as a key concern associated with shared decision-making, what is initially perceived as just another commitment to add to already busy schedules does not necessarily end up being such. This is because most of the decision-making in question has always existed within the school's administrative realm and, through shared involvement, it becomes linked in meaningful ways to those directly affected. Shared involvement, when implemented properly and gradually, allows for the workloads of participants to be more balanced. Thus, the benefits of shared decision-making outweigh the concerns about the time commitment that, at first, seems insurmountable.

In contrast, other authors such as Chapman (1990) argued that the costs of shared involvement in school management issues do, in fact, translate directly into time. This is especially problematic for teachers whose classroom priorities become compounded by committee responsibilities. Moreover, limited time can affect the quality of the decisions made. Under time constraints, important issues cannot be considered with an appropriate

amount of thought and deliberation, and the challenges associated with organizing and coordinating a range of participants become particularly difficult.

Teachers

According to participants, the implementation of shared decision-making and shared leadership initiatives poses particular problems for teachers. As one participant asked, "What about the wasted time that can be better served in important areas, for example, instruction?" In this regard another participant wondered about the time and effort expended when "evidence does not necessarily support that shared decision-making is having a significant impact." A teacher argued that "ultimately the schools and kids suffer because I don't have the time or the energy to do my job, which is to teach." Some voiced concerns over the type and degree of involvement required of teachers. One teacher, for example, offered the following: "It depends on the decisions that are being made. I care about decisions relating to my life as a teacher, for example, timetable and school structure." Another teacher was adamant that some concerns should not be shared. "Many decisions need to be made elsewhere. Get on with it. Do I, as a teacher, want to be involved in allocating staff? Do I want to make decision on whether to spend money on a roof vs. new computers?"

Frustrations about the meetings and committee involvement often required in making shared decisions and in sharing responsibilities were voiced by several participants. For example, one teacher lamented that "we are 'meetinged' to death." Another participant offered the following criticism: "I'm happy to go to meetings, but we had better be talking about something important." One participant voiced the following concern: "It might impact student achievement negatively because of the time required for meetings." A teacher's comment reflected the sense of resignation felt by some: "Just tell me what to do, and I'll be happy to do it."

The above concerns have been acknowledged in the literature which deals with the role of teachers in shared governance and decision-making (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1993; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Chapman, 1990). Many tasks and decisions related to school

administration and management are being assumed by teachers who are already feeling overtaxed and weary. In addition, although teachers are not necessarily happy with the decisions made in their schools, they often prefer not to become involved. Either they perceive their participation to be at the expense of their continued ability to do justice to their classroom roles, or they feel that their involvement is not valued, recognized, or even truly desired (Chapman, 1990; Barth, 1990; Owens, 1998). According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and Louis, Kruse, and Bryk (1995), what is most important in encouraging teachers to accept decision-making roles and responsibilities is the provision of opportunities and structures, supported at a system level, which encourages collegial and collaborative work and the development of professional communities beyond the isolation of the classroom. Furthermore, the decision-making expected should focus on instructional issues so that energy is not spent on all issues pertinent to the management and administration of the entire school (Chapman, 1990; Cohen, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Wallace et al., 1997).

Parents

When discussing how to facilitate involvement in school governance, leadership, and decision-making, many participants also commented on the reluctance of parents to become involved, particularly on school councils. Recent initiatives for shared decision-making and shared governance assume that parents want more involvement and power within their schools. In reality, however, this may not be the case. Parents are not always prepared to commit the amount of time and effort required to participate (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Goldring & Sullivan, 1996). This concern was consistent with the views of participants of this study: "Consider parent council changes. They are new and revised. How much involvement do people really want? Do they want an advisory role or committed involvement? This legislation was changed. Parents wanted only an advisory role." One participant related the following: "We make decisions based on teamwork. Teams go away and work on a problem, but some don't want this responsibility." One

parent suggested that because "parents are not clear about what is going on," their role should be "to listen" only.

Some participants felt that a lack of participation on the part of parents was not the result of a deliberate choice. Other factors are involved. For example, one administrator identified a specific problem: "There is a concern about how to involve parents from a low-income and multi-ethnic schools. Cultural diversity adds pressures." A parent added the following: "I hear lots of lies out there. People don't know what is happening. Parents are intimidated by the system and don't realize their rights. It is worse at the high school level." This concern was reiterated by another parent: "At the high school level there is less involvement. Parents feel at a loss; they don't feel competent."

According to the literature, the above concerns are legitimate ones. Formal structures for shared decision-making, such as school councils, offer limited opportunities for parents to participate. Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991), for example, suggested that these arrangements often lack a clear focus, are ineffectively implemented, do not address the needs of parents, and have resulted only in token participation. Further, Seddon, Angus and Pool (1990) reported that school councils require the sort of representation and constituent development which is often problematic: "Those who do not form a recognizable constituency, who are disorganized, whose position and concerns are fragmented or poorly articulated, and who, for whatever other reason, fail to take a political stance are excluded from participation" (p. 45). Conversely, those who have traditionally benefited from the political processes they are familiar with and knowledgeable about - those with education, financial position, political connections, and the ability to organize - continue to retain political influence (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Seddon et al., 1990).

In light of these concerns, participants wondered about how to get parents more involved. One participant related the following: "We try to respond to parents outside the school so they feel comfortable with those who reside within the walls of the school. Over time, parents begin to feel valued and join in more and more." Some participants had some specific suggestions. For example, one teacher offered the following recommendation:

"Some parents are afraid to come into the school, so we have had social occasions to get them into the school. We have parent representatives there to explain what the role of the council is. We offer babysitting to parents." Another suggested that the "'working group' concept works well because parents feel valued and are pleased at being asked to sit on a special committee."

According to many participants, parental involvement and input must be validated, taken seriously, and genuinely valued. Specifically, some participants suggested that if parents are involved, they must be involved in meaningful ways. For example, some participants discussed the issue of fundraising and suggested that this kind of commitment, although greatly appreciated, is not the sort of involvement that allows parents to feel that they have a truly valued and important role in the decision-making process. Further to this, a teacher voiced another concern: "When parents *are* involved in decision-making, some of the decisions are downright patronizing." A parent affirmed this concern: "When we, as parents, want a minor change, everything is okay. When it's major, the door seems to start to close. Power should not be the focus." Authors such as Brandt (1999) and Darling-Hammond (1995) advocated for authentic parental involvement based on relationships of trust, openness, empathy, and an understanding of communication that puts listening carefully to what parents say first. Schools must enable parents "to participate in real conversations about children, teaching, and learning" and must allow parents to be "engaged in fully understanding and participating in an educational dialogue about what's important, how the school community is trying to accomplish its goals, and what changes may be considered and undertaken" (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 170). Levine, Lowe, Peterson, and Tenorio (1995) called for parents to be involved beyond the "pizza sale" (p. 235) in key roles as valued resources, advocates, and decision-makers. Parents should be empowered to improve not only their own children's education, but to better the education of all children (Cohen, 1990; Levine et al.).

Another side to the discussions about the problems associated with parental involvement was also presented. As one administrator offered, "My concern is with parents. Are decisions informed? We have no power over the parents we get." Another

administrator related the following: "I have a problem with school councils because the parents that come out do not necessarily represent a total school's population of students. A problem with shared decision-making is just getting special lobby groups or the most vocal groups." Yet another participant argued that "school council members have a vested interest [only] while their children are in a particular school, and some parents are involved to 'clean up' the school." One participant suggested that "the aim is to find a group of parents who would look beyond their own children to the education of all students."

As Barlow and Robertson (1994) and Seddon et al. (1990) asserted, school councils tend to attract the most confident, articulate, and persuasive parents who do not necessarily represent the entire parent body. The views of this type of parent tend to be compatible with the views of those who work in the school and the values upon which the structures and processes for shared decision-making, such as those of school councils, are built and maintained. On the surface, this may seem to be an ideal situation; however, what becomes problematic is that, under these conditions, the potential for existing arrangements of participation to be challenged or interrupted is less likely (Seddon et al., 1990). In addition, the potential for aggressive and vocal groups to further narrow or self-serving agendas exists as a legitimate concern in situations were those involved form a select, hegemonic group (Barlow & Robertson, 1994).

Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991) asserted that "parent involvement is not the only answer. Nor is it free from danger" (p. 248). Endless conflict and low morale are some of the harmful consequences that can result. These authors recommend that the implementation of programs for shared governance and shared decision-making be carried out and monitored carefully. For that matter, involving any stakeholder group in the leadership and management of the school poses a variety of challenges. However, the discussions of this study indicate that, in spite of obstacles and difficulties, participants support the ideals of shared governance and decision-making. These initiatives are an important step in encouraging the sense of shared responsibility for public education that was so clearly on the minds of participants. That said, it must also be noted that the concept of sharing held by participants seemed to go beyond the formalized structures of school councils and models

for decision-making. Consistent with the views of some authors (Brandt, 1999; Darling-Hammond; 1995, Noddings, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994), participants of this study emphasized the values of trust, mutual respect, openness and communication, empathy, and caring that constitute a foundation which must be solidly in place before the more pragmatic functions of shared governance and shared decision-making can occur in a way that is authentic, meaningful, and beneficial to those involved.

Community Involvement and Partnerships Beyond the School

In addition to the extensive discussion about shared governance and shared decision-making as significant topics under the larger theme of shared responsibility and accountability for public education, this study also revealed significant attention to the topic of the involvement of the community beyond the school. For the most part, participants felt that there is a need to expand the notion of the school to include and integrate support not only from parents, but also from the extended family, the business community, social agencies, and not-for-profit organizations. As one trustee explained, "community is more than parents. Working in partnership with other agencies in the community is important." A teaching assistant agreed: "We must be involved with the broader community. Let's support what needs to be done in a holistic manner. There is too much compartmentalization in society." A graduate student offered the following: "Do we need to define and redefine our space? Where is the real world? It goes beyond the walls of the schools."

Some participants understood community involvement to focus on business and corporate partnerships. As one parent commented, "I associate community involvement with money from businesses." However, many participants argued that seeing partnerships in terms of connections with business is limited, and suggested that community involvement must include connections with social agencies and less formal links with community groups and organizations. One superintendent offered the following: "We don't need to look just at business partnerships, but also at the other elements of our community which can provide success for children." Some participants were concerned that business partnerships tend to

receive more attention than is their due. As one participant argued, "Business partnerships or efforts are given so much weight. Other partnerships are undervalued." One trustee offered the following: "Compared to corporate partnerships, partnerships with social agencies lack status, but there is a philosophical reciprocity of services and relationships."

Whether they are understood in terms of partnerships with businesses or partnerships with social agencies and organizations, an examination of the literature reveals that emerging programs for coordinated and integrated connections between the community and the school have initiated a significant movement in North America. The recognition that schools alone can no longer meet the diverse, changing, and challenging needs of today's youth and families is increasingly accompanied with calls for public education to be more responsive to the community by narrowing the gap between the classroom and the world beyond the school (Kritek, 1996). School partnerships with social agencies and community organizations have come to be seen as important investments in social capital, and school partnerships with businesses and the workplace have come to be seen as crucial investments in human capital (Kritek, 1996; Leithwood et al., 1994).

Partnerships Between Schools and Social Agencies

Participants of this study were particularly interested in partnerships between the school and social agencies for connecting education with areas such as healthcare and social services. Some advocated for the development of both formal and informal partnerships, and some argued for the full integration of a range of services and facilities. For example, one trustee suggested the following:

> Schools should be seen as community centers, not just places of learning. Schools should deal with everything to do with the growth and learning of kids. They should integrate libraries, seniors complexes, and medical centers. Seniors could use the facilities and work with students too. Partnerships could include the Legion and other community groups.

Another trustee referred to other outside agencies which offer educational support or curricular enrichment:

> We need more of the external programs, for example, museum schools which change kids and teachers. There are resources out there and we need to access these. For

example, the Tyrell Museum, Olds College, Head-Smashed-In Historical Site - the possibilities are limitless.

Several participants mentioned that the support of seniors and grandparents was worth considering seriously. As one trustee explained, "Grandparent programs as partnerships include a very powerful group of individuals. Partnerships with seniors are very successful and perhaps one of the earliest forms of informal partnerships."

A review of the literature written about the involvement of social and community agencies and organizations in or with education reveals that collaboration among youth-serving institutions is a growing concern and a timely topic. A number of models and arrangements for school-community connections, which include the types of partnerships and affiliations mentioned by the participants of this study, has evolved. Goldring and Sullivan (1996) described these models as either "school-linked" or "school-based." School-linked models are organized so that outside social services and programs are coordinated with the school, and school-based models are organized so that social services and programs are provided within the school. Most recent initiatives have incorporated some form or degree of the school-linked model, as connections of this sort are most easily established given that the structures and bureaucracies of both educational and social institutions are quite rigid.

More ambitious or radical school-based models include the community school and the full-service school. Community schools function as resource centres delivering a wide range of services. They integrate education with health and hospital care, businesses, community organizations, and churches, and they sponsor activities designed to meet the needs of their community, for example, parent and employment-related training and literacy classes. Accessibility is their aim, and they are open year-round, on evenings and weekends (Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Keith, 1995). Full-service schools strive to wholly integrate education, health, social services, and youth and family resource programs into one "seamless" institution, rather than focusing on the development of partnership links with outside agencies. These schools are created to be accessible and efficient single-site centres for the provision of support structures along with quality education (Dryfoos, 1993, 1996).

Whether school-linked or school-based, these models have emerged as a result of the increased numbers of children who are troubled, "at risk," or who have special needs which hinder their ability to learn (Dryfoos, 1993, 1996; Keith, 1995; Kritek, 1996; Mawhinney, 1993). School-linked and school-based initiatives are intended to provide educational and social programs in a more holistic manner for collaboration, family empowerment, and continuous and consistent community development (Adler, 1994).

Challenges in School-Social Agency Partnerships

Participants of this study acknowledged that partnerships between schools and social agencies or community organizations were not necessarily easily established. To begin, as one trustee remarked, partnerships must be based on relationships and "relationships take a long time to build." A professional development consultant suggested that "schools need to seriously sit down and talk about what partnerships are." Many participants argued that partnerships should not be entered into lightly or without careful consideration. For example, one superintendent asked the following questions: "Are schools ready for sharing responsibility? Can we sustain partnerships in the 'business' of the world?" Another participant suggested that initiating and developing a partnership first involves setting common goals, and establishing communication: "Partners should be matched based upon common ground, using mission statements. We can make links based on common ground and correlate purposes so benefits are mutual. We need to define roles, responsibilities, and expectations up-front."

Participants talked about a number of more specific problems or concerns associated with educational partnerships. As one trustee remarked, "integration of services from school boards, regional health authorities, and law enforcement are almost impossible. Boundaries are becoming more distinct and this discourages coordination." A teacher suggested that "agencies may be too competitive to work together." The time and human resources involved in developing partnerships was cited as a major concern. For example, a trustee voiced the following: "Partnerships take time and people. Making the coordination of services possible is not really the job of the educator."

The concerns voiced by participants of this study echoed many of the issues, concerns, and cautions highlighted in the literature. For example, Chapman (1996) recommended that specific strategies for mediating and managing difficulties and for ensuring that partnerships are based on mutual respect must be in place before initiatives of these sorts are even started. Beyond this advice, Crowson and Boyd (1996) and Smithmier (1996) suggested that although schools are motivated and committed to partnerships and integrated programs, they are, of all agencies, the most cumbersome and resistant to the type of changes involved in reforms such as these. Interestingly, this resistance does not often come from individuals, rather it is a result of entrenched school structures and routines. In addition, because the new roles and expectations of partnerships and integrated programs are often seen by those in schools as ambiguous and blurred, functioning within these roles causes a significant degree of friction and stress. Ironically, the very school structures and routines that are obstacles to these reforms become the source of security and stability held onto by school personnel out of familiarity or habit, or in an attempt to deal with the discomfort associated with the change. For these reasons, some authors (Capper, 1996; Heath & McLaughlin, 1994) suggested that it is perhaps more effective and appropriate for collaborative efforts involving schools to be initiated outside of the school, in neighboring communities, where structures for 24 hour access are in place and where the expert focus is shifted away from educators. In addition, schools can learn some valuable lessons from community agencies and organizations that have, for years, been providing successful youth programs and services.

Partnerships Between Schools and Businesses

A heightened focus on technology, increased attention to global competitiveness, and a growing emphasis on the connection between school and the workplace has resulted in the gaining popularity of school-business partnerships as a means to encourage cooperation and communication between public education and the private sector and as a way to allow students to acquire firsthand career information and experience (Alberta Education, 1996; Cornell, 1996; Gladstone & Jacobsen, 1999). This move has been furthered by consistent

decreases in funding to public education and the necessity for school systems and educators to seek new sources of support (Cressy, 1994; Molnar, 1996; Robertson, 1998). The remarks about school-business partnerships made by this study's participants reflected this reality: "Business and corporate involvement usually means money and resources for schools." According to one teacher, for example, "The Galileo Centre in Rocky View School Division received $500,000.00 of private sector funding." A parent explained that some businesses support schools by providing technology: "We're partnered with this corporation, therefore, we receive all this technology." Although most participants of this study were somewhat cautious or skeptical about school-business partnerships, the very real financial benefits of these connections were recognized.

Challenges in School-Business Partnerships

In spite of the benefits, participants were quite concerned about the complexity and challenges around involving businesses in public education. The following comment is indicative of this skepticism: "Business partnerships are quite superficial. A rich learning experience could be described as a partnership - not a contrived business partnership." The motives behind business involvement were often questioned. For example, one superintendent voiced the following opinion: "We have a moral obligation to engage the community, but in whose interest is a partnership, for example, with a chartered bank?" Another participant argued that "companies never give without there being an ulterior motive. There is a tax break behind the involvement." An additional concern was voiced by another participant:

> There is difficulty on the part of schools to make it without a partner. Corporations are having a profound effect on schools and education. The corporate model does not overlay the public service model. Why has education changed in this way? Why do we allow our schools to be directed by corporations?

More opinions of this type were voiced: "Some schools are funded by corporations. This raises ethical questions. It raises the questions of whose agenda education is following. Are companies entering the classroom to sell their products? Are business arrangements, for example, Pepsi and Coke, business partnerships?" Concerns about the incompatibility of

educational and business ideals were also voiced by several participants. As one parent suggested, "In involving the business community there is danger in the business emphasis on profitability. Schools are not run on such ideals." Another argued that "education focuses on building relationships. Business wants to make money and product."

Authors such as Giroux (1998), Harty (1994), Molnar (1996), and Robertson (1998) have also viewed school-business partnerships critically and have argued, as many of this participant's study did, that these alliances raise serious ethical and moral concerns. School-business partnerships encourage corporate intrusion and commercialization and render students little more than workers-in-training or an important untapped consumer market. A corporate culture results and the values of competition, entrepreneurialism, and consumerism become valued over the democratic ideals of citizenship, justice, equality, and respect for children.

In keeping with the sentiments of the above mentioned critics, participants were concerned that business partnerships be entered into with careful consideration of ethical and philosophical issues. One participant offered the following caution: "Do we have checks and balances in place to monitor that good ethical considerations are in place? There is always an up side and a down side of partnerships." Another participant asked some important questions: "What do you want from the contact? Money? Time?" A graduate student suggested that "partnerships with the business community should not be for money alone, but should also be for ideological input." The following concerns were raised:

> What are the objectives, what are the outcomes, and what purpose are these partnerships serving? Should we not take it to the next level so that we can redefine these partnerships? We need a clearer definition of how we need to be working within these partnerships.

It is for reasons such as these that Chapman (1996) recommended that policy makers and educators pay special attention to the lessons that have been learned from past failures, problems, and dysfunctions in school-business partnerships. They are not always easy or positive unions. However, school-business partnerships should not be avoided. They are an important means by which public education can broaden access to support, assistance, and advice. That said, the literature presents some cautions worth noting: Partnerships,

according to Cornell (1996), should be entered into in the same way marriages are. Fundamental values and ideals of potential partners must be clearly articulated and compatible. Only with careful courtship, proper nurturing, trust, and investment and commitment to the relationship will these unions grow and last as positive and rewarding alliances. In addition, according to Chapman (1996), the impact of such connections, not only in terms of how education can be enhanced by business and industry involvement, but also in terms of how business and industry can be influenced by education, must be seriously considered and investigated.

Giroux (1998) presented some stronger warnings, and argued for a renewed democratic mission in public education and advocated for educators to actively work to maintain a balance between the public and the private good and to "confront the march of corporate power by resurrecting a noble tradition" (p. 16) in which children see themselves as more than consumers or workers, and where education encourages politically empowerment and critical thinking. Public school systems should not allow advertising, merchandising, or commercial interests, and guidelines for noncommercial relations between public schools and the business world should be clearly established.

Benefits of Community Involvement and Partnerships

Participants identified a major reason for initiating and developing school-community or school-business partnerships as a need for money and or human or support resources. As one teacher reflected, "As services are being downloaded, we are forced into securing partnerships according to our needs." A superintendent explained that "integration of resources and social services provides resources in the school," and an administrator suggested that "at the school level, partnerships provide time and resources and effectiveness in the use of resources." Another participant suggested that "education of our young people is so devolved. Schools are forced into partnerships because of the lack of funding."

The promotion of positive relationships and the enhancement of public relations were referred to by several participants as a benefit of educational partnerships. As one

participant argued, "Partnerships are a two-way street - mutually beneficial for both parties involved. They build public relations, involve volunteers, and support technology and special events. The partnership is more than a give-receive relationship." In the opinion of one member of the business sector, "paybacks of the partnerships are phenomenal according to business - good for the profile as 'good citizen.'" A trustee referred to another important benefit: "Reconnecting the community to public education helps in the understanding of the schools."

According to participants, the most important advantages of educational partnerships are the benefits to students. In particular, students identified as "at risk" were mentioned as being potentially assisted through partnerships with social services and other community agencies. As one teacher suggested, "Coordination is difficult and yet we know collaboration is essential when working with children at risk." According to one trustee, "You cannot teach a child until you reach a child. Outside agencies facilitate this." In this regard, some interesting suggestions for the integration of services were made. For example, one participant asked, "What if we had a Ministry of Youth so that children would not slide through the cracks?" A superintendent offered the following: "We need to reform partnerships at the provincial level, for example, a Ministry of Education and Health." A teacher agreed: "We need a greater number of agencies working together to help children and families."

According to many participants, educational partnerships promote student learning. As one participant suggested, "partnerships help students to see the purpose of education, to generalize, and to apply skills. Community involvement extends education and learning beyond the classroom and promotes lifelong learning." Partnerships, more importantly, offer students valuable mentoring. As one superintendent remarked, "Community involvement provides children with extended influence." A teacher offered the following statement: "Partnerships mean more people cheering the students on and more support. Students need more parents in their lives."

Another important benefit of partnerships mentioned by many participants is the opportunity for students to be involved in the community in a reciprocal relationship. As

one administrator suggested, "Instead of bringing volunteers into the school, we might take children out to the community." According to one superintendent, "Partnerships should be looked at differently, having to do with civic responsibility, giving back to the community, and students providing service. The sense of privilege and obligation must be balanced between the community and students." A trustee made the following suggestion: "Get the message to students that their education is a privilege. We need to raise student awareness so as to give back to the community."

In accordance with many of the benefits of school-community partnerships and collaboration outlined by participants of this study, Halford (1998) and Wilson and Corcoran (1988) concluded that strong links between schools and the community have significant benefits for a school's students and staff. To begin, those in the community represent a tremendous resource of varied expertise. Community involvement also results in the school being seen as more inviting and accessible. As people become more familiar with and involved in schools they also become less critical and more supportive. Positive political connections between the school and its stakeholders are formed. Adult involvement in school initiatives and activities also sends a crucial message to students that says what is happening in schools is important. In addition, shared activities and experiences develop a rich, caring, and positive school culture.

Specific to school-business partnerships, Gladstone and Jacobsen (1998) emphasized several benefits for both students and schools. Student motivation is increased through opportunities for relevant learning experiences beyond the curriculum, and employability skills are enhanced. Teaching and learning and professional development opportunities are enriched, and both the school and the business gain from greater visibility and recognition and the reciprocal benefits of increased awareness and respect. In addition, of school-community partnerships, McLaughlin (1997) suggested that schools gain from the important function that those outside of the school provide in "sustaining disequilibrium" (p. 86) by offering the feedback, constructive criticism, and reality checks important to educators in achieving and maintaining school effectiveness and responsiveness.

Reflections on Chapter 5

Although participants of this study recognized the many successes of public education, they identified change as both necessary and desirable. Public education must continue to adapt to its ever-changing context and to respond to the needs of its diverse communities. Participants realized that, more than ever today, schools cannot see themselves as autonomous, separate, or immune from the troubles and complexities of the outside world. Furthermore, schools cannot, in isolation, begin to address all of the problems faced by society; nor should they be expected to accept the sole responsibility and accountability for the education of our children. Public education must be a shared endeavor. In order for meaningful and appropriate collaborations and partnerships to be formed and to develop successfully, participants felt that public education must broaden its scope and extend its boundaries. The larger community, with all of its possibilities as well as its messiness and discord, must be embraced.

This section, entitled "Moving Ahead," presents the many and varied ideas and concerns that the participants of this study had about how public education has begun to reform, restructure, and move forward. The extensive discussions about responsiveness, accountability, and shared responsibility for education, specifically through consideration of shared governance and shared decision-making and school partnerships with outside agencies, organizations, and businesses, revealed a significant desire and willingness on the part of participants to understand and to entertain possibilities for different and more open forms or arrangements for public education. Although participants recognized that new conceptions of education are desirable and timely, they also acknowledged that even the beginnings of such changes, like the ones we have seen or experienced in efforts such as school councils or school-business partnerships, are fraught with contention and difficulty and require, and will continue to necessitate, discussion, debate, negotiation and, perhaps, new understandings of democratization.

As Fullan (1993) suggested, when schools join with other stakeholder groups in shared initiatives, the level of complexity increases as new and uncharted waters are tested. Participants of this study agreed with this view and understood that, in order to be positive

and effective, relationships must be "no fault" partnerships, based on trust, communication, and mutual respect. In addition, as Fullan (1993) did, participants also argued that those involved will have to continually ask themselves what they are doing and why they are doing it. They will have to be ready to challenge their assumptions about their own institutions and their roles within those organizations, and be willing to step outside of or away from what is comfortable and familiar.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A Look Back

At the beginning of this thesis, I talked about this research project as being an important learning event and, as I conclude this writing, I am compelled to reflect upon the process as a whole. I began my study with the questions I had about public education and public education reform as a result of my personal experiences, experiences which centred on my life as a high school teacher in Alberta during the wave of reforms that began in earnest in 1994. My questions and my wondering led me to the literature. At this point, my interests were broad and my questions were general, but I needed a context for my study. I encountered article after article and volume after volume of information that seemed to be an appropriate starting point for my reading. I realized, of course, that I could not possibly read it all, but I tackled what I could. This was to be an important start.

From this reading I learned of the magnitude and consequence of the topic I was investigating. Up until that point, for me, the issues of public education reform had been primarily attached to my own and my colleague's experiences. I knew that in order to understand what was happening in my own province I had to go beyond this limited view. As I read, I began to see my world in a much larger sense, and from a significantly different vantage point. I learned that the reform projects and the discussions and debates about educational change and restructuring of many nations bore striking similarities to one another and, moreover, to Alberta. I saw that much of what was happening in my province was also happening on a global scale. My classroom, my school, my school district, and my province were connected to or embedded in something very big.

My reading also revealed that what had been my own experience in the contention and complexity of the reforms of my province and, subsequently, of my own school district, was also paralleled in a larger debate. The literature revealed that the socio-political and economic influences on public education and reform carry with them great force. What happens in public schools affects us not only as individuals but also as members of a larger

society; therefore, whether driven by private or public motives, education becomes the interest and the domain of all citizens at all levels. Schools become contended spaces. Discussions about them are not neutral. Attempts to change them are loaded with tension, opposition, contradiction, and difficulty.

The reading I was doing was to set the stage for the rest of my project, and it needed to be written about. So, I proceeded with the initial stages of the writing early in the research process, at about the same time the CLL seminars (and the collection of my data) began. What ultimately resulted were the sections entitled "The Global Context" and "The Public Education Debate" in this thesis' introductory chapter, but when I look back to the point at which I began this writing I remember being more than a little confused. (I imagine my advisor remembers this too!) The information that percolated in my thoughts and the notes I was compiling as a result of my initial literature review seemed huge. Not only were they huge in terms of quantity, they were also huge in terms of content. They dealt with the "big" issues - those of a theoretical and philosophical nature - and, although I found this work to be very interesting, it started to seem a bit abstract.

I began to panic as my data continued to come in. How, exactly, would I connect what the participants of my study were saying to what I was reading and writing about? Furthermore, it seemed that much of the data had to do with issues or concerns that were local, specific, or practical. Should I have been reading about site-based management? Should I have spent my time with the literature about leadership? Should I have surveyed the studies written about parental involvement? about assessment? about business partnerships? (Indeed, I later went back to the literature as these topics did become the subjects for another stage of reading.) However, at that point I need not have panicked. When I look back, I now realize how relevant and crucial my initial reading and writing was. More than I could have ever imagined, and more than if it had been planned that way, this inquiry and the writing, which resulted in "The Global Context" and "The Public Education Debate," frame the study quite nicely. They serve as a place "outside," from which to look "into" the findings of the study or, conversely, a place to look "out to" from the findings. Together, these sections serve as a contextual organization, a macro-perspective to frame

the more local or specific micro-perspective of our CLL seminar discussions and our experiences in Alberta.

Key Findings

As mentioned above, what is happening in public education in Alberta can be seen reflected in other countries, in a number of ways, on a number of levels. In addition, what is reflected in the findings of this study is also reflected to a great degree in the literature which reports what others say about public education and what they relate about their own experiences of change and reform. More importantly, in the numerous discussions of this study, what one participant said was often repeated by others. In many ways, the experiences and the stories of this study's participants can be seen as shared and, perhaps, to an extent universal. This is not to say that to see the individual experiences of those of this study as unique, individual, and often shaped by particular and certain circumstances is not important; nor is it to say that the single, the different, or that which is outside of the experience of others is not significant. (Our individual perspectives and our unique stories and opinions carry with them great import, and can be particularly revealing and illuminating.) Rather, it is to say that something can be learned from what we have in common and from what we have, separate from one another, repeatedly experienced. It is with this in mind that I approached the process of identifying the key findings of this study.

Where We Are

As educational stakeholders, participants of this study are overwhelmed by the enormity of a larger social, political, and economic context which cannot but impinge upon Alberta's public schools and the lives of our province's students. They wonder about the pace of change, about the effects of globalization, and about the technological advances our schools cannot keep up with. They are concerned about increasing poverty, about the growing gap between the "haves" and the "have nots," and about the challenges our diverse and multicultural communities present. Participants are worried about the effects of these influences on our children and their families, and about how schools will continue to meet the needs of an increasing number of students who are troubled, have special needs, or

require individual attention. They are frustrated because there does not seem to be enough support for public education, not only in terms of funding, but also in terms of advocacy. They believe it is imperative that those who seem indifferent to the problems and challenges facing public education be convinced that these issues cannot be addressed by schools alone. The education of our children must be seen as important enough to be supported by the wider community.

Participants understand that politicians and senior policy makers in our province are also struggling to make sense of many of the same changes and challenges those in our schools face. Indeed, participants acknowledge that the government has been working hard at reforming education so as to ensure an "Alberta Advantage": Administrative and governance structures - from the ministry level all the way down to individual schools - have been reorganized, and funding has been reduced and reallocated so as to meet a commitment to "strong financial management" (Alberta Education, 1994, 1996b). Measures for increased public accountability and student achievement have been implemented so as to meet a commitment to "high standards" for "quality education," and so as to ensure that Alberta's students are among the best in the world (Alberta Education, 1994, 1996a, 1996b). Not unlike our government, participants of this study understand very clearly the importance of producing graduates who are prepared for the workforce in a high-tech, competitive, global economy. As well, they had to agree that it would be nice if a piece of that competitive global economy existed here in Alberta when future graduates are ready to go to work. Indeed, who would disagree?

However, participants are not convinced that the "means" by which our government intends to achieve this "end" involve sound approaches to educational change. They report that they have seen little evidence that the initiatives of the past several years are the kind of reforms that have truly improved the learning experiences of our children or the quality of education in our schools. Furthermore, although participants realize that the government has a mandate to include and involve Albertans in education, they wonder who these Albertans are. Generally, the stakeholders of this study believe that they have been, and continue to be, left out of the decision-making process at the times or at the levels at which

the most far-reaching and consequential reforms have been, and continue to be, initiated. They also feel that the government is committed to "staying the course" in spite of substantial early evidence that some reforms are not resulting in positive outcomes.

Specifically, the participants who are teachers know that they are seen by the government as a special interest group and, therefore, they realize that their voices are not always welcome. Besides, even though they continue to try to do what they think is best for students, they are getting tired. The participants who are trustees believe that they have become caught in the middle of an embittered political struggle between the teachers' association and the government. Trust has become eroded and they are feeling powerless. The participants who are parents suggest that they and their counterparts are far too busy fundraising to become politically organized and active in ways that count. Those who are not fundraising are also concerned about their children, but they simply do not have the time to get involved. The participants who are business people would like to have a stake in public education, and in some cases and to some extent they do, but they do not always know what it is they should be doing in schools, or what, exactly, is expected of them. The participants who are administrators are just trying to keep their heads above water as they attempt to involve all stakeholders in the decisions of their schools, try to keep everyone on track and happy and, at the same time, prepare to share the credit if things turn out O.K. and accept the blame if they don't. The participants who are students - well - who asked them?

The general tone of the discussions strongly indicated that the participants feel that we, in Alberta, are in the midst of a confounding and disconcerting era. There was a definite feeling among participants that they are a part of something they often have little understanding of or little control over. Perhaps if they were convinced that things are getting better they would be a little more enthused. For example, they wonder why it is that we pay so much attention to achievement exams. Everything we know about teaching and learning tells us that these evaluations serve a limited pedagogic purpose. What they *do* do most effectively, however, is tell the public where schools rank. Participants who work in schools that end up at the bottom of published lists know why their students receive the marks they do. They also know that this does not necessarily mean they are failing. But

participants are not convinced that the public or the government understands their unique contexts, or that the successes they celebrate cannot be measured on standardized tests. As another example, participants grappled with how to get shared decision-making to work the way it is "supposed" to. Those of school communities that include a high number of single and immigrant parents or those who have worked with extremely "vocal" and challenging parent groups understand that the structures and guidelines for school councils outlined in the "government issue," one-size-fits-all school councils manual (Alberta Home and School Councils' Association & Alberta Teachers' Association, 1995) does not necessarily work in their circumstances ticipants also believe that the budget cuts and financial restructuring that represent the most severe consequence of the government's reforms have placed impossible constraints on public schools. For example, schools are required to ensure that their students "achieve." At the same time, the types of programs and support that, in many schools, make this achievement possible have been cut.

Considering these examples, which represent only a few of many, it is not surprising that the participants of this study are suspect and cautious about the reforms that have come from above. Furthermore, those such as Cohen (1990), Darling-Hammond (1995), Elmore (1990), Fullan (1993), Johnson (1990) and Tyack and Cuban (1995) who have written extensively about educational change, have been telling us for some years now that imposed, "top-down" directives for reform are, for the most part, ineffective. They are resisted or ignored, particularly by those at the school level who are most affected by such reforms. What is related about recent reforms by many of the participants of this study is consistent with these conclusions. Moreover, it seems that we, in Alberta, are also experiencing the frustrations associated with the "loose-tight" coupling Knight et al. (1993) referred to in explaining that devolved or decentralized governance structures are more about "means" than "ends." On one hand, the importance of local responsiveness and community participation is recognized; on the other hand, independence and autonomy are curtailed by significant central controls over funding and accountability.

Contemplating Change

This is not to say that participants do not want public education to change - they do! But when they consider change they start their discussions by talking about why things should change and about what it is they hope to achieve through change. This, they argue, is the first step. It requires a close look at what we believe to be the purposes or functions of education. When participants take this close look, most of them want to talk about our world as being more than the world of work. They wonder about the values and ideals that motivate the recent educational reforms in our province. One has only to look at a recent *Three-year Business Plan* (Alberta Education, 1996b) to realize that the government does, indeed, mean "business" in its literal sense. With the exception of relatively few references, for example the mandate statement which suggests students should "become self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing citizens" (p. 9), the document focuses on high standards, technology, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, affordability, and financial management - the ideals of a competitive, corporatist, capitalist agenda. Participants do not necessarily disagree with this focus. In fact, some support it wholeheartedly. Most, however, are somewhat concerned.

Participants wonder about whose interests are really being served by recent reforms. In addition to an education for a competitive world, they want their children to have a "well-rounded" education; for example, they want them to appreciate our rich cultural heritage and the fine arts. Participants want children with special needs to have a place in our schools with the individual attention they require, but participants also know that the funding for programs that support these students has been cut, and they wonder about the government's priorities. Moreover, they see the world beyond school as a place where we need to care for one another, to cooperate and work together, to build upon a common good, and to nurture responsible and democratic citizenship. Preparing our children for jobs is only one way in which we prepare them for life.

Participants of this study want to move ahead. They want public education to change. They acknowledge that this is also the goal of the government and, for that matter, the aim of most who have a stake in public education. Schools, as they presently exist, are not

responding to our changing world and our changing society quickly enough, or in ways that appropriately meet the needs of our diverse student populations and their communities. However, as Fullan (1993) reminds us, stakeholder groups often come up with opposing solutions to common problems. According to participants, we find ourselves at cross purposes and, as such, we spin our wheels. We go nowhere, or, we go nowhere important. Again and again, we are set up for frustration and disappointment.

The discussions of the stakeholders of this study indicate that they are irritated and fed up with the Klein government's approach to reform. However, there is also a sense that, being in Alberta, we are not likely to experience a change in government any time soon. Participants are very in tune with the political climate of our province, and our Conservative roots run deep. So, although participants may not agree with our government's reform plan, it seems they have developed strategies to cope. They are politically active in ways that they can be, or in ways that they have the time and energy for. In addition, as mentioned above, those in schools often cope by being passively resistant. They do what they have to and try to ignore the rest. Participants believe that the changes initiated from "above" thus far have had little to do with what they believe is important - teaching and learning. Those who work in schools are tired and disillusioned with the provincial government's reforms and with the lack of support they receive. However, they are also highly committed and dedicated, and they are willing to move ahead. There is a strong indication in this study that what, at one time, may have caused anger and resentment is now seen as little more than another inconvenience or an additional irritation. Stakeholders of this study have not given up on public education. They are willing to work with the government but, government or not, they are ready to push forward. They feel strongly about doing what is necessary to change public education. The first step, they argue, is to build a vision for education in our province - a common focus that we can all "buy into."

That said, participants very clearly recognize the difficulties associated with this endeavor. After all, to date, it seems that we haven't had much luck in this regard. When we talk about public education, our ideas and our opinions are as diverse as our individual backgrounds and perspectives. Moreover, what often start out as polite discussions end up

as heated debates. In many ways, the views of the participants of this study mirror or parallel the contention of the larger debate about public education and reform. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, this debate is impassioned and highly charged, and it has raged on for more than a decade. The findings of this study tell us why. When we talk about public education and issues of educational reform we tread on sensitive and volatile ground. The topics we cover touch us not only in personal ways, in terms of the connection they have to our own children and our own lives, but they also touch us in public ways, in terms of how they affect our communities and, indeed, our society and our nation as a whole. It is not surprising that these topics and issues do not get talked about in neutral ways. They are the matter of much emotion and, indeed, much hope. And they are packed with tension, dilemma, contradiction, and complexity.

On further reflection it seems that, in discussions about purposes, aims, and visions for public education, the participants of this study have become caught in a problematic paradox of a liberal humanist ideology which underscores our understandings of democracy. The values of fairness, justice, and equality, and of individual rights and freedoms become contrary and incompatible. They compete for a place in our conversations about public education, and the discussions of the participants of this study are a strong case in point of this tension and contradiction. For instance, on one hand participants want to honor diversity but, on the other hand, they argue that this should not be at the expense of equality. On one hand, they say difference matters; on the other hand, they say it shouldn't. In one breath participants argue that the needs of the individual must be met in our public schools and, in the same breath, they suggest that public education should offer what is best for the whole, for the common good. Participants argue that competition is O.K. - we want our children to get ahead and, indeed, schools should serve a practical function; students do need to be prepared for the workforce. But, at the same time, we want our children to cooperate, we want them to learn to be responsible and caring citizens and, further, we think they should receive a "well-rounded" liberal education.

Participants want parents to be involved but, according to some, these parents had better know what they're talking about and they had better cooperate! Teachers want to be

involved in the decisions of their schools and, indeed, of their province, but only if this doesn't require too much time away from their students. Participants believe that accountability and responsiveness are key, but that these things should not be quantified in the ways in which they can most easily and efficiently be measured. The list of contradictions goes on. No wonder we're confused and reeling! No wonder our wheels spin! We want it all and, at the same time, we know this is not possible.

In the midst of the muck and muddle of complexity around figuring out what it is we might be able to agree upon before we change our public schools, participants also acknowledged another key issue: Change is not always easy. It causes discomfort and anxiety and, more often than not, we tend to hang on to the familiar as a way of coping with the unknown. Change requires all stakeholders to challenge deeply ingrained values and assumptions. It often means that we must give up the control we have in what is secure and known, or that we must relent or relax the control we have over "territory" or authority. In short, change is scary!

Moving Ahead

That said, the participants of this study are not resistant to moving ahead. In many cases, they indicate their enthusiasm and their willingness to embrace change. Ironically, as much as the government initiated reforms of this province have been the "thorns in the sides" of most participants, it seems that these changes have become the catalyst for an incredible amount of important discussion and debate. Moreover, the struggles with the practicalities of the reform mandates and policies have resulted in the beginnings of some crucial understandings about what doesn't work and what might.

The legislated changes that have required that schools be more accountable to parents and more open to the community are changes that participants of this study agree are important. However, again participants wonder about the "means" to this "end." For example, in terms of teaching and learning, they do not agree with the government's approach to responsiveness and accountability. A focus on specific learning outcomes and standardized achievement exams only accounts for a very a small part of what it means to be

a successful learner. Similarly, participants are highly suspect of the involvement of businesses and corporations in public education. Again, they wonder about the motives and the propriety behind what seems to be a competitive, corporatist, capitalist thrust for public education.

The "ends," however, are another story. Stakeholders of this study feel strongly that the public should be involved in public education. This, in fact, is the theme most emphatically expressed by participants. Schools need to be embraced by supportive individuals and citizen groups. Moreover, regardless of our circumstances, we must all be willing to, in some way, accept responsibility for the education of our children. In this light, participants value the involvement of parents in schools, in both instructional and noninstructional roles. As well, they are extremely aware that by including, integrating, or making connections with a range of social agencies and community organizations, students and staff in schools can only benefit. In addition, considering present funding issues, participants also recognize the potential of private sector partnerships.

According to participants, opening the doors, inviting people in, eliminating the "walls," and breaking down the barriers between schools and the world outside the traditional boundaries of public education are priorities. However, the discussions of this study reveal that aspiring to this ideal is one thing; making it happen is another. This conception of public education requires new understandings about who a teacher is and who a leader is, about who makes the decisions, and about who is accountable. It also requires new understandings about where schooling happens and about what learning and teaching constitute.

In this regard, participants are in the midst of an important paradigm shift. For example, they talked about the importance of incorporating the findings of recent research on teaching and learning into the practice of public schooling, and they have recognized the changing role of the school leader and have acknowledged new notions of leadership. They are excited about shared school governance and shared decision-making, and they recognize the incredible potential of school-community partnerships.

Most importantly, participants realize that, in order to truly share responsibility and to genuinely involve others in public education, problems associated with processes and organization of schools as they presently exist must be addressed. For example, many participants touched upon the difficulties and obstacles presented by the democratic processes of school structures such as school councils: We understand representative governance, and we realize that those who represent others do not always act with the interests of all of their constituents in mind. We also know that the direct democracy model for decision-making is limited. A 51% majority vote does not recognize the voices of the other 49%. So we try our hand at consensus building. Even this becomes problematic. Have we really achieved consensus if the agreement is only among those who show up for the meetings?

Moreover, democratization of the kind participants allude to requires that we be truly open-minded. We must be prepared and willing to be careful and thoughtful as we listen to the opinions and suggestions of those we work with, and we must be empathetic to the perspectives of others, even if these views are ones we do not share. We must be willing to be challenged and, as one participant so aptly remarked, "We need to be prepared to hear things we might not want to hear."

Reflections on the Key Findings

Even after considering the above key findings, an important question remains: "So what?" I am compelled to take one more step back, to look at the study as a whole, and to draw some conclusions about what the findings of my project reveal about public education. In order to do this, I must ask myself a more specific, two-pronged question: As I conclude this study, what *are* the attitudes and beliefs about public education that I must report, and what do these attitudes and beliefs tell us about the state of public education? The purpose of this section of the thesis is to answer these questions.

To begin, participants wonder about the vast and rapid changes in the world around them, and they are particularly concerned about how these changes affect public education. They suggest that the provincial government's answer to dealing with the changes are

limited and, perhaps, short sighted. For example, they argue that initiatives such as decentralization and devolution, in response to a need to be effective, efficient, and accountable in a highly competitive global economy, do not take into account imperatives beyond those of an economic nature. They fear that this approach to educational reform erodes or, at the least, ignores fundamental democratic values which should continue to underpin public education. As such, the views of participants of this study indicate that we, in Alberta, are experiencing the same tension felt in other countries. As was outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis, reform trends common among Western nations have tended to be driven by New Right policies - specifically those of a neo-liberal inclination motivated by economic objectives - and have been resisted by stakeholder groups and have been especially criticized by members of the academic community (Apple, 1993; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Ball, 1994; Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Codd et al., 1990; Gordon, 1992; O'Neill, 1995; Knight et al., 1993; Whitty et al., 1998) Therefore, this study reveals that the state of public education in Alberta and the responses and reactions to issues of reform in this province mirror those of other Western nations.

More specifically, participants of this study relate the same frustrations with "top-down" reform initiatives that have been reported, particularly by educators, in other countries (Cohen, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Elmore, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As well, under new systems of decentralization, the tensions that are revealed in the discussions of participants of this study over the degree to which control and autonomy are given to those at the school level and the degree to which control and authority are retained at the central level are also reported as problematic in many other nations (Angus, 1995; Knight et al., 1993; Whitty et al., 1998) Thus, experiences in public education in Alberta parallel those in other countries.

Although generally critical of recent provincial government reform initiatives, participants of this study believe that public education must be reformed in order to reflect societal changes and to address the needs of today's students. However, the participant discussions about change and about what public education should be were highly contentious and contradictory. Indeed, these discussions reflected the same tensions and

dilemmas inherent in the larger public education debate described in Chapter 1. For example, when participants attempted to reconcile the opposing ideals of private and public interests, they became aware of the paradoxical nature of the debate they were involved in. To cite a specific example, they recognized the importance of cooperation on one hand and, on the other hand, they acknowledged that competition should also play a role in the education of our children. This is only one of many instances that demonstrate that we, in Alberta, are involved in a debate of the type that continues to occur in many countries, at all levels, when public education and reform are the topics of discussion (Webb, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1998; Young & Levin, 1998).

In addition, although change is seen by the participants of this study as desirable and, to some, exhilarating, participants also acknowledge that change is difficult and stressful. It is the cause of anxiety and fear. Those who write about change (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Pascale, 1990; Stacey, 1992; Vail, 1989) tell us that the feelings related by the participants of this study are not, by any stretch of the imagination, unusual or uncommon. Moreover, participants recognize that we stand on the brink of a major paradigm shift, not only in the way we see public education, but also in the way we see the world. It is not surprising that, when faced with overwhelming and awe-inspiring change, and the unknown that accompanies this shift, we feel anxiety and trepidation (Slattery, 1995). Indeed, authors who write about the postmodern condition (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Beare & Slaughter, 1993; Doll, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Slattery, 1995; Wheatley, 1992) agree. They suggest that turbulence, indeterminacy, volatility, tension, and dilemma are the new constants, and they affirm that, in the face of such incredible change, reactions or feelings of fear and uncertainty, such as experienced by the participants of this study, can be expected. Given this, we can conclude that the participants of this study are experiencing a phenomenon that seems, in this day and age, to be universal. Moreover, that this phenomenon is particularly apparent within the realm of public education, as it is within all societal spheres, is also not surprising (Beare & Slaughter, 1993; Doll, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Slattery, 1995; Wheatley, 1992).

In spite of feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, participants believe change is a good thing. Their comments reveal a willingness to look at public education critically, to talk about what seems to be working and what doesn't, and to attempt to look beyond the present to possibilities and alternatives for the future. For example, they see potential in new approaches to curriculum and instruction, in new forms of school governance, and in new relationships with organizations outside of the school. This attitude - this recognition that educational change is necessary and desirable - is being embraced and promoted worldwide, and is the topic of an extensive body of literature (Beare & Slaughter, 1993; Elmore, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Gallagher, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Leithwood et al., 1994; Sarason, 1996; Wheatley, 1994) Considering that the theme of change is so apparent in current educational literature, it is not surprising that this focus is also strongly reflected in the findings of this study.

Although participants believe public education should continue to change, they also argue that its founding principals are worth preserving and fighting for. They defend public education as a means by which we are able to uphold values of democracy, social justice, and responsible citizenship. In this regard, participants of this study are not alone. Again, their views are reflected in the larger public education debate described in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Indeed, the beliefs of this study's participants about the connection between public education and democracy also continue to capture the imagination of many beyond our local context (Gutmann, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fenstermacher, 1995, 1997; Glickman, 1995; Goodlad, 1997).

Participants of this study concede that they do not have all of the answers. However, they are adamant about one thing. When considering public education, the discussion and, indeed, the debate must continue. All stakeholders must be encouraged to enter the fray, so to speak. The task is difficult, complex, uncomfortable and, at times, it is frustrating and disillusioning. Given these views, the findings of this study are in accordance with the arguments of authors such as Fullan (1994), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), Hargreaves (1994), and Sarason (1990) who remind us that in order for our efforts to result in "second

order," proactive, deep, and lasting changes, as opposed to "first order," reactive, superficial, and short-lived changes, the debate must be continuous.

Agreeing with those who write about the necessity of contention in effecting change (Doll, 1993; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Pascale, 1990; Stacey, 1992; Vail, 1989; Wheatley, 1994), participants of this study also acknowledge that embarking on this sort of continuous debate is not unlike taking a leap of faith into a chaotic, disquieting, and unstable unknown. That said, in keeping with the opinions of the above authors, there is some recognition among participants that seeing flux, uncertainty, turbulence, and chaos as normal and common allow for new and greater insights and understandings, and encourage positive change. According to Darling-Hammond (1997) and Knight et al. (1993), recognizing diverse and opposing perspectives as a necessary and healthy feature of our debates about public education will result in the valuable "creative democratic tension" required to develop a shared ideal for education and to move beyond changes and reforms that are superficial and ineffectual. Participants of this study agree.

Although its flame has sometimes ebbed or seemed dim against a backdrop of far-reaching reforms and funding cuts, the findings of this study indicate that educational stakeholders in the Calgary area are willing to carry the public education torch into the 21st Century. However, they realize that this torch burns in an ever-changing world and, because of this, it must be fueled with new and different conceptions and ideas. As such, participants of this study appreciate venues such as the Centre for Leadership in Learning Seminar Series which offer important forums for the ongoing public education debate wherein cross-role dialogue is valued and multiple perspectives are voiced and heard.

To summarize, several conclusions about public education can be gleaned from the attitudes and beliefs revealed in the discussions of the participants of this study. First, public education in Alberta is in a state of flux and transition, particularly as a result of global economic changes and because of the subsequent response of the provincial government to reform. Second, provincial reforms motivated by economic imperatives are not well-received. They are seen by the participants of this study as limited, short sighted, problematic and, in some cases, ineffectual. Third, in spite of frustrations over recent

government reforms, change in public education is seen by participants as positive and necessary. Fourth, however desirable, change is also disconcerting, somewhat scary and, moreover, the root of much contention, especially when questions about what public education should be are addressed. Fifth, although much possibility for education lies in change, participants do not believe that everything about public education should be reformed. Specifically, the essence of the "public" in public education must be preserved and defended. Sixth, public education will survive into the 21st Century only if the debate about what it should be continues and only if all stakeholder groups are involved in the discussion. Seventh, although this debate is disquieting and volatile, it is difficulty and contention that serve as catalysts for positive change.

This section, entitled "Reflections on the Key Findings," reveals that the findings of this study are, to a great extent, reflected in recent literature written about public education, and paralleled in the experiences of other Western nations. As such, it can be concluded that, on a micro level, the state of public education in Alberta and the experiences of educational stakeholders in the Calgary area reflect the macro-level conditions of a greater international or global context.

Beyond the Study

As I have moved through the process of this study, my learning curve has been incredibly steep. I set out to find the answers to what, at first glance, could be seen as simple and straight-forward questions. I was, however, not totally naïve; I knew that these uncomplicated questions would reveal complicated responses and that my inquiry would unveil a great amount of information and a complexity of issues. I had no idea, though, of the enormity of the research topic and what the project would require of me as a learner.

I realize now that the recordings that were compiled after the many seminar discussions probably comprised enough information to complete several projects. For example, there are sufficient data on topics such as leadership, vision-building, shared decision-making, school-community involvement, and assessment and accountability to constitute entire studies. I recognize that any one of these topics, among many others of the study, could be

investigated much more deeply and thoroughly in another project. Because of the breadth of topics covered in the discussions of this study, I often felt that I was unable to explore the many issues and concerns included in the data at a depth further than a surface level or with a view beyond a cursory glance.

As well, any one of the many topics or, for that matter, the data as a whole, could be approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives. For example, much of the discussion notes would lend themselves nicely to the discourse analysis of a poststructural approach which would explore meaning through the deconstruction of the language of the participants of the study. Or, for instance, a critical theorists' approach might also illuminate some interesting findings and interpretations in an investigation of the social and economic structures reflected in or reinforced by the participants' comments and views.

Other possibilities for further investigation appropriate for research projects of a topic similar to mine might include variations of the case study or the group interview. For example, it occurred to me that either the CLL seminars, individually or as a series, or the CLL organization itself, would be an interesting case to explore. I also often found myself thinking about the dynamics of particular discussion groups, and I wondered about the possibility of considering a "table" as an individual case. This idea was similar to another my advisor suggested: Supplementary focus group discussions for a more in-depth investigation of certain topics or of the views of certain groups, perhaps even in a different location, offer interesting possibilities. This would have been appropriate in my study in situations where I felt the representation of some stakeholder groups was lacking. For example, the seminar series did not attract many school students. It would have been interesting to set up a focus group discussion which included only students, particularly since the participants of this study indicated that, although it is often the students we need to hear from the most, it is them we hear from the least.

More specifically, the findings of this study reveal some interesting concerns, particularly in terms of the contradictory or paradoxical issues which were grappled with by participants. These tensions offer up some intriguing questions that have the potential to provoke further investigation. For example, participants argued that public schools must be

responsive to the needs of today's students yet, for the most part, participants seemed convinced that the issue of choice, especially as it relates to alternative systems of education such as charter schools, is necessarily contrary to public education. This concern raises some interesting questions: If responsiveness necessitates choice, can the public system offer genuine and effective alternatives without compromising its claim to serving the common good? Are the ideals of choice and the ideals of democracy always oppositional? Can charter schools "fit" within or alongside the public education system?

Much discussion of the participants of this study focused on the purposes of public education. The contradictory ideals of cooperation and competition were the subjects of a fair amount of debate. From this contention, a question that might guide an interesting inquiry emerges: If we must prepare our children for a competitive world beyond the school, can we also expect public education to promote the values of cooperation, caring, and sharing?

Another issue of contradiction that presents intriguing research possibilities is that of parental participation in school decision-making. On one hand, the findings of this study reveal that the voice of parents is valued; on the other hand, the findings also reveal that parents do not always want to be involved, or that only certain parents become involved consistently or, in some cases, that parental involvement is welcome only under certain circumstances. Again, these concerns raise questions worthy of further investigation: How might we ensure effective parental representation? To what extent are educators willing to relinquish "expert" control? To what extent are parents willing to be accountable for the decisions of their schools?

Another intriguing issue revealed in the findings of this study has to do with power and empowerment. Participants report that when "top-down" reform initiatives are not accepted they are often "passively" resisted. For example, overwhelmed by what is already required of them on a day-to-day basis, teachers may choose to do nothing, or as little as possible, rather than to actively lobby against a change they are opposed or to advocate for a more desirable alternative . On one hand, passive resistors feel powerless. On the other hand, they assert a certain kind of power by rejecting change through inaction. Considering

circumstances such as these, one has to wonder to what extent external reform initiatives are effective at the local level. Can passive resistance be transformed into positive, active resistance? Moreover, to what extent do imposed reforms bring with them subtle implications that result in negative outcomes which are not obvious, immediate, or measurable?

As can be seen by the above discussion, the possibilities for research beyond this project are numerous. Indeed, the wide range of issues and topics (many of which are contradictory or paradoxical in nature) discussed within this study raises questions that might serve as appropriate starting points for further inquiry, and lends itself to a myriad of more specific concerns worthy of investigation.

A Look Forward

The possibilities for alternative or further research on public education and public education reform are, indeed, endless. Nevertheless, now, in the final stage of the process of my inquiry, I am able to reflect upon what I have accomplished and what I have gained by approaching my study in the way that I did. The notions I had about public education and reform when I began have been constantly challenged. Some of my understandings have been affirmed, but this affirmation has not come without deeper understanding. More importantly, the reading I have done, my participation in the CLL seminars, and the hours and hours I have spent poring over and working with the data of my study has presented me with a abundance of new ideas. As a result, I feel I have gained many new insights. This learning has allowed me to surmise and to speculate about what I envision as an ideal for public education in the future. As might be expected, my ideas reflect or are affirmed by views of the participants of my study. My data were a significant resource in my learning. In addition, I am, after all, a teacher and, as such, I hold much in common with many of the study's participants. The literature, of course, was also a rich resource in my inquiry and, as I was continually reading and rereading throughout the process, my ideas cannot but reflect the views of many authors who have written on the subject of public education and change.

To begin, I would like to see public education become a truly public endeavor. This means that our current understandings of public education must be reconceptualized. We can no longer equate the word "education" with the word "school," and we must open our minds to consider all possibilities and alternatives. This involves three thrusts.

First, we must not only expect schools to uphold and sustain society, we must also expect society to uphold and sustain schools. Schools need to be responsive, but they also need to be supported. This means going beyond superficial changes in reforms such as shared decision-making and school-community partnerships. It means entering into reciprocal relationships of trust, respect, and empathy. It means working together - not at cross purposes and not in competition with one another - to develop some common understandings and goals. It is a messy, contentious, and often an uncomfortable and frustrating process. It involves thoughtful and hard work, and it requires that we challenge what we are sure of, and what we take for granted.

For example, we must be prepared to revisit the values and ideals that underpin the institutions within which we work. We can no longer assume, for instance, that our white, middle-class understandings of the democratic process are always suitable and appropriate in our dynamic and heterogeneous communities. We must work towards a democratization that embraces the struggle and the difficult process of genuine involvement and consensus-building. This means that we must carefully consider our notions of plurality and diversity. Even our conception of the "stakeholder," a label so often used in our organizations and, indeed, evident throughout this thesis, becomes problematic. It forces us to see individuals as merely members of a larger group. It categorizes us according to a fixed role, and leaves little room for the personal or the unique. Because of this, alternative understandings of democratic processes must be considered. For example, poststructuralism offers a perspective which honors multivocality, and that which is personal and autobiographical. In respecting all voices and all views, alternatives are presented, creative possibilities emerge and, moreover, as authors such as Kanpol (1992) explain, the resistance of "counterhegemony" is embraced in order that existing structures are continually challenged and transformed. In this vein, educational goals and visions must also be seen as temporal

and contextual. They must be revisited continually in order to fit ever-changing circumstances.

Second, we can no longer see schools in a traditional sense. As the participants of this study suggest, we must be prepared to eliminate barriers and to see boundaries as permeable. Interestingly, however, a close look at what participants described reveals a subtle irony. While the importance of inviting others "in" was acknowledged, participants talked about schools with the assumption that the school is the "centre," the place to which others must come and from which connections are initiated. Although this is perhaps not intentional, we tend to revert to traditional, conservative understandings when we think of the institution of education. We take for granted the structures of schooling as they exist - from classrooms, to schedules and time allocations, to power relationships, to teaching practices - as monolithic and fixed. We consider ourselves open and amenable to change, yet, in many ways, we merely pay lip service to the prospect. When it comes right down to it, we assume and, indeed, we expect that change will happen in our terms and on our turf. Beyond this, we seem unable to imagine the possibilities.

In order for education to be truly responsive and forward-moving, we must be willing to push the limits of our own preconceptions and to envision schooling as different from its present forms. In this way, the potential exists for effecting deep and positive change, for example, by interrupting the reproduction of problematic values and negative conditions which can be found in existing school structures: inequality, inflexibility, hierarchy, power relationships, claim over authority and expertise, etc. Moreover, by breaking away from the constraints imposed by the "walls" of the school building, we recognize that learning does not only happen within the confines of the traditional classroom or its off-site equivalent, and that teaching is not the sole domain, nor is it the sole responsibility, of the professional educator. In order for education to be truly responsive and truly public, in addition to our present understandings of partnerships and shared responsibility as the "community in the school," we must also start envisioning the "school in the community." Perhaps this will require us to think of education in more abstract terms - as an institution or entity *of* society - rather than in terms of the school in its concrete or physical form. As such, we may

be better able to move beyond merely inviting others "in" and merely making connections to the "outside."

Third, consistent with the above conception of education beyond the school, is the understanding of education in a holistic sense - as integrated and implicitly connected to a larger community. Our present notions of schools as primarily separate from the rest of society renders education disconnected and disassociated from the "real" world of our children. Furthermore, schools, as isolated institutions, prevent students from developing the significant connections they need in order to understand themselves as holding important membership within an interdependent whole. As an essential component of a wider ecosystem, schools must be integrated and incorporated with all other societal institutions and organizations. This conception sees educational institutions as learning organizations within a larger learning collective, where the focus is on active inquiry, critical thinking, constructed knowledge, generative curriculum, and lifelong learning for the benefit of not only the individual but, moreover, the entire society. Further, the interconnections and ties between the school and the community forge relationships necessary in nurturing values of mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence - values which are essential if education is to indeed be public.

The ideals presented above are just that - ideals. Embracing these concepts as possibilities for reform requires that we radically "rethink" public education. Then, beyond thinking, we must act. Change of this type does not happen overnight, nor does it begin on a large scale. It starts at a "grassroots" or school level, with small groups of individuals who are most closely or directly connected to children, and it moves slowly and incrementally. It is motivated by what is in the best interests of students, and it focuses on teaching and learning. In this light, Hargreaves (1999) talks about deep, meaningful, and lasting reform. He argues that parents, together with teachers, form a powerful alliance. By starting out small, and continually and consistently advocating on behalf of children, this alliance can secure the support and force required to launch a full-fledged social movement. This movement, he argues, stands to carry with it impact and consequence of the magnitude advanced by the environmental movement of the 60s and 70s which resulted in fundamental

changes in the way we do things and in the way we see our world and ourselves within that world. Hargreaves suggests that it is only through this type movement, and its initial grassroots activism, that we can hope to change the way our schools are viewed so that education will be seen by all as critically important and essentially public.

As mentioned earlier, the kind of public education I envision is not entirely original. My conception incorporates or is formed, to a degree, by several ideas I have come across in my reading. For example, conceptions of democratization have been advanced by authors such as Aronowitz and Giroux (1991, 1993), Darling-Hammond (1997), Gutmann (1987), Kanpol (1992), and McLaren (1993). The "systems thinking" behind understandings of schools as within intricately connected ecosystems is reflected in the work of Beare and Slaughter (1993), Fullan (1993), and Hargreaves (1994), and ideas related to learning organizations and learning societies can be attributed to those such as Senge (1990) and Sergiovanni (1994). That said, having the work of others and the views of the participants of my study inform my own vision for public education in the future does not prevent me from seeing my ideas as unique. They mark the end point of my inquiry and, as such, they are the result of many hours of my own thinking within a particular context - as a graduate student and a teacher in Alberta.

As I write this conclusion, public education in our province approaches a critical turning point. The reforms which began in 1993 have, on one hand, resulted in an education system which is being held up nationally and internationally as a model of our government's fiscal and economic responsibility and acumen. On the other hand, the same reforms have impacted schools in significant ways. The consequences have been deeply felt by stakeholders, particularly at a local level. Indeed, the lives of individuals have been affected. That said, this study reveals that stakeholders are not entirely critical of the reforms. Moreover, they remain hopeful, forward-thinking, and committed to public education. In light of these conclusions, I suppose I could close by suggesting that, at this point, the reforms of the past several years have not been totally devastating. In this sense, therefore, the findings of this study are not profound or earth-shattering. Public education in our

province has not been completely destroyed by recent reforms, and we have not been thoroughly and utterly disillusioned and demoralized as a result. (Not yet, that is!)

According to the views and comments of the participants of this study, public education is likely to be around for some time, in one form or another. However, in terms of the provincial decisions and policies that presently drive education in Alberta, we seem to be heading down a road where our successes are measured in primarily fiscal and economic terms. Is this really the direction we want to take? Participants of this study don't think so. In fact, they fear the long term implications of such a course. Perhaps before we go too far down this road we ought to take serious stock of our situation. I believe that "taking stock" is just what the participants of this study had in mind when they discussed, debated, surmised, and wondered. As Hargreaves and Evans (1997) suggest, taking a break to reflect while the "dust settles" is key to the reform process. In this pause, on the brink of a new millennium, it is my hope that conceptions for public education such as the one I have put forth in this conclusion - with the help of the participants of my study and the authors whose wisdom I admire - serve as reminders of an alternative road we might embark upon. As the stakeholders of this project clearly indicated, in moving forward, we must continue the debate to ensure that new ideas and alternative approaches to educational reform are generated. As we do this, we must also continue to imagine a better vision for public education in our province - for a better future for our children. It is this that will result in the true "Alberta Advantage."

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APPENDIX A

NUMBER OF SEMINAR PARTCIPANTS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Stakeholder Group	Seminar 1	Seminar 2	Seminar 3	Seminar 4	TOTAL
Parents	10	7	18	11	46
School Board Trustees	18	13	12	15	58
Business or Community Members/Representatives	3	13	4	6	26
Teachers	16	13	26	22	77
School Administrators	18	16	35	20	89
Other School Personnel	0	5	5	2	12
District/Division Educational Personnel	8	5	5	11	29
School Students	1	0	0	6	7
University Students (Undergraduate/Graduate)	16	12	12	17	57
University Faculty/Personnel	3	7	4	6	20
TOTAL	93	91	121	116	421

APPENDIX B:

SEMINAR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Seminar 1 - Public Education: Myths and Realities

1. Why Public Education?

2. In your view, what are the myths about public education? What are the realities?

3. In what ways is public education successful? In what ways could public education be improved?

4. Who should be accountable for public education? Why?

Seminar 2 - Community Involvement: Beyond the Classroom

1. What is your perception of community involvement in education?

2. How has this perception been affirmed, challenged, or informed by the keynote speaker's address?

3. After attending a break out presentation, how do you now perceive community involvement in education? ·

4. What possibilities for community involvement do you see for your own school(s)?

5. How might such community involvement enhance student achievement?

Seminar 3 - Shared Decision-Making: What Should It Look Like?

1. Share an example of a positive, negative, or interesting experience with shared decision-making.

2. How does the implementation of shared decision-making impact participant perception of leadership?

3. What skills, knowledge, and attitudes do we need in order to effectively participate in shared decision-making?

4. How might shared decision-making influence school climate?

Seminar 4 - Exploring Public Education in the 21st Century

1. What is your vision for public education in the 21st Century?

2. What significant issues might impact your vision of public education in the 21st Century?