REALITIES OF PARTICIPATION IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

by

Winnifred Anne Downer

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

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Since the early 1990s, public attention in Ontario has focused on parent participation in education; the formation of school councils represents the Ontario government’s attempt to involve parents and the general public more directly in educational reform. This suggests that parents, students, community members, and business representatives will join with teachers within a formal structure at the local school level to advise principals on issues related to educational policy and programs.

This qualitative study describes the advisory process, an aspect of participation in education that has not received attention. The study draws on theories of participation and advisement to form a conceptual framework to describe the participation of parents and community members with teachers as advisers to a school principal. Informants are members of a school advisory council, administrators, and members of constituency groups. The assumptions of the informants present images of the advisers, what they do, and the consequences of their agency. Data were derived from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations made during school council meetings,
district council meetings, and during attendance at conferences devoted to the theme of school councils.

The findings show that advisers were linked by two motivating forces: the desire to improve the educational environment for all students and the need to understand the potential of parent and community participation within the formal structure of an advisory group. The findings also show that members had extensive expertise in business and finance and that, within their advisory role, they performed the tasks of executors, educators, friends, informants, critics, and advisers. Positive benefits of the advisory process included personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy of the system. The findings show, however, that counter forces threatened to weaken the zeal of the advisers. These are discussed as problems related to issues of adjustment and inaction. Findings show that policy makers were unaware of the existence of such forces.

The findings have relevance for administrators with the task of defining the advisory role and for those who must design programs and policy to facilitate this form of participation. They also have application in educational contexts where researchers seek a framework to study the participation of parents and community members in the advisory experience.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

The participation of family and community members in education impacts positively on the educational attainment of students (Bastiani 1987; Epstein 1992, 1995; Henderson 1988; Swap 1993). Over time, participation has followed a passive/active continuum whereby parents were first received as guests at concerts and Parent Nights, and then were welcomed as volunteer members of such organizations as Home and School and Parent/Teacher Associations (Cervonne & O’Leary 1982). Today, the inclusion of parents into formally organized school committees such as school advisory councils suggests that councils are the “next logical step towards giving parents a greater say in how schools are run and strengthening partnerships with the community” (Government of Ontario 1995:27).

Following the recommendations of the report of the Royal Commission on Learning (Government of Ontario 1995), the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training strongly encouraged all school boards and minority language sections to:

develop policies that direct schools in their jurisdiction to begin the establishment of school councils in September 1995, and to ensure that a school council is in place in all schools by June 1996 (Government of Ontario 1995:2).
Councils promise to “decentralize and democratize educational policy making, ... to energize and revitalize school systems” (Malen & Ogawa 1988:251); they also promise parents, teachers, students, and community members an increased voice in school matters.

The directive from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, however, gives limited voice to council members - they will have advisory jurisdiction only and are directed to advise the principal on issues related to school programs, budgets, schedules, staffing, assessments, and the use of school facilities. Council members will also have opportunities to have input into the formulation and review of school board policies prior to their implementation at the school level (Government of Ontario 1995).

1.2 Need for the Study

Personal observation, participation in discussions at educational conferences, and attention to messages from the electronic and print media signaled the need for this study.

While there is much research into the positive and negative consequences of parent participation as volunteers and tutors within schools, especially elementary schools, and while there is continuing research into the role of the principal in fostering this participation, there is little Canadian research which describes and interprets the situations, approaches, and consequences when parents and community members come together with teachers as advisers to the principal within the formal structure of a school advisory council. Most literature on the subject of advisers and the advised, and of the difficulties associated with these roles, comes from the experiences of those who have
studied and written about advisers to great kings and to heads of state (Goldhamer 1978) or about advisers assigned to administrators of educational programs in developing countries (Curle 1968). There is need, therefore, to identify who advisers are, what they do in their advisory capacity, and the positive and negative consequences of their agency within an educational context.

Also, while the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training encourages parents to assume new roles in their children’s schools and promotes parents as leaders with a duty to take a more active stance in education (Epstein 1992, 1995), recent media coverage (Caplan 1995) has raised the question of whether parents have the interest, the time, or the competence to assume such positions. There is need, therefore, to understand the rationale for participation, the nature of the expertise parents bring with them, and the manner in which they are socialized into their new positions.

From an administrative perspective, I believe that policy makers ought not to formulate policy directing schools to establish advisory councils unless they understand the origin of the change, the background influences which have set the stage for it now, and some of the positive and negative realities of the change in practice. In this study, the literature review, the document analysis, the anecdotes and vignettes of real situations, and the assumptions of those in the micro and macro environments of one school council present realities of this kind of participation.

Finally, parents and community members who are selected or elected to formally organized groups, such as councils, work within a variety of authority structures. Some
groups have governance authority (Caldwell & Spinks 1988; Deem, Brehony, & Heath 1994; Radnofsky 1994), while others act in a resource capacity without any decision-making authority and are encouraged to simply offer ideas and opinions to school leaders to assist in the decision-making process. The directive from the Ministry of Education and Training in Ontario (Government of Ontario 1995) does not give council members governance authority; that is, they will not operate as independent, autonomous groups with the authority to make decisions on critical issues such as budgets, hiring practices, or curriculum. Parents and community members, under the reform in Ontario, will come together with teachers to advise principals and school board officials on a list of priorities identified by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. The significance of this study rests on the distinction in interpretations of what it means to advise and on the description of situations, approaches, and consequences of those who have experienced the advisory role or those who have observed the advisory process in practice. The variations in interpretations come from the diverse perspectives of three groups: (a) the advisers, (b) those who receive the advice, and (c) constituents who presumably benefit from the agency of advisers.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Many critically view the attempt by the Ontario government to establish school advisory councils as another reform by government to quell a growing dissatisfaction with the Ontario school system and the quality of education children are receiving. Others
postulate that it is a temporary strategy as governments experiment with fiscal restraint options as if the participation of parents could achieve economic efficiency.

The problem becomes obvious. Advisory councils signal the beginning of a process of educational decision making at the school level decidedly different from the traditional approach. Schools have traditionally followed a process of top-down policy formulation and implementation (Sergiovanni 1995) whereby policies and programs first developed at the Ministry and school board levels were then implemented at the school level by the principal. The new arrangement, however, suggests major changes as committees or councils of teaching and non-teaching members oversee and give advice on policies and programs before they become implemented at the local school. The problem has both psychological as well as technical dimensions.

To further elaborate, those who become advisers and those who receive advice become involved in an advisory relation (Goldhamer 1978). Within this relation, participants may experience problems of adjustment, inaction, or rivalry. These I have determined are issues which cannot be regulated by rules or policy and have psychological implications. Participants may also experience problems associated with access, number, and selection. These, however, suggest technical rather than psychological issues that can be regulated by rules or standard operating procedures. A brief explanation of each follows.
**Adjustment**

When parents and community members come together with teachers to advise the principal, they take on new roles in relation to their previous positions within the school and in relation to other members of constituent groups which they represent (Chapman 1990). They become colleagues with one another and with the principal despite the mix of teaching and non-teaching experience and despite the potential for differing ideologies and conflict related to the implicit or explicit efforts of professionals to maintain autonomy amidst the potential of lay control (Deem, Brehony, & Heath 1994; Levin & Young 1994; LaRoque 1983).

Those who are involved in this new form of participation within Ontario schools will require a period of adjustment because, no matter how wide their previous experiences, new situations and approaches will be significantly different from others they may have experienced. Adam Curle's (1968) insight into the plight of advisers to policy makers in foreign countries can be applied to advisers anywhere: “It is not only that the subject-matter of the role is different; the structure of the organization will have little in common with what the adviser experienced previously” (p. 17). Curle goes on to explain that there can be a disastrous crises of confidence for advisers who have not had a satisfactory period of adjustment to the new environment or an opportunity to be briefed on the issues and the potential consequences of certain decisions.

Also, principals of schools, whose only source of advice has traditionally come from teachers and students during staff and student council meetings, will require a period of
adjustment to the formal operation of an organization comprised of parents, teachers, community members and, in some cases, students. Their greatest adjustment will be the requirement for them to consult with groups that do not have a history of involvement in education. Principals must now decide which issues are appropriate to discuss, how much background information is required by the group, how much access the group should have to policy and program information, and how to prepare the school for the possible upheaval and confusion resulting from inappropriate advice.

Inaction
Determining when to act, or whether or not to act, poses considerable stress on any relationship, especially if one member of the group, the leader for example, gives the impression that he or she is unwilling to act. The problem can become more severe for those giving advice, especially when they realize that, after considerable discussion and research, no action has been taken. When discussion has ended, those directly involved want to see substantial and immediate activity (Curle 1968). Some leaders prefer discussion, some prefer swift and often thoughtless action. The challenge is one of finding an acceptable balance between action and inaction. In a workable, harmonious relationship everyone benefits (Johnson & Johnson 1994). Inaction, however, may spell strife and conflict and cause interpersonal tensions to mar the advisory relationship.

Rivalry
Rivalry suggests that while individuals may be members of groups, their actions indicate that what they want for the organization lacks congruence with the goals of other
members and are not necessarily targeted at the 'greater good' of all. When members of a group come together, the relation can be a mix of harmony and disharmony, or one person's agenda can override all others as intense competition takes over and the group becomes plagued by what Charles Taylor (1991), a respected commentator on the political scene in Canada, referred to as 'instrumental reasoning'. Instrumental reasoning is the push and pull that occurs when the agenda of the individual takes precedence over the agenda of the group, when there is little or no correlation among group members' goal attainments, or when attention is on recognition of the self (i.e., self-fulfillment, self-discovery, and self-importance) at the expense of being closed to the horizons of the creative genius in the 'greater universe' (Taylor 1991). Individuals motivated by this form of reasoning seek what is personally beneficial. The name of the game becomes dominance of one person's agenda over the agenda of the group, leaving the views, values, and goals of others ignored (Johnson & Johnson 1994). Rivalry develops and persists as key players cannot go beyond self-interests, self-gains, or self-importance. Such a self-centered stance may result in disturbing consequences for the individual, the organization, and for the institution.

Within schools, the idiosyncratic becomes apparent when those with most authority, such as school principals, refuse to consider the proposals of the collective; ultimately, they fear the potential for negative consequences to themselves such as job loss or demotion (McDonald 1994). Principals in such situations find ways to avoid, to rescind, or to challenge. They become selective in the information they give to the group, they control
the agenda, and they may even determine the extent and intensity of discussions (Dehli 1995). Principals may experience concern for loss of professional autonomy in the event that they are forced to admit to a discerning public that they do not have all the answers. Every action of those guided by self-interests is intended to guard against loss - loss of self-esteem, loss of power, and loss of influence (McDonald 1994).

Goldhamer (1978) suggests that advisers to kings or to heads of state had to provide judgment, wisdom, analytic, and professional skills, and had to have the ability to apply these to policy. But, unfortunately, he admitted, some advisers did not have the wisdom or the essential skills and were often guilty of giving bad advice. In an educational context, parents and community members may become advisers for the wrong reasons, i.e., to enhance their own political position in the community, to advance their child's placement at school, or to gain self-importance. The fact that their expertise may not include knowledge of educational issues suggests a disturbing picture of rivalrous conditions for those who have never administered schools under the watchful eye of parents and community members and, alternatively, for those who have never acted as advisers in an educational context.

Access

‘Access’ means ‘the right to make use of’ or ‘the right to enter or approach’ (American Heritage Dictionary 1994:5). Access becomes problematic when it is denied to those seeking an audience or to those seeking information. While it can be argued that ‘access’ can be as much a psychological as a technical problem, the treatment of it in this thesis is
more technical in that I have attempted to emphasize the physical proximity of advisers to the advised. I do not present any convincing evidence to show the negative or positive effects of access to participants.

**Selection**

Selection may be one of the most challenging technical issues. For example, the practice of leaders to go outside the organization for support and advice presents the challenge of deciding from whom and when to seek and to receive advice. Leaders may find that advisers are potential friends and companions with particular expertise to add wisdom to the decision-making process (Goldhamer 1978) or, alternatively, leaders may find that advisers may serve as facilitators of dialogue to listen, to passively consider, and to assist when they feel it is appropriate to do so (Curle 1968). For the leader, therefore, selection of advisers who are both effective and available may present situations that are both satisfying and frustrating.

Some leaders may have the freedom to select those advisers who have a particular expertise and who serve a particular need; other leaders, however, find that advice must come from those who receive their position through a process of democratic election. Goldhamer (1978) noted that, in France, the king’s advisers were elected by the people. This was seen as one way to limit the powers of the king. For the king, Goldhamer tells us, the results were extremely frustrating because, often, the elected advisers lacked the required skills.
Number

Number reflects the problem of knowing the right number of advisers to make the advisory group functional and also of knowing how to increase the amount of participation in public institutions without increasing the actual number of participants in the group. A group that is too large can be dysfunctional, while a small number of advisers may mean that the leader does not have access to the expertise required (Goldhamer 1978). Leaders may be unaware of strategies to solicit advice from large numbers without increasing the size of the advisory group; furthermore, they may not realize the benefits of receiving as many points of view on an issue as possible.

Problems resulting from the above issues receive fuller elaboration in Chapter III.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the participation of parent and community members who come together with teachers as advisers to the principal within the formal structure of a school advisory council. In this study, therefore, influenced by a study by Jennifer Adams (1996), I present the realities of the advisory experience from the perspectives of three groups: the advisers who are members of an advisory group, the leaders or those who have directed the formulation of policies that determine the operating procedures of the group, and the constituents or teachers and parents who have observed the operations of the advisory group from a distance and who, presumably, have benefited from its agency. Also, following from Adams (1996), I discuss information from selected documents published by the province of Ontario, the
school board, and the school (the site of this study), as the ‘documented realities’. The following questions guide this study:

1.5 Research Questions

Question One: What is the reality of participation of parents and community members within the formal structure of a secondary school advisory council? How does this reality compare with the definition of participation from previous research?

Question Two: What situations do advisers experience and how do they approach them? What commonalities and variations exist across realities?

Question Three: What are some negative consequences of the advisory experience as identified by advisers? What commonalities and variations exist across realities?

Question Four: What are some benefits of the advisory experience as identified by the advisers? What commonalities and variations exist across realities? What conclusions can be drawn from the experiences of advisers and the documented realities?

1.6 Conceptual Framework

In this study, I use an advisory council established in a newly constructed secondary school as the central source of data. The council was established one year before the school opened; therefore, the majority of members participated for more than two years. Document analysis and interviews with selected participants provided data which enabled me to construct the early history of the council, the unique characteristics of the school and of the community, and the policies that governed the operations of the council. Data from semi-structured interviews with council members helped elaborate the unique characteristics and experiences of members and underscored the reality that participants in the advisory group brought with them expertise which they placed at the service of the principal, the school, and, indirectly, at the service of the school board.
Throughout each stage of the research, data enabled me to identify the issues, the processes, and the outcomes. The issues referred to the purposes, aims, and intentions of the group. Processes referred to the stages through which situations were identified and how they were approached. Outcomes were the results, including both anticipated and unanticipated consequences.

Taken together, these data laid the foundation for this study. Understanding the environment, the individuals, the relationship between individuals, and the issues, processes, and outcomes, enabled me to describe the organization and to use the accumulated data to further my understanding of both participation and advisement.

Participation and advisement are closely linked concepts. Two theories of participation put forward by Nicholas Beattie (1985) elaborated the benefits to participants of participation. The theories are the reformist theory and the general crisis theory. The aims of participation, according to the reformist theory, are responsiveness, personal development, and overcoming alienation. Taken separately, each construct is explained as follows: people respond when they are given opportunities for participation; they become better informed as a result of the knowledge gained from participation and from being involved in issues which affect them; and, people learn to be more tolerant of one another when they understand the collective purposes of society. The single aim of the second theory, the general crisis theory, is legitimacy or the maintenance of support for governing bodies and for institutions in times of economic crises.
Theories of advisement help to describe and to interpret the agency of advisers. Those who become advisers to a leader form a relation with that person and use their expertise to perform diverse tasks required by the organization which the leader directs or administers. According to the experiences of Curle (1968) and Goldhamer (1978), advisers do everything except the work of the organization. Most frequently, they serve as executors, friends, educators, informants, critics, and advisers. The tasks are briefly outlined below.

Executors set agendas, attend meetings, and assess the organization; friends act as supporters and close companions of the leader; educators instruct the leader and one another; informants move between the organization and the community to keep everyone informed of ongoing situations and events; critics, theoretically, prevent the leader from making decisions that are harmful to the organization or to the leader - they may also act as roadblocks to prevent institutional reform; and, advisers use their expertise to share ideas and opinions as they perform the central task of giving advice.

Participation and advisement, when juxtaposed, set the stage for interesting consequences. Again, from the work of Goldhamer and Curle, I have determined that the negative consequences of participation relate to problems of process and attitude. Problems of process result from such technical issues as access, number, and selection and problems of attitude result from psychological issues such as adjustment, inaction, and rivalry.
Access relates to the ability of advisers to gain access to the leader. The magnitude of the problems resulting from inaccessibility depends on the physical proximity of advisers to their leader and the inability of advisers to attain and maintain contact. Number becomes a problem when the size of the advisory group becomes too large to function effectively. Selection suggests problems of process, gender, age, and outsourcing. Process relates to the manner in which advisers are selected whether by a democratic or a non-democratic process, gender to problems associated with gender preferences, age to problems of seeking advice from one age group to the exclusion of others, and outsourcing to problems of leaders going outside their institution to seek resources in the form of advice. Psychological consequences are subsumed under the concepts of adjustment, inaction, and rivalry. Adjustment implies that those who assume advisory positions potentially experience problems related to adjusting to new environments and to new operating procedures. The socialization process affects the way that new members adjust or fail to adjust. Inaction becomes a problem when discussion assumes greater importance than immediate and decisive action. Rivalry results when the agenda of the individual dominates and possibly controls the actions and the agenda of the group.

In conclusion, the above discussion outlines the conceptualization of accumulated data for this study.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study demand attention. It was not my intent to present a critical perspective of advisory councils in Canada, nor to test an hypothesis, or to explain any
previous findings, theory, or law; this is a qualitative case study of one advisory council in one secondary school in Ontario. The findings, therefore, are not generalizable to all school contexts. The purpose of this study is to describe contextual conditions and to understand a new phenomenon in its natural setting.

The strength of this study is derived from two sources: the extended period of time I was permitted to remain in the study site and the multiple sources from which rich contextual data were accessed. Since I was able to move within the micro and macro environment of the school, I acquired an understanding of the issues, the intentions, the decisions, and the desires of the advisers and their principal. Through attendance at regular meetings with the advisory council established at district office, I also experienced the attitude of officials who had the responsibility to design policies to guide the establishment of advisory councils in each school in the area of jurisdiction.

The reform to involve parents and the local community in education is strongly influenced by politics and norms in the larger community. This study moved outward from the school site into the local community and beyond in order to construct a broad-based understanding of current issues. I was, therefore, able to expand my understandings by talking with members of constituent groups within the school, the community, and at the school board office, as well as with the advisers and the principal. This, however, brings me to another limitation of this study. While it was possible for me to attend council meetings at the school and policy formulation meetings at the district office, I was unable to observe policy formulation sessions at the Ministry of
Education and Training. Document analysis and attendance at provincial conferences provide the information from this sector.

The final limitation relates to participants. Interviews with parents, teachers, community members, district officials, and the principal are described and interpreted throughout the findings but students were not interviewed. They are cited as members of the advisory council but their absence from council meetings which I attended made it impossible to arrange interviews with them or to observe them at meetings.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Past and Present Reality of Participation

2.1.1 Past Reality

2.1.1.1 Introduction

From the late 1960s to the present, North American schools have developed and adopted strategies to involve parents in education. As a result, parents have served as tutors, volunteers, and leaders helping to support the work of teachers, students, and parents themselves (Epstein 1995; Hughes, Burgess & Moxon 1991). Research shows that, while participation strategies vary across school and community contexts, many educators are criticized for their failure to improve either the quality or the extent of participation (Hughes, Burgess & Moxon 1991; Dehli 1995).

This chapter links past practices to involve parents and community members in education with present efforts to engage them within formally organized groups such as school councils. More specifically, in the section which follows, I use previous research on parent participation to present the following: (a) strategies to involve parents in education; (b) a history of participation; (c) a definition for participation; and (d) a rationale for the current attachment to participation as a political ideology. In the following section, I describe and interpret participation strategies.
2.1.1.2 Participation as Passive

Public discussion and debate have underscored the prevailing belief that education is a public activity and that parents not only have a democratic right to be informed about their children’s education, they also have the right and the responsibility to question and to participate in decisions related to school policy and practice (Nikiforuk 1993; Lewington & Orpwood 1992). Schools, on the other hand, are criticized for being closed to their publics and for providing opportunities for parents to participate only passively in their children’s education.

To support this view, one study by Cervonne and O’Leary (1982) presented participation strategies along a continuum. Activities which involved parents more passively were placed to the left of the continuum while those which involved them more actively were placed to the right. Such activities as receiving information from the school newsletter and from report cards or attending the Year-End Picnic were cited as examples of passive involvement. In the middle of the continuum were activities which involved parents more actively either in the classroom as tutors helping with reading and at school in attendance at pot-luck suppers, fund-raisers, PTA meetings, or at home helping with homework and other school assignments. At the far right of the continuum were those activities which involved parents more actively. They included attendance at workshops, performing classroom teaching, or designing education sessions for other parents.

Studies of the actual involvement of parents (Cervonne & O’Leary 1982; Stallworth & Williams 1982; Toronto Board of Education 1991) show that most parents are more
involved in activities to the left or at the passive end of the continuum and that reform efforts to increase the legitimacy of parent involvement in educational change and reform continue to miss the mark (Dehli 1994).

The literature on school reform suggests that a fundamental shift is required, not only in the way we educate, but also in the way we think about education (Fullan 1993; Barth 1990; Rosenholtz 1989). In recent years, reform efforts have focused on changing educational thought with respect to the participation of parents as active participants in children's learning. Reformers base their efforts and their persuasion on the plethora of evidence that parental involvement can result in improved educational achievement to the advantage of all children (Epstein 1992, 1995; Swap 1993; Mortimore 1988; Henderson 1988; Bastiani 1987; Cotton & Savard 1980; Bronfenbrenner 1974, 1986).

While schools in Ontario may have only just begun to involve parents in advisory groups, the participation of parents in organized school groups has a long history outside of Canada. According to a distinguished Canadian writer and philosopher, John Ralston Saul (1995), knowledge of history is important. Saul suggests that knowledge of the past is 'public knowledge' and that possession of this knowledge helps raise our consciousness as a citizenry and prevents us from falling into the dangerous habit of generalizing and institutionalizing something which we do not understand. To quote Saul: "To know - that is, to have knowledge - is to instinctively understand the relationship between what you know and what you do" (Saul 1995: 5). Following is a brief historical review of some of the strategies to involve parents within organized groups in education.
2.1.2 Participation as Active: Historical Developments

In this section I trace some of the historical developments of parent participation in schools in areas of Western Europe, the United States, and Canada. The search spans a period of approximately fifty years and exposes events whereby parents were presumably engaged as active participants in organized school groups. This history also serves to demonstrate that present trends in educational reform in Ontario are part of a larger global movement which has been in progress since the end of the Second World War.

2.1.2.1 Western Europe

Parent participation in school councils suggests participation in school-based decision making and presents images of active public involvement in education. This is not a new phenomenon. Parents have been involved in decisions related to school programs and policy since the end of the Second World War in such countries as France, Italy, the German Federal Republic, England, and Wales. In her review of related literature, Allin (1995) reasoned that:

> Liberal democracies adopted formal structures for consulting and involving parents in education, not because of the persuasiveness of the educational rationale, but because of the underlying crisis of confidence in democratic institutions. (p. 7)

The 'malaise of modernity', or public disillusionment with governing institutions, evident in Western Europe in the 1950s, as it is now (Taylor 1991; Hargreaves 1991), cast suspicion on the ruling 'élite'. In response, those in power were convinced of the need to organize groups of citizens as advocacy groups for their cause. The metaphors abounded. Published documents referred to 'parents' rights', 'parent power', and 'the parent
movement' and implied a kind of powerful political participation of parents. But, Nicholas Beattie (1985) has cautioned, such metaphors were deceiving. From his observations, parents merely acted in an 'oversight' capacity. Decisions related to curriculum or to the use or provision of school resources continued to be made by the professionals. Beattie (1985) elaborated:

Parent activity was not absent, but it tended to be sporadic and unstable and aimed at supporting particular schools rather than at questioning or altering the system or conveying parent views to teachers or administrators.

(p.2)

While active parent and community engagement was widely encouraged in Western Europe as early as the 1950s, it was not until the late 1960s that many of these countries formulated legal documents to mandate structural changes in education to encourage fuller participation (Beattie 1985; Hughes, Burgess, & Moxon 1991). Schools in Britain, for example, were governed by LEAs or Local Education Authorities and parents were designated as 'governors' with jurisdiction over budget allocations, staffing, and resource management (Deem, Brehoney & Smith 1994). Thirty years later, the issues continue to challenge decision makers. In 1991 for example, the Conservative Government in Britain, with John Major as Prime Minister and Kenneth Clarke as Secretary of Education and Science, demonstrated a persistent dissatisfaction with the manner in which schools communicated with parents. That Government subsequently unveiled a document entitled The Parent's Charter (Department of Education and Science 1991).
The charter was designed to give parents the legal right to receive information from their children's school, the right to choose the school they wanted their child to attend, and the right to know the destination of students who had withdrawn from a particular program or school. It would seem that, in Great Britain at least, government had determined that parents should have legal recognition for their role in the education of their children. Six years later, the question is asked, has the promulgation of such a document made a difference to the cause of parents? Research suggests that while parents are more actively involved in the school system in Britain, particularly as governors at the local school level, little has changed with respect to the manner in which schools communicate with parents (Deem, Brehoney, & Heath 1994).

2.1.2.2 The United States

In the United States, parent participation stems from events surrounding the issues of equity and equality of educational opportunity for all children by way of compensatory programs such as Head Start (Hughes, Burgess, & Moxon 1991). The argument for participation was that responsive and quality education could be achieved if and when parents and other community members became meaningfully involved in the decision-making process at the level which most directly affected their children. Gerald Faris (in Davies 1976), a free-lance reporter on educational issues in three Los Angeles school districts, wrote that:
As long ago as the 1950s, a feeling began to take hold in the sprawling Los Angeles school community that the completely centralized administration, with a board of education 'out there' somewhere calling most of the shots, was no longer meeting the needs of the people served by the educational system. (p. 69)

Parents organized loose advocacy groups called 'advisory councils'. They were unlike the traditional PTAs in that within these councils parents focused on the content and effectiveness of school programs and, where possible, they became involved with issues related to teaching and learning. Membership in these groups was dependent on attendance at monthly meetings and, for the first time, parents were recognized as potential leaders in the education system. In his discussion of parent councils, Davies concluded: "While people came and went from month to month, ... a solid core of leaders began to develop in each council" (Davies 1976:70).

Some groups were successful but others were not. The efforts by some groups were viewed as merely "window-dressing" serving little to modify the decision-making process (Davies 1976). In effect, according to Davies, principals were considered the winners in schools where councils existed. Council members became 'parent activists' and, in some cases, energetically lobbied on behalf of schools to seek additional funding; in many cases, the success of these councils depended solely on their fundraising ability. In Los Angeles, for example, councils were distinguished as groups that could push back the veil of bureaucracy at school board offices by using high profile tactics to seek and to find sources of funding when principals put forward the call. In most cases, fundraising became the sole purpose for the existence of such groups.
William Bennett (1992), a former United States education secretary, criticized the education scene in Chicago for this very reason. He observed that as late as the 1980s, educators continually sent out messages through parent groups for extra funding. Failed attempts to access such funding served as sound rationale to explain the failure of educational reform (Bennett 1992). Since that time, Chicago has mandated the establishment of councils in each school and parents and community members have presumably received governance authority to question and to alter the education system to the advantage of students.

Research, however, suggests that councils in some Chicago schools have not delivered what was promised. Special criticism has continued to be levied at the actions of principals who have misused power and control. Some principals have promoted councils on the premise that they offered parents, teachers, and community members an increased voice in school matters and that they furthered the cause of decentralization and democratization of education to benefit everyone (Radnofsky 1994) but, such is not the case. Parents and teachers complain that there has been no change in their status and have expressed outright dissatisfaction with the refusal of principals to share decision making in areas other than fundraising (Radnofsky 1994). It would seem that while parents are involved in organized school committees at the school level in some States in the United States, it is questionable whether they are actively involved in educational reform or whether their views are more frequently conveyed to teachers and administrators on matters affecting change in the quality of school programs and instruction.
2.1.2.3 Canada

As society has moved into a post-industrial period, Canadians have concluded that education and training are essential to national and personal prosperity (Conference Board of Canada 1992). Reports of high unemployment, coupled with the availability of technology-related jobs that Canadians are unqualified to fill, has cast doubt on the ability of school systems to prepare students for the future. As a result, Canadians feel the necessity to 'shift gears', to accelerate the pace into the 'new economy' (Beck 1995).

Schools are strongly urged to become better connected with their communities in order to offer relevant programs to prepare students for the 21st century (Nikiforuk 1993).

School-based management was instituted in Edmonton, Alberta and in the province of Quebec as early as the 1970s. Schools were allocated funding on a per pupil basis and school committees were organized to facilitate a new way of operating each school. One consequence of this change was that parents and students were encouraged to choose their schools carefully. The reform resulted in entire school systems adopting a 'market driven' mentality. Schools began to advertise programs designed to compete with rivals and, therefore, participation meant increased competition between schools to increase enrollments and, thereby, to increase funds (OTF 1992).

Within the rest of Canada, the onset of the 1990s has witnessed the initiation of school councils, especially in the Atlantic region in the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. In Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, the move to establish school councils followed a demonstrated and expressed
public dissatisfaction with the traditional education system (Government of Newfoundland & Labrador 1994). Presentations were made before a Royal Commission that traveled the island seeking input into imminent educational reform. The high costs of duplicated services, coupled with declining enrollments, were very real issues as government considered strategies to ‘cut back’.

Recommendations were made and government responded by outlining an approach for ‘on site’ management of schools. The report, “Adjusting the Course, Restructuring the School System for Excellence in Newfoundland and Labrador” (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 1994) underscored the important role each school principal must play in school leadership as it affected the increased level of involvement of parents in education. The rationale was expressed as follows:

Increasing the level of parent involvement in their children’s learning is considered to be one of the most important means of engendering higher levels of achievement. (p. 17)

One recommendation stated that school principals and staff would be expected to encourage more active parental involvement through the establishment of school councils. As a result, selected schools became pilot schools as a preliminary to organizing councils in each school in the province. The Ministry of Education and Training emphasized that this was part of a worldwide shift to involve parents and the community more directly in education (Government of Newfoundland 1995).

Since the establishment of councils remains in an evolutionary state in the Atlantic Provinces (Leonard 1996), it may be too early to identify the positive or negative
consequences of the reform. It is interesting to note that, while Newfoundland and Labrador was one of the first provinces in the Atlantic region to establish guidelines to initiate the formation of school councils, in many areas of the province progress has been slow. After three years, the province is continuing to reorganize and downsize the number of school boards and to reform the denominational structure of its schools. Only time will tell whether reform efforts will result in satisfactory improvements to the quality of education available to all students.

2.1.2.4 The Province of Ontario

Many Ontario schools boast that parents and community members have participated as members of committees to assist in the selection of staff since the late 1970s (OTF 1992). The Board of Education for the City of Toronto established a Work Group in 1991 to study the need for newer policies to address parent involvement in decision making, governance, volunteering, fundraising, and helping other parents (Board of Education for the City of Toronto 1991). The latest efforts by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training follow the recommendations of the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning (Government of Ontario 1995) and the release of Policy and Program Memorandum 122¹ (Government of Ontario 1995). Such efforts reflect the Ministry’s commitment to have all schools involve parents, teachers, students, and community members more directly in school affairs through the establishment of school

¹ Herein referred to as PPM 122.
councils. This participation is meant to ensure that parents and communities are consulted with respect to changes in the Ontario educational system.

The reform is based on a number of rationales: that parents and guardians have the right and the responsibility to participate in the education of their children, that through participation parents "can contribute to their children's development in a wide variety of ways" (Government of Ontario 1995:1), and that students and community agencies have ideas and opinions about programs being offered in schools which can be used to enhance decisions made by educators.

In the province of Ontario, the establishment of school councils presumably shifts the total responsibility for decision making from professionals and encourages the input from parents and community members. The government's approach to implementing this reform, however, is cause for concern. PPM 122, for example, may be viewed as a preliminary document since it merely outlines minimum requirements governing the composition and operation of school councils and the tasks, roles, and responsibilities of members. The document does not elaborate situations that could involve council members nor how they are to approach specific situations; it does not suggest ways that new relationships between professional and non-professional educators can be fostered; nor does it elaborate any potentially negative consequences to parents, community members, or educators of this kind of participation.
The government of Ontario, under The New Democratic Party, released PPM 122 in the spring of 1995; at the same time, it created a commission to advise on the reduction of school boards in the province. The move was slated to reduce out-of-classroom spending and to ensure sufficient funding for student programs in view of necessary reductions to the education budget. The newly elected Progressive Conservative government, under its leader Mike Harris, targeted a $400 million decrease to education and promised more severe reductions. In light of these events, one could infer that the government of Ontario envisions that the establishment of school councils will move schools to decrease overall educational spending and encourage parents and community members to assume more responsibility for their children’s schools.

In Ontario, the new reforms have resulted in the development of new concerns along the educational landscape. There is concern about the pace and direction of educational reform, especially with respect to the potentially negative implications such moves may have for parents and community members who are suddenly thrown into an environment about which they have little knowledge or experience (Galt 1995). There is also concern on the part of administrators and educators who find that they are now forced to consult with yet another group about issues that were traditionally controlled at the school board office and about which parents and members of the community have little background knowledge.
2.1.2.5 Participation Defined

At this stage, it becomes crucial to stop and to consider what is meant by participation. From the research, it may be concluded that a certain ambiguity surrounds the actual meaning of parent and community participation in education. From the previous discussion, participation can mean parent involvement in activities such as fundraising and helping children at home and in the classroom with math or reading; participation can also mean the active involvement of parents and community members in discussions of educational issues without having any real influence in the decision-making process; or, it can mean parents being full participants in site-based management of schools.

In England and New Zealand, parents have jurisdiction over the governance of school buildings, staffing, budgets, and curriculum selection (Whitty 1997). In Ontario, participation means that parents and community members will join with teachers to offer advice to principals on a variety of priorities determined by the Ministry of Education and Training (Government of Ontario 1995).

From the United States, Don Davies (1991) has suggested that participation embodies the notion that the education of a child is a community responsibility. He has concluded that community participation ensures that the social, physical, emotional, and academic needs of the child are met. In turn, according to Davies, the community accepts the responsibility to influence, to support, and to monitor educational programs so that everyone benefits from a system that responds to the educational needs of all children.
Newport (1992), in a study of elementary teachers in New South Wales, distinguished between participation and involvement. Her study of the attitudes and perceptions of elementary school teachers toward parent engagement suggested that a marked distinction existed between the goals and the outcomes of ‘involvement’ and ‘participation’. She concluded:

The term ‘involvement’, as applied to schools, can refer to any form of information giving or receiving, consultation, or helping by persons or groups where the final power to make decisions associated with the activity lies with another person or group. Participation, on the other hand, refers to a process in which all share in the decisions. (p. 45)

According to Newport, it is more desirable to have parents and educators participate in the issues and to share in the decisions. Involvement is a weaker form of participation.

In Great Britain, Nicholas Beattie (1985) defined participation as “the legally required association of parents with the schools their children attend through systems of elected representatives and committees” (1985:19). He discussed participation in school councils as a representative form of participation which, in his experience, had the potential for a better-informed system and a much improved process of managing schools.

In summary, according to the literature, participation is: (1) the community and school working together to enhance the educational program to benefit all children, (2) parents and educators together discussing the issues and sharing in the decision making process, and (3) the legal organization of parent representatives acting as a resource to assist in the administration of schools. A synthesis of all three statements may help formulate a body of knowledge or ‘an ideology’ to reflect the needs and aspirations of those who promote the active participation of parents in education. According to the present available
research, 'participation' is the legal organization of parents and community representatives working together with teachers and school administrators to discuss and to determine the educational environment for all children.

Unfortunately, the definition is incomplete. It does not adequately express the meaning of participation as it is discussed in the contemporary climate of parent and community members participation in organized school groups in the province of Ontario. It does not identify which parents are involved, the resources they bring with them, the situations which involve them, nor the approaches they may use in their advisory capacity, and neither does it outline any of the positive or negative consequences of participation.

Again, there is need for further research to determine a more comprehensive definition.

2.1.2.6 Summary

In summary, research has shown that, traditionally, strategies to involve parents in education have encouraged a sort of passive participation and that, while there have been efforts, especially in the United States and Western Europe, to involve parents in organized school committees, the results are less than satisfactory. Within Ontario, efforts to involve parents and community members in organized groups to discuss and advise on provincially-determined priorities continue to challenge school administrators. More research and more direct observations are required to determine individual perceptions of the reform, the potential of organized school councils, the extent of their jurisdiction, and the exact nature of the relationships implied by this form of participation.
In the next section, I use research on parent participation in four Western European countries to discuss the question of why participation in formally organized school groups has emerged as a central theme of school reform in Ontario. While the Ontario government claims that parents have a right and a responsibility to be involved in the education of their children and have outlined certain benefits to all participants of such involvement, a satisfactory rationale for the present push for active participation remains elusive. Two theories of participation have been proposed to clarify issues surrounding the contemporary emphasis on citizen participation in public institutions. These may help explain the current scene in Ontario.

**2.1.3 Present Reality of Participation**

**2.1.3.1 Introduction**

Theories help to explain phenomena by linking them to interrelated elements that together present a systematic explanation for the occurrence of such phenomena (Merriam 1988). In this section, two theories of participation are presented to help explain the current call for the active participation of local citizens in public institutions.

**2.1.3.2 Participation as Reform**

In a democratic society, discussions of excellence in public institutions must include public participation (Fantini 1986; Barber 1969). From a philosophical perspective, people have a moral need to ‘participate’ or to publicly express what they believe to be true. Charles Taylor, a contemporary political philosopher, has postulated that through public interchange people are given an opportunity to refine and to reshape their point of
view because “(t)here frequently is a lack of fit between what people officially and consciously believe, and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions” (Taylor 1991: iv). According to Taylor, people need to discuss and to debate in order to crystallize their thinking and, ultimately, to understand. This, according to Pateman (1970) is the educative potential of participation.

There is another, more basic, reason for public engagement in discussion and consultation. Taylor says it well: “a society where individuals are ‘enclosed in their own hearts’ is one where few will want to participate actively in self-government” (p.9).

Participation has, therefore, an integrative function. This is elaborated by Pateman (1970) in her discussion of the various functions of participation as outlined by Rousseau. According to Rousseau, participation has an integrative potential in that it enables ordinary citizens to feel that they belong in a community and that they have the ability to shape and to foster community values. Alex de Toqueville, writing on democracy in America, advocated “a vigorous political culture in which participation is valued at several levels of government and in voluntary associations as well” (in Taylor 1991:10).

A culture characterized by non-participation is forced to contend with its own problems. There is danger that when individuals remain uninvolved or feel alienated from the public sphere, they will inevitably feel a complete loss of political control, loss of ‘dignity as citizens’ and, at worst, a ‘loss of freedom’ (Taylor 1991). When considered further, this rationale suggests that those who feel excluded from decisions in the public sphere eventually realize, consciously or unconsciously, that decisions are made without them
and by an 'immense tutelary power'. Participation, therefore, has a protective function.

Taylor explains:

(W)hat we are in danger of losing is political control over our destiny, something we could exercise in common as citizens. What is threatened here is our dignity as citizens. The impersonal mechanisms ... may reduce our degrees of freedom as a society, but the loss of political liberty would mean that even the choices left would no longer be made by ourselves as citizens, but by an irresponsible tutelary power. (p. 10)

Taylor’s rationale for participation can be applied equally to educational environments.

As parents and members of minority groups, for example, find themselves in the distasteful position of powerlessness, distrust and disharmony characterize the relationship between school and home (Dehli 1994) principally because decisions are made for children without their parents’ participation. Often, decisions placate the aims and values of those with access to power who most often carry the greatest weight. This is one explanation for the prevailing disillusionment and frustration with discussion of democratic ideals and the concerns raised about the exclusion of minority opinion in the political realm, generally, and in education specifically (Ryan 1995; Daigle 1995; Dehli 1994). But, there is a solution:

The only defense ... is a vigorous political culture in which participation is valued at several levels of government and in voluntary associations as well (Taylor 1991:9).

While there can never be a solution that is satisfactory to all (Pal 1991), policy makers in education and in other public institutions have a responsibility to consult extensively with all stakeholders so that reform remains compatible with the ideals, values, and interests of all affected by the outcomes (Begley 1995). Refusing to involve the community in public discussion of issues which affect them and their children may be viewed as an
attempt to ignore the opinions and solutions offered by those ultimately responsible for their children’s education (Townsend 1995) and in so doing, to take away a community’s right to participate. Such a situation spells disaster as people find themselves ‘out of control’ and in a ‘state of feud’ with educators and with neighbours (Duffy 1995).

One theory of participation, the reformist theory, helps to explain why the general population benefits from participation; the theory explains participation in terms of the communal need for discussion and debate. The central aim is participatory democracy or the right of ordinary citizens to participate in the issues and the decisions related to the conduct of society (Beattie 1986; Pateman 1970). The more citizens are involved in and can contribute to the institutions of society and “the more opportunities for such contributions exist, the more democratically involved a society can be said to be” (Beattie 1985:20). The reformist theory of participation explains participation from two perspectives: (a) as a means to maintain the status quo; and, (b) as a way to stimulate gradual, piecemeal reform as people are given or assume opportunities for fuller participation and ultimately learn how to govern both themselves and others.

The functions of participation were earlier proposed by Mill (1910 in Pateman 1970). Mill emphasized the educative function. He assumed that participation at the local level enabled individuals to learn about the democratic method, as well, they learned about the issues of concern to the greater masses of the population (Pateman 1970).

The rationale for an increase in participation, according to the reformist theory, does not reflect economic pressures or class conflict but basic psychological assumptions that
people learn to be democratic when they are given opportunities for democratic activity (Beattie 1985; Pateman 1970). Based on this theory, meaningful participation promises the following: responsiveness, personal development, and an opportunity to overcome public alienation. Responsiveness because those who participate want to continue to do so; personal development since individuals, working as a collective, learn from one another about the collective purposes of society; and overcoming alienation since members of a community eventually demonstrate a common interest in a single cause, such as the improved educational attainment of children, and want to take a more active role in the issues and the solutions. Participation helps to ensure, explains Beattie, that citizens come to understand why people behave as they do within society. As well, according to Pateman (1970), in her review of the theories of participation put forward by Jean Jacques Rousseau, “The human results that accrue through the participatory process provide an important justification for a participatory system” (p. 25).

2.1.3.3 Participation as Crisis Response

The ‘reformist’ theory, however, could be termed an idealistic view of reality in that it neglects consideration of the pervasive global concentration on economic issues which have captured the attention of policy makers in the latter part of the 20th Century. Deficit reduction and political solutions which generally yield drastic decreases in national funding to public institutions, such as schools, have an undeniable impact on the content and the nature of reform. A second theory labeled the ‘general crisis theory’ of participation explains participation in terms of economic realities and the single goal of
'legitimation of the ruling élite' when the public needs to be convinced of government's ability to wisely use public funds in times of economic crisis.

The 'general crisis' theory suggests that issues of global coincidence and significance which impact on solutions to restore homeostasis to economic and political systems, following difficult periods of economic crisis, ultimately demand public input as one way to gain cooperation and public support (Habermas cited in Beattie 1985). Participation, therefore, serves to camouflage the inevitable confusion as political leaders orchestrate change according to a blueprint that does not exist (Wheatley 1994).

Barber (1969) hinted at this when he suggested that bad times were good times for community involvement in public institutions. His claim is that in large cities or in small communities parents have traditionally shouldered the ups and downs of their children's performance in schools with little objection or question and in isolation. Organized activities to bring about change, Barber concluded, were largely attributed to the motives, resources, and energy of ordinary citizens supported by the governing élite because "(c)hange never just happens. People make it happen, purposely, or inadvertently" (Barber 1969:178).

The movement to decentralize or to move decision making down to the level of the ordinary citizen is intended to demonstrate government's response to the aspirations and needs of the local community. Ironically, such conditions usually occur when economic reform is high on the government's agenda (Barber 1969). Barber's comments reflect the general crises theory of participation. Political leaders strive for public understanding of
the problems and the solutions while they encourage the creation of opportunities to make citizens conscious that their troubles are widely shared and that remedies can be found in government action (Barber 1969). The general crisis theory, therefore, can be viewed as the dark side of participation. People are made to feel that they are being consulted and that their ideas matter but, in reality, the decisions have already been made without them (Barlow & Robertson 1994). Such participation has been termed ‘pseudo-participation’ (Pateman 1970) and suggests the opposite of ‘full participation’. As the present government in Ontario continues to decrease the provincial contribution to education, the aim of the general crisis theory presents a strong rationale for the present push for citizen participation within public institutions in that province.

2.1.3.4 Summary

The discussion of the past and present realities of participation has followed four paths. The literature on participation elaborated on the concept of a passive/active continuum of parent participation and helped to trace the historical background of participation from an international to a national and local perspective. Past research also helped to define participation and to formulate the contents of an ‘ideology of participation’. Finally, theories of participation put forward by Nicholas Beattie (1985) helped to explain the current trend toward citizen participation in public institutions in Canada.

The literature review up to this point has been a review of research dealing with the ‘inanimate’ aspects of participation. It is research that deals with the ‘what’ and not the ‘who’ of participation. Therefore, in the section which follows I look at the reality of
participation in terms of who the participants are, the implications of their social status with respect to the extent of their participation, and the expertise participants may bring in the form of personal resources.

2.2 Introduction: Status and Expertise

The establishment of advisory councils in every school in Ontario signals the beginning of a process of educational decision making decidedly different from the traditional approach. Schools have traditionally followed a vertical pattern of top-down policy formulation and implementation whereby policies and programs first developed at the Ministry and district levels were then implemented at the school level by the principal. The new arrangement, however, suggests major changes as committees or councils of teaching and non-teaching members become advisers to principals and, in effect, oversee educational change. This can mean that parents and community members will assume new roles in relation to, and in some cases in addition to, their previous positions within the school and also in relation to members of constituent groups which they presumably represent.

To elaborate further, within Ontario, schools have been directed to establish school councils to act as ‘advisory bodies’ to principals and to school boards on a wide range of school-related issues. The issues include curriculum and program priorities, assessment and accountability, school profiles to be used in the selection of principals, budget planning, the involvement of community support agencies, the school calendar, codes of behavior, and community use of school facilities (Government of Ontario 1995).
The relationship between advisers and those receiving advice, however, presents a variety of interesting images. From the literature, it can be concluded that advisers may become friends and companions to the advised; they may be experts with the ability to add wisdom to the decision-making process; or, they may simply serve as facilitators of dialogue to listen, to consider, and to assist when it is appropriate to do so (Goldhamer 1978). Within education, the potential for non-professionals to challenge the professional autonomy of teachers and principals within the context of an advisory group becomes a source of intense concern as professionals feel that their knowledge, expertise, and traditional autonomy are being threatened by external advisers (Henderson 1990).

The purpose of this section is to understand the relationship that may develop between parents and educators, especially school principals as parents assume new roles in education. I use research by Goldring and others to describe the relationship between status and selection with respect to parent participation in organized school groups.

2.2.1 Social Status of Members

In a contemporary context, participation implies a move to involve parents and community members as active partners in decision-making, curriculum development, and program implementation. The question of representation becomes increasingly central to this reform. More than two decades ago, Head (1971) suggested that some satisfactory method needed to be found to ensure that community groups actually represented the various interests in the community; he cautioned that in the event they did not, this fact
needed to be well understood and taken into account by those formulating and implementing policy.

Within Ontario, school principals are encouraged to organize parents as members of groups within schools to assist in the decision-making process and to become involved in discussions related to school issues and policies. ‘Parents’, however, are not a unified group; they come from varied social backgrounds and represent a host of varied experiences and values. These backgrounds are often discussed in terms of the material resources, the skills, and the knowledge that parents bring with them to the decision-making arena. Such resources, skills, and knowledge constitute the ‘expertise’ that members now place at the service of school administrators (Epstein 1995; Henderson 1990; Goldhamer 1978; Benveniste 1972; Curle 1968).

School principals as decision makers, however, do not access expertise from all parents. While some principals have openly stated that formally organized groups within schools should include representation from a “cross section of parents from the uneducated right to the top” (Harte & Kennedy 1995:51), it has been found that parent representation in formally organized school groups depends significantly on the social status of parents and the school context. To explain this phenomenon I depend significantly on the research of Ellen Goldring (1990) and that of Christina Hughes, Robert G. Burgess, and Susan Moxon (1991) who studied the principal-parent relationship in multiple contexts.

The work of Goldring (1990) and Hughes, Burgess, and Moxon (1990) was predominantly carried out in elementary schools in the United States and Great Britain
respectively. From Goldring’s work it can be concluded that parents from upper socio-economic settings represent a formidable group within schools since they bring a tremendous amount of ‘expertise’ to the decision-making arena. The expertise is mainly attributable to their professional backgrounds, the amount of material resources they possess and/or control, and their prominent position within the community.

Parents from high socio-economic backgrounds, therefore, claim ready access to knowledge, position, and wealth - all very powerful resources. John Ralston Saul (1994) talks about the power of knowledge in this way:

The people who have it, do have power as we understand power today, given our managerial, technocratic élite. Knowledge is one of the currencies of systems men, just as it was for the courtiers in the halls of Versailles. They require a position in the structure that provides some ability to deny access to others and gain access for themselves. (p.42)

Since the scope, domain, and weight of resources such as knowledge, position, and wealth are never evenly distributed within society (Hickson & McCullough 1980), a corollary to this is that parents from lower social contexts have limited or no access to either material resources, professional expertise, or positions of authority and, therefore, may be denied a position in the structure.

Principals respond differently to parents depending on their socio-economic status.

Goldring studied schools serving three distinct clienteles, a homogeneous high socio-economic status (SES) parent clientele, a heterogeneous middle SES parent clientele, and a homogeneous low SES parent clientele. In homogeneously high SES contexts, such as private schools, principals reported that parents were assertive, demanding, and often interfering. To safeguard their ‘administrative position’, principals felt these parents
were useful but that it was essential to direct and control their behaviour. Parents did participate in school affairs but the principal-parent relationship was singularly formal and businesslike - little time was spent socializing for example.

At the other end of the continuum, principals viewed parents from lower social contexts as apathetic, unsupportive, and passive (Goldring 1990). The principal-parent relationship was formal and parent participation in decision-making activities was either rejected or minimized. Principals who felt forced to work with parents from low socio-economic settings saw re-education and the maintenance of a continuous flow of information to these parents (Goldring 1990), usually mothers (Hughes, Burgess & Moxon 1991), as key aspects of their role.

Parents and community members from middle-class contexts enjoy complete and unchallenged acceptance by principals. This acceptance has been attributed to the convergence or lack of dissonance between the values of the school and the perceived values of the middle-class home (Chrispeels 1991). Features of the effective school such as high expectations, varied learning opportunities, a strong focus on academics, and consistent feedback to students and teachers compare favourably with characteristics common to middle-class homes and community life. The opinions and ideas voiced by middle-class parents, it was concluded, often paralleled those of professional educators and were usually sought and used.

Mixed social settings, according to the research, provided the ideal context for the cultivation of cooperative and harmonious relationships between parents, community
members, and educators. Parent representation in organized school groups was high, principals made a concerted effort to understand parent needs, and principals demonstrated a willingness to devote time and energy to work with these parents to achieve mutually acceptable goals and objectives in both formal and informal settings. In mixed social contexts, principals willingly and frequently accessed material resources, knowledge, and skills. It can be concluded, from the findings of Goldring and Hughes, Burgess, and Moxon, that, depending on the context, principals selected parents from whom they wanted to receive advice and they manufactured strategies to buffer or shield themselves from those whom they preferred not to receive this service.

But, what kinds of expertise do principals require and what are some of the situations that parents encounter as they assume positions in organized groups within schools? To understand these issues it was necessary to go outside educational research and to consult literature on the role of the adviser to political leaders and those assigned as consultants to government officials in developing countries. I depend significantly on the work of Adam Curle (1968) and Herbert Goldhamer (1978) to elaborate specifics of the expertise and the roles of advisers.

2.2.2 Expertise of Members

It was ... various forms of administrative, fiscal, judicial, and other record keeping (skills) that opened to those who were literate and numerate pathways to the court and to power (Goldhamer 1978:60).

Herbert Goldhamer (1978), in his discussion of advisers to kings and political leaders, informs his readers that churchmen, lawyers, and doctors were among those frequently selected to serve as advisers to kings and to heads of state in the early Middle Ages. One
of the principal attractions of such men was their ‘literacy’ in both numbers and letters. Leaders also frequently chose churchmen who were versed in both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical matters such as civil law and accounting and, since their time was not fixed or controlled by state affairs, they were especially attractive because they were available to attend the monarch at any time with regularity and continuity (Goldhamer 1978).

In the Middle Ages, churchmen usually came from influential families and/or were men of great wealth who had decided for various reasons to abandon their thrones and to end their days as monks (Goldhamer 1978). Such men were useful to the nobility for their social status and wealth; it was generally accepted that they could gain easy access to the courts of influence and wealth through acquaintances in high positions of authority. Such strategies remain useful to this day.

Men such as the former Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, have gained prominence as advisers because of their influence and ability to gain access. The international gold baron Peter Munk, an aggressive exploration giant in the world of mining (Rumba 1996), recognized Mulroney’s potential as an adviser. Despite the fact that the former leader was no longer the favoured among Canadians, Munk knew that:

Mulroney enjoyed immense prestige outside Canada. After nine years of trotting around the world meeting world leaders, Mulroney had incomparable access to presidents and prime ministers in all the key spots where Munk wanted to take Barrick. Through Mulroney, Munk knew he could get to meet the presidents of Chile and Argentina or the premier of China. With that kind of access and Munk’s ability to pitch an irresistible idea, Munk knew he could launch Barrick into new mining fields at a speed that would turn heads around the world (Rumba 1996: 42).
Unlimited access to influence and power, literacy in math and letters, and ‘expertise’ in multiple areas, according to Goldhamer, made advisers jewels in the crowns of those who aspired to great heights.

The word ‘expertise’ comes from ‘expert’ and is derived, via old French, from the Latin ‘expertus’ which means ‘tried’ or ‘issuing from practice or experience’. Over time, there has developed a group of people, principally men and rarely women, who have gained the title ‘advisory experts’ (Goldhamer 1978; Benveniste 1972; Curle 1968). With the growth of scientific, technical, and engineering knowledge and skills in the economic, social, and military world, it has become obvious that successful leaders require ready access to the expertise of those well versed in each field of knowledge and skill. There has arisen, therefore, “a great increase in the number and type of expert advisers and a whole series of organizational devices (has) developed to train, mobilize, and exploit their services” (Goldhamer 1978: 27).

A summary of the accumulated expertise required by advisers constitutes a long list but the principal requirements are as follows: (1) advisers need intelligence and skill at public and private debate, privately with the leader and with other advisers - publicly, when defending decisions taken by the leader; (2) they need the ability to expound and instruct on a variety of issues, especially those which fall directly within their area of expertise; (3) they require the ability and the will to operate effectively in both calm and stormy waters; (4) they need to be expert at addressing and defending issues of human affairs and public interest; and, (5) they are favoured if they have access to wealth and influence (Goldhamer 1978; Curle 1968).
2.2.3 Summary

In summary, while wealth and influence enhance an adviser’s opportunities, such attributes are usually rationed and jealously guarded by a select few. The ordinary adviser does well to be expert at debate, capable of instruction, dependable as an executor, and wise in giving counsel. Such are the highlights of what the ordinary adviser is expected to approach with skill and expertise. In the following section, I elaborate situations and approaches which are intended to elaborate certain aspects of the advisory role and help illustrate, more specifically, how advisers use their expertise.

2.3 The Reality of Participation: Situations and Approaches

2.3.1 Introduction

Advisers, according to Goldhamer (1978), have an unofficial status in that they are not administrators nor heads of state nor do they have powers defined by law or custom; however, “(t)he oldest literary and historical documents show the (adviser) as much a part of the political structure as the king himself” (Goldhamer 1978: 7). Advisers, therefore, despite their lack of official status, provide an extensive service to their leader and have earned the respect of those over whom the leader rules. In the following sections, I elaborate various situations and approaches which help to identify the roles of executor, friend, educator, informant, critic, and ‘adviser’.
2.3.2.1 Adviser as Executor

In the elaboration of the executor role, it is helpful to review a theory of advisory behaviour put forward by Adam Curle (1968). The theory holds that advisers do everything except the actual work of the organization. Advisers discuss, study, research, and help in many ways but the actual work of developing and implementing new policies is carried out by others. To do otherwise, concluded Curle, would be to render leaders handicapped or incapable of further action in similar circumstances when the adviser moves on or is replaced.

Notwithstanding, advisers perform numerous tasks. Curle generously elaborated what I have conceptualized as the executor role:

[The adviser] helps to plan for the flow of information to the agency, he carries out - or arranges to have carried out, relevant inquiries and research investigations, he studies the way in which the plan is being put into action, he travels around the country to keep in touch with recent developments, he negotiates with foreign aid agencies, he takes part in budget discussions, he assesses projects submitted to the planning organization for funding, he keeps in touch with scholarly research relevant to planning, he is constantly having to revise his estimates and projections in accordance with alterations in the economic situation or changes in government; all in all, he engages in the rough-and-tumble life of a public servant operating under great pressure. (p. 12)

To further elaborate, it is interesting to note that advisers are often requested to perform tasks unrelated to their expertise. They may be required to listen, to facilitate discussion, to attend numerous meetings, to deal with unforeseen emergencies, to bolster colleagues’ morale, to assemble and analyze data, and finally, to sit in silence in representative attendance at official functions (Curle 1968).
Each setting or context exerts different demands on the role of the adviser. Henderson (1990) concluded that advisers in the college system had the following duties: they planned relevant, industry-based curriculum; reviewed ongoing programs; advised on new and improved instructional modes; prepared public relations campaigns; selected winners and distributed scholarships and bursaries; set agendas and meeting schedules; and, periodically, served as lobby groups to the Board of Directors or to industry on behalf of a program. While context may determine the kind of duties assumed by advisers as executors, certain situations and approaches have remained constant, such is the case with the adviser who serves in the overt or covert position of friend to the leader.

2.3.2.2 Adviser as Friend

The adviser may act as friend or colleague of a leader. Permeating the images of great leaders is the persistent image of the lonely, isolated figure in need of the comfort, trust, and the support of a close companion or friend. Among those who are elected or invited to become members of the leader’s advisory council, there may be found a person or persons willing to become a confidant or friend and whose presence causes “(s)ome abatement of the ruler’s sense of loneliness and isolation ...” (Goldhamer 1978:8). The leader, despite reports to the contrary, represents a ‘feeble creature’ with a heavy load to carry and one who requires assistance. As friends, advisers and their leader may form a useful team whereby “the pooling of insights and skills from different backgrounds of experience can be most valuable ...” (Curle 1968:15). As with all human relationships, however, developing mutual trust and understanding between friends and team members requires time, patience, and a close working relationship (Curle 1968).
2.3.2.3 Adviser as Educator

The advisory process can be a reciprocal one. The adviser educates, informs and, in certain cases, trains the leader. In many respects, however, the adviser becomes the educator of the advised for one sole reason - no leader can know everything about every aspect of the administrative role or be expert in all situations. Goldhamer supports this with an example from the late John F. Kennedy who chose to consult with multiple advisers: “Kennedy, although he wanted his personal staff to be small, liked to get varying points of view from many advisers” (Goldhamer 1978: 95). It may be in the best interest of everyone for the leader to attract the services of many advisers who have a wide range of personal, academic, and technical expertise: “Multiple advisers are ... useful [because ] they bring to their task a variety of experiences and talents ...” (Goldhamer 1978: 95). Adam Curle maintains that, “(n)o successful adviser returns from a mission without having learned as much as he has taught” (Curle 1968:16).

Goldhamer, however, points out that problems can result when leaders bring together very large groups of advisers. This subject will be elaborated on in the discussion of technical problems.

2.3.2.4 Adviser as Informant

Leaders usually select advisers who are well connected to and representative of the community. Louis XIV reminded his grandson of the importance of having such contacts when he expounded the benefits of continual and trustworthy counsel:
Our lofty position ... separates us from our people to whom our ministers are closer and are constantly able to see a thousand things of which we know nothing, but on which, nevertheless, we must make up our minds and take measures (in Goldhamer 1978:33).

The adviser serves as contact and communicant going between the community and the leader, bridging the void that can and does often develop between leaders and the led. A good adviser can prevent a leader from the terrible consequences of making decisions unaware of the realities of the lives of the people to be served. As informants, advisers help their leader avoid decisions that reflect a ‘value neutral’, immoral, or unethical manner, knowing that such behaviour is often precipitated by being ‘out-of-touch’ and poorly informed about community events. Confident advisers are often forced to take a strong stance against decisions taken by a leader; in this way, they approach situations as critics of the leader.

2.3.2.5 Adviser as Critic

Leaders may be spared extreme folly or grave consequences when advisers effectively accomplish their role as critic and admonisher or conscience of the leader (Goldhamer 1978; Curle 1968). Advisers in the Middle Ages, Goldhamer tells us, had on their conscience the conscience of the king. Those who questioned and advised their leaders made no distinction between moral instruction or political wisdom, knowing they were expected to act as ‘sounding boards’ and critics of leaders’ ideas and plans in all situation even though there could result severe consequences to the adviser for persistent and forceful condemnation of a leader’s decision. A wise adviser, rather than totally
condemning a leader’s decision, looked for strategies to diplomatically inform him of how the wider public might react to a pending document or policy.

Advisers also had to be prepared for the painful experience that their advice may not be accepted. Henderson supports this observation by quoting from Charles Harvey’s article “On the Art of Giving Economic Advice,” in which Harvey reasoned why advice is not always accepted:

It is quite common for an advisor\(^2\) to believe that advice should be accepted, but to know that it may not be. It may be rejected because it will damage the interests of powerful people, or because it is easier to do nothing than to take a difficult initiative, or because it will remove some part of the power of the administration itself (Harvey 1986: 445 in Henderson 1990: 15).

It has been shown that leaders may suffer severe consequences when they continually and mindlessly ignore the admonishings of their advisers. John D. Ehrlichman, White House adviser to President Richard Nixon, testified in a trial in which he was charged with the obstruction of justice during the Watergate scandal. He said: "... [Nixon] said I had been or tried to be his conscience. I replied that I hadn’t been as effective as I would have liked" (in Goldhamer 1978: 12). In reciprocal fashion, advisers whose counsel continually goes unheeded are forced down one of three painful paths: they withdraw from their position, leave public life totally, or suffer “torture and death by virtue of [their] insistent remonstrance” (Goldhamer 1978: 11). In all matters, however, the adviser must not lose sight of the fact that the prime reason for being is to give ‘advice’.

\(^2\)There are two acceptable spellings for this word: adviser and advisor. I have chosen the spelling used by both Curle and Goldhamer. Henderson and Harvey preferred the alternate.
2.3.2.6 Adviser as Adviser

Above all other tasks, advisers assume a three-fold role: they advise on specific problems related to policy, they provide advice to improve the leader's own judgment and knowledge, and they generalize the advice 'beyond the occasion of the moment', knowing that the advice could become the basis for future policy decisions. In other words, advisers provide judgment, wisdom, analytic, and professional knowledge and skill (Goldhamer 1978). As indicated earlier, the adviser does everything except devise and implement the actual plan. The adviser advises, the leader draws up and enacts the plan. There must be a clear division of labour (Curle 1968).

2.3.3 Summary

Advisers may place their expertise at the service of leaders and may approach situations in many ways. Included among which are as executors, friends, educators, informants, critics, and advisers. Important points surface from the previous section: (1) the expectations for the advisory role alter as the working context alters, so that, especially with respect to the adviser as executor, advisers in a community college setting will be expected to perform tasks that are different from advisers in government departments or advisers to noblemen or lords; (2) that the adviser does not do the work of the institution administered by the leader; and (3) there must be a distinct division of labour between the role of the adviser and the role of leader.

In the next section, I use research on the experiences of advisers in political contexts to help me to describe and to interpret some of the negative consequences resulting from the
relationship of the adviser with the leader and of the adviser with other advisers. These experiences are discussed as technical and psychological issues.

2.4 Technical and Psychological Issues

2.4.1 Introduction

The use of councils, except those of the most severely limited size, as a forum for discussion and deliberation rather than as a means for soliciting individual expressions of opinion, are viewed with alarm as a perversion of the decision-making process ... and even such notables as Henry Kissinger have ... expressed some antipathy for and concern over the contemporary organization of political advice (Goldhamer 1978:59).

In the previous section, I identified tasks and ways that advisers approached them. The above quotation suggests that, like most relationships, the advisory relation has its dark side. Some of the antipathy for and concern over the contemporary organization of advice within organized structures, such as councils, may be attributed to certain problems which have been identified and discussed by those who have studied the relationship between advisers and their leaders. Goldhamer (1978), Curle (1968), and others have discussed several reasons to explain the 'antipathy' associated with organized advice-giving.

The information presented in this section represents two distinctly separate sets of problems - those determined by process and those determined by attitude. I discuss these as problems resulting from technical and psychological issues - understanding that these do not exhaust the array of problematic situations confronting advisers. The technical issues include access, number, and selection while the psychological include problems resulting from adjustment, inaction, and rivalry.
2.4.1.1 Access

The advisory relation is decisively affected by the nature of the access that the adviser has to his principal. An adviser may be the principal or predominant source of advice or, on the contrary, have to compete with advice pouring in from a large number of counselors, analysts, and agencies (Goldhamer 1978:88).

'Access' can mean 'the right to enter or to approach'; it can also mean 'the right to make use of' (American Heritage Dictionary 1994:5). The point has been made that advisers are those who place their personal, academic, and technical knowledge and experience or 'expertise' at the service of their leaders. In this respect, leaders become the 'advised' and advisers place their expertise at the service of those to whom they are granted access. The frequency and the form of access of the adviser to the advised, however, can become a source of severe irritation as access may be intimate, uninterrupted, and frequent or it may be formal, interrupted, and sporadic (Goldhamer 1978).

Advisers who have easy access often boast of close ties to the leader. It may be unwise for advisers to boast too loudly, however, since some leaders prefer not to publicize those from whom they receive advice. Anthony Wilson-Smith, in a recent discussion of advisers to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, helps explain why discretion among advisers is essential:

The nature of power under Jean Chrétien is more discreet (than it was when Brian Mulroney was Prime Minister). Few people boast of their close ties to the Prime Minister because they know that is the surest way to end them. 'I have a bunch of people I call regularly for advice, and I am not gonna say who they are,' Chrétien told an acquaintance recently. 'And they are sure not gonna say who they are, because they know that if they do, I won't call them anymore' (Wilson-Smith 1996:12).
The issues of physical proximity and influence may enhance or detract from advisers' opportunities for access. There are two reasons to explain this reality. Firstly, the physical proximity of the adviser to the advised may determine the frequency of contact. Advisers who work in the same institution and are in close contact with the leader have more intimate and more frequent opportunities to communicate with the leader than those who advise from afar or whose advice is relayed according to a plan of scheduled meetings and formal agendas.

Secondly, opportunities for access may depend on where on the continuum the adviser is situated (Goldhamer 1978). An adviser deemed by the leader to have an important message may have frequent access while advisers whose messages have become prosaic and pedantic may find that access is limited or blocked. Some advisers become the principal source of advice for the leader while others, whose influence has waned, have to compete for attention with advice pouring in from a large and diverse number of sources.

Leaders can block access or alternatively allow advice to flow in certain directions and from certain select sources. Such leaders choose to unilaterally determine agendas, set the time and the place for meetings, direct discussion, talk incessantly preventing input from others, or, alternatively, permit a few members to have exclusive opportunities to speak (Goldhamer 1978). One rule has served advisers well: advisers remain close enough to the leader to have some influence but they maintain enough distance to enjoy some form of respectable detachment so as not to become totally consumed by organizational affairs (Curle 1968). There are implications here for educational contexts. Teachers and members of staffs may be perceived to have ready access to principals,
parents with children in the school have legitimate access, but community members or business representatives who do not have children in the school may have limited access - they may be forced to depend upon formally scheduled meetings as the only route to relay their ideas and opinions.

Advisers learn that to gain access, some forms of advice-giving are more appropriate than others and, that when traditional forms of advice-giving have run their course, they must resort to alternative forms. Face-to-face contact may be one of the most problematic strategies to relay an adviser's message since attempts are frequently hindered by canceled or shortened meetings, by constant interruptions, and by inattentiveness resulting from a leader's fatigue or preoccupation with problems other than those of immediate concern to the adviser.

When face-to-face contact has proven an impossible route, some advisers have resorted to a more indirect route - through the press. It has been noted that the printed media have served some advisers to advantage; advisers who write well have relayed their message via newspaper articles and editorials. Goldhamer (1978) tells the story of an adviser who gained employment to the president of the United States as a result of a brilliant exposé on an issue related to public administration which appeared in the morning newspaper the president customarily read.

The printed media, however, can serve as a powerful rival and even serve to replace officially contracted advisers. Those who read gain ideas, information, and insight. This can work to the advantage of scholarly and literate advisers assigned to busy leaders who
do not have the time nor the inclination to read; it can also spell the end for advisers who fail to read and, therefore, fail to keep their advice fresh and informed (Goldhamer 1978).

Memos, letters, telephone conversations, newspaper articles, and electronic messages are just a few of the contemporary alternative strategies used by advisers to gain immediate, personal, uninterrupted, and direct access to their leaders. One important rule that advisers have learned is to practice brevity when relaying messages orally and in writing; good advisers learn to reduce written documents to their bare essentials. Goldhamer (1978) cites the example of Machiavelli’s message to his ‘Prince’ as an example to elaborate that lengthy reports are not always the most effective. In a mere one hundred pages, Machiavelli elaborated the essential themes related to the ‘art of government’.

2.4.1.2 Number

Variation prevails as to the ideal number of advisers. Some leaders, such as the late President John F. Kennedy, prefer a small number within their advisory council although they alternatively confer privately “with as many sources of advice as there are problems” (Goldhamer 1978:94). The number of advisers may range from a very few to many. There are various reasons for this situation. A council made up of more than three or four members can prove to be an arena for debate and collusion and not serve the leader well. For the adviser, however, there is comfort in numbers. Advice given in council may diminish personal blame when the wrong decision is taken. Alternatively, when all
advisers are congratulated, large numbers diminish the personal gain or praise to someone on whose advice a decision is made.

From their observations of great leaders and their advisers, both Curle and Goldhamer have concluded that neither one nor a large number of counselors can serve the leader well. There are great differences in the knowledge and background experience among advisers so that multiple advisers are "only useful if they bring to their task a variety of experiences and talents and do not engage in collusion to impose a particular form of advice" (Goldhamer 1978:95). One adviser, on the other hand, could provide a rather narrow view. Goldhamer posited that three or four counselors could constitute a group with a sufficient variety of experiences and talents to prevent the imposition of a particular form of advice; still, he countered with a quote from Solomon that 'in a multitude of counselors there is safety' (p.95).

The number of advisers can also correspond to the number of different problems confronting decision makers and the nature of the expertise required to reach satisfactory solutions (Curle 1968). Within any organization, the adviser who lacks a complete picture of the multiplicity of concerns on which advice is required can potentially distract and mislead rather than settle and direct. It may be perilous, therefore, to seek advice from multiple advisers who have a fragmented understanding of the goals of the organization. This fact alone has implications for educational contexts where leaders are being forced to seek advice from parents and community members who potentially do not have background knowledge related to educational policies and programs.
2.4.1.3 Selection

An issue which I have entitled ‘selection’ encompasses four distinct dimensions, namely, (1) process, (2) age, (3) gender, and (4) ‘outsourcing’. The process to select advisers may be personal or it may be public. Some leaders are at liberty to personally select their advisers because they want to ensure they have responsible and knowledgeable persons that they can depend on to stand close to the center of power and to relieve them of some of the responsibility of the decision-making process (Curle 1968). There are situations, however, wherein leaders must receive advice from advisers who receive their position by election or by a formal vote from members of the institution. In the latter case, leaders do not select advisers, advisers receive their position by decision of constituents whose vote determines who will give the leader advice. In the Middle Ages, this process was one way to limit the power of the king. In France, for example, problems occurred when “the king governed with a council whose membership he could not entirely control and without whose approval his acts lost their legal force” (Goldhamer 1978:55). The practice of electing constituent representatives to advisory councils remains a common practice despite potential negative consequences for a leader who can no longer choose from whom he or she will receive advice. The argument holds that unless leaders have the freedom to personally select their advisers, they risk not receiving opinions and ideas from all sectors which they govern.

Selection also relates to issues of the social status of advisers, including age, gender, ethnicity, and the list is long. In the case of age, leaders may find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when an advisory group is comprised totally of members who are young
and inexperienced or, alternatively, by members who are old and lethargic. In the first instance, leaders are faced with the impetuousness and daring of youth and in the second, with the caution and the hesitancy of old age. There is support for the leader who chooses an inter-generational advisory group. Very often younger advisers lack experience, they are poor speakers, and are so eager to please that they will uncritically support their leader in any venture and on any decision taken; older advisers, while they may be prudent and wise with the experience of great statesmen, are usually undaunted by leadership and frequently choose to challenge authority in all matters (Goldhamer 1978). Senior advisers may represent stalemate and inaction but young, inexperienced advisers soon earn the distinction of impetuousness and short-sightedness as they endeavour to solve complex problems with simple solutions. Leaders guided by ideas and opinions put forward by an inter-generational group can place their confidence in the wisdom, experience, and doubt of age and the energy, loyalty, and over-confidence of youth.

Problems of selection also include problems of gender. In a contemporary context, I would be remiss to ignore the predominance in the literature of the frequent references to the ‘male adviser’ and the absence of any female reference. As Goldhamer (1968) concluded, “(t)he image of the political adviser is that of a man” (p. 73). For male leaders and male advisers the gender issue may not exist. The ‘old boys’ network has sustained itself throughout the generations and consequently, up to the late 1970s, women were rarely selected as advisers. Joan of Arc soars above the rest and is recognized for her service as adviser to her king. And, while some women, usually the wives of
powerful men, played a powerful role as advisers at a 'lower level of fame', such females were toasted for their intrigue and subtle influence but not for their counsel; furthermore, leaders were frequently advised to ignore their wives and to do the reverse in whatever they advised (Goldhamer 1978).

The tradition not to select women as members of advisory groups possibly created more problems than either Goldhamer or Curle were able to recognize or to discuss. Happily, as the twenty-first century looms, this situation ranks high on the list of social reform at all levels of public and private administration. It has been observed that such a small number of women were elected in the recent Congressional election in the United States that, according to one media commentator, the next round of government will look at the 'femininization' of the political process.

Females may have been underestimated for their ability to contribute to the decision-making process, but this does not mean that leaders only selected or recruited advisers who were well versed in local politics. On the contrary, many leaders sought advice from outside their organization and even from outside the country. This process, which I have termed 'outsourcing', has prevailed throughout history right down to the present day. In earlier times, the problems related especially to the re-education of the peripatetic adviser.

During the almost thousand years of the Middle Ages it was not unusual for rulers to select strangers or the mobile members of society to their counsel. The sophists, as they were called, were wanderers with the attributes of wit and intelligence derived from their multiple experiences abroad (Goldhamer 1978). The selection of such members was
unproblematic except that their re-education and constant mobility eventuated unsettled conditions for leaders.

Education of the foreign adviser required time, patience, and skill. When instruction was thorough and successful, advisers served their masters well; however, when the reverse was true, leaders met with disastrous results, especially when advisers suggested cures more severe than problems. Advisers from outside the community and who were on the move stayed for a short time; problems associated with constant (re)adjustment tormented both advisers and leaders.

2.4.1.4 Adjustment

(1) it is never possible in this field to separate entirely the technical from the social or psychological, for unless a man adjusts adequately to his surroundings, his technical performance will be flawed (Curle 1968:12).

‘Adjustment’ suggests change so as ‘to match or fit or to adapt or conform’ as to new conditions or to new relationships (American Heritage Dictionary 1994:11). Problems of adjustment constitute major concerns for advisers who assume positions in environments different from those in which they previously worked. Problems range from being unmatched or unfitted for a new environment to not adapting or not conforming to new relationships.

Advisers realize that however wide their experience, the new role will be different from any other role or position, both intellectually and technically. As Curle (1968) so aptly elaborated: “(1)t is not only that the subject-matter of the role is different; the structure of the organization will have little in common with what the adviser has experienced
previously" (p. 17). Adjustment requires time and patience. The underlying issue is one of ‘briefing’. Briefing, often referred to as the ‘socialization’ or the ‘training period’, provides an opportunity for advisers to become acquainted with the people, the context, and the issues before commencing any new situation which involves change, reform, or reconstruction.

Advisers are wise to assume a tentative attitude when they assume a new position; they should tread softly, focus on minor tasks, and in the beginning, develop a working relationship with other members while slowly realizing that “(t)he entire initial phase may be earning the right to advise” (Curle 1968:20). Advisers meet and converse with members of the new group and understand that those who have a history of involvement in the organization know a tremendous amount more about the environment, the situations, and the approaches.

Adjustment becomes a problem of ‘approach’. Differences in context create differences in approach so that what will work in one context may not always work in another or, as Curle elaborated: “... what will succeed in a rich country in one continent will probably not work in the same way in a poor country in another” (Curle 1968:17). The wise and expert adviser learns that in most cases the context cannot be changed; it is the adviser who must adjust the approach in an effort to adapt to the new environment.

Discussions of context are imbedded in discussions of culture, values, and codes of behaviour. E. V. Thompson (1977), in his award winning novel Beckie, advised artists of the importance of having a complete understanding of the culture in which they worked.
A good artist, Thompson concluded, is accepted wherever he chooses to work, but he must observe the rules of the people who live there because this is their code. Breaking this code can be disastrous.

Thompson’s advice has implications for the adviser. Those who are involved in policy making and policy analysis cannot afford the luxury of adopting a value-neutral approach. Good policy analysis requires a thorough understanding of the historical and the contemporary, the past and the present (Pal 1992). The adviser’s role implies change. To understand the cultural implications of change is to understand and be in touch with priorities, traditions, and ‘values’ of the group with whom the adviser will work. Values are the root of human conduct (Wynn 1980 in Downer 1991); if the values of the adviser and the values of the advised are in conflict, then the change process can be doomed to failure.

Persons going through (the) painful process of (re)adjustment customarily go into retreat. Their self-assurance wanes, they are more reluctant to express opinions, they feel worried and guilty because they recognize that they cannot contribute to the situation (Curle 1968: 18).

When briefing is minimized, the problem becomes either one of over-confidence or under-confidence. The most destructive stance for an adviser to assume is to reject the importance of the initial consultation and information-sharing stage and to adopt an attitude of superiority and fault-finding, wherein advisers overconfidently reject and overtly criticize the organization and its members (Curle 1968). Lack of personal adjustment could also result in a situation of under-confidence which could impact significantly on the psychological well-being and self-esteem of advisers. When the
newness begins to wane and the issues and problems surface, advisers may feel daunted by realizations of inadequacy and futility. A psychological crisis of grave proportions may develop among advisers; such a situation could act as a strong force to curb the zeal of the highly motivated.

2.4.1.5 Inaction

Advisers suffer tremendously when leaders are slow to act or when they fail to demonstrate any intention to take action. Advisers are usually proponents of bold and decisive action; they are critical of and frustrated by leaders who waste time with idle talk and who show no immediate sign of wanting to act. It has been claimed that discussions in council are an excuse for action and that "(c)ommittee deliberations have been criticized as a substitute for thinking" (Goldhamer 1978:123). It should be noted that some of the great advisers, such as Machiavelli, believed that there are advantages to tempering one's action since, with time, circumstances could change or information could be revealed which could change the nature of the situation; however, continued slow response tests the patience of advisers. In most instances, when discussion has ended, members want to see substantial activity immediately (Curle 1968). Leaders who hesitate inevitably earn the reputation of being deficient or fearful of the consequences of decisive action. And, while few leaders are gifted in both the art of discussion and the ability to act, inaction may degenerate to the point where both advisers and leaders are severely hampered by an inability to discuss or to decide (Goldhamer 1978). Dissatisfaction on both fronts could act as another powerful force to cause the advisory relation to seriously deteriorate.
Barb MacLellan, a North Vancouver parent who has served on school, district, and provincial advisory councils, confirms that problems arise when some advisers want more action than others and when action is impeded by external constraints. Some advisers are content to address minor issues such as the school calendar, others want more substantial responsibilities such as setting goals for schools and working to realize them. MacLellan adds that problems occur when advisers realize they do not represent the ultimate decision-making authority. She explained that advisory action is often limited by such externals as the Education Act, union rules, and by board policies. She stated it this way: “... so much of what goes on in schools is laid out in the school’s act, in teachers’ contracts, and so on, that parents really have very little room to move” (in Potter 1996:14).

The agency of advisers is determined by the leader. Leaders have knowledge which is of grave importance to the adviser: they are connected with the institution, they understand the organization, and they operate as chief executive officers. In this way leaders understand and determine the norms, goals, and values of the institution and of the advisory organization (Curle 1968). Alternatively, the adviser’s advice is futile unless it can be put to some use. In return for counseling, leaders most often reciprocate by channeling the advisory information or advice into the institution and the system. The second theory of advisory behaviour reflects the complementary relation between advisers and leaders - one can do nothing without the assistance of the other.
2.4.1.6 Rivalry

The pooling of insights and skills drawn from different backgrounds of experience can be most valuable if unmarred by interpersonal tension (Curle 1968:15).

'Ruley' implies competition between individuals. The extent of rivalry determines the tenor or atmosphere within groups and may depend inevitably upon the strength of character, the values, the attitude, the authority, and the control of a strong leader. It is the leader who establishes unity of purpose and registers any shifts in tone that foretell a decline in relationships (Goldhamer 1978). The leader models acceptable behaviour. Wise leaders do not show anger to those who have been officially placed in unofficial positions. Perfect control, calm, and a non-hostile atmosphere are most conducive to permit members of any group to present their views and to allow everyone an opportunity to discuss issues openly and freely unhindered by fear of criticism or scorn. The leader displays strong confidence in each adviser. While the advice may not always be taken, the wise leader receives it in a loyal, gracious, and courteous manner while always maintaining the position of authority (Goldhamer 1978).

There are pompous, ungrateful, unceremonious, and patronizing leaders who find working with multiple advisers offensive, time consuming, and non-productive. Problems develop when such persons callously and frequently disregard or ignore others and their advice. Advisers, who depend on their position for recognition and community acclaim, may be psychologically and personally damaged by such an attitude; callous disregard of their advice could result in intense rivalry among advisers for recognition and for acceptance. The leader, who shows special favours to certain advisers and
ignores the talents and contributions of others, demonstrates a distasteful lack of diplomacy and may create an atmosphere of intense disharmony.

Rivalry can be avoided. Leaders, who devote time and attention to developing a positive working atmosphere and a strong collegial relationship among potential rivals, cultivate attitudes of tolerance, openness, and a desire to celebrate the accomplishments of everyone. Competitive forces will always lurk among those who have a wide range of special interests, special concerns, special needs, and special skills (Goldhamer 1978).

Avoiding incidents of rivalry does not mean that debate among advisers and leaders should be discouraged. One opinion holds that the hectic and frantic process of discussion and debate constitutes an inefficient and overt activity imposed upon leaders by a more powerful external agency, such as government, as a legitimating or approval-seeking strategy. It could also be argued that the service is offered to benefit the adviser and not the leader (Goldhamer 1978). Taylor (1991) has concluded that, through debate, issues are crystallized and understandings surface; in this way citizens are engaged in a vigorous democratic life of continually reforming their lives.

A prime source of rivalry between and among members of advisory groups may be found in the hierarchical arrangement of members. Initially, all members arrive as equals. The intensity of rivalry may depend on the importance or the prestige attributed to individual members who are raised to levels of importance higher than the others. Through such acts, the leader decides to cause a shift in relationships; there is created an ‘envied circle of intimacy’ whereby remaining members are excluded and must rest outside the circle
Advisers who are selected or elected to elevated positions, such as chairs, experience more frequent and, possibly, more intimate and regular contact with the leader. Eventually, other members come to realize the differential treatment and may demonstrate behavior akin to jealousy and intense rivalry. Members generally concede that operations of the council warrant ‘someone at the helm’; however, competition and hence rivalry may occur despite all efforts to maintain cordial and cooperative relations (Goldhamer 1978; Curle 1968).

Within schools, the idiosyncratic becomes apparent when those with most authority such as school principals, refuse to consider proposals of parents and community members, fearing the potential for negative consequences to themselves, such as job loss or demotion (McDonald in Lawton et al. (eds.) 1994). Principals in such situations find ways to avoid, to rescind, or to challenge. They may, therefore, be selective in the issues discussed at council meetings, possibly control the agenda, and may carefully control the extent and intensity of discussion (Dehli 1995). They may also remain unaware of the perception by parents and community members of the existence of an ‘envied circle of intimacy’ between principals and teachers or between principals and chairpersons.

Goldhamer (1978) posits that advisers to kings or to heads of state had to provide judgment, wisdom, as well as analytic and professional skills, and had to have the ability to apply these to policy. But, unfortunately, some advisers may not have the wisdom nor the essential skills. They may have accepted their position for all the wrong reasons and could be accused of giving bad advice. This, inevitably, also becomes a source of rivalry.
Applied to education, parents and community members may become advisers for what may be deemed as the wrong reasons: to enhance their position in the community, to advance their child's placement, or to gain self-importance. Add to this the fact that many advisers may not have knowledge of educational issues and the images signal a disturbing sequence of potentially rivalrous conditions for those principals who have never operated schools under the watchful eye of parents and community members and for those parents who volunteer to participate as advisers.

2.4.2 Summary

In summary, in this section I have elaborated some of the problems resulting from technical and psychological issues associated with the advisory experience. The technical issues involved problems associated with access, number, and selection; the psychological issues related to attitude and were discussed as problems associated with issues of adjustment, inaction, and rivalry. Some issues, it should be noted, such as not providing access, selecting too many members, refusing to act, or projecting a pompous and dominant attitude, are problems generated by and solely attributed to leader behaviour. Other problems, such as seeking and not finding access and failing to adjust to new situations, are attributable solely to the behaviour and attitude of advisers.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have reviewed literature that has helped to inform the following questions: (1) What types of activities have involved parents at the local school? (2) What is the historical background of parent participation in organized school
committees? (3) How is participation defined? (4) What is a rationale for the current push for civic participation in public institutions such as schools? (5) Who generally participates in school-based organized groups? (6) What expertise may participants bring with them? (7) What are some examples of situations which participants encounter and how do they approach them? and, (8) What are some negative consequences of participation?

Research generally supports the importance of parent and community participation in education (Epstein 1992, 1995; Henderson 1988; Cervonne & O’ Leary 1982; Davies 1976) and also supports the view that the school administrator occupies a pivotal position in determining the nature and the extent of this participation (Hughes, Burgess & Moxon 1991; LaRocque 1985; Goldring 1986, 1990). Despite the apparent consensus, there is limited research to determine the exact nature of the role that parents assume within organized school committees such as school councils. Most studies have focused on the types of parent involvement activities (Epstein 1992, 1995; Hughes, Burgess & Moxon 1991; Swap 1993) and the positive effects of such participation on student achievement (Chrispeels 1991; Bronfenbrenner 1986).

Many studies of parent participation in organized school committees, such as councils, (Radnofsky 1994; Malen & Ogawa 1986; Beattie 1985; Davies 1976) have concluded that, while a solid core of parents has become involved, there continues to exist a strong degree of dissatisfaction with the nature and extent of involvement. One key concern is the refusal of principals to devolve power to those willing to participate.
The rationale for the present study has been stated in Chapter One, but bears repetition. There is no known Canadian study in an educational context which elaborates the nature of advisement and the relationship between those who give and receive advice. Studies from political contexts have provided valuable information to help formulate the conceptual framework to explore the relationship between members of an advisory council and their leader. My data-gathering approach follows from the advice of Colin Evers (in Duignan & Macpherson 1992) who suggests that to understand any reform, researchers must consider not only the opinions of those directly involved in the reform, but must also consider the opinions and observations of those most likely to experience the effects of the reform. In my view, as educational policy makers continue to emphasize the importance of parent and community participation, there is need to secure feedback from all groups such as parents, community members, and teachers, who are not members of school councils, to understand the weaknesses and the strengths of this form of participation.

Data for this study, therefore, come from the following sources: (1) on-site observations during meetings of an advisory group; (2) the reported experiences of parents, community members, and teachers who were members of an advisory council for more then two years; (3) the experiences of leaders who directed the operations of the advisory group; (4) the experiences of constituents or those who presumably experienced the effects of decisions of the advisory group; and (5) written documents prepared by the province of Ontario, the school board, and the secondary school. The documents were appropriate because they contained the stated aims of the reform to establish school advisory councils
in the province of Ontario. Willower (1994) suggests that the process of studying the aims of a reform and comparing these with the reform in practice enables the researcher to identify the gaps that may exist between theory and practice or between what is desired and what actually exists. Such knowledge, Willower claims, may assist administrators and policy makers to formulate guidelines for improvement. Chapter Three elaborates further on the research methodology.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I sketch a little of my personal background and why I undertook this study. I also present a rationale for the selection of the research design, the approach used to select the site and the participants, the phases in data collection and data analysis, ethical concerns, the approach used to analyze and to present the data, and the procedural schedule.

3.1 Personal Background, Research Design, the Site, and the Sample

3.1.1 Personal Background and Research Design

I have been an educator for more than twenty years and during that time I have taught students from grades kindergarten through to high school using the languages of both English and French. I am also a parent of three adult children. As an educator, I have played an advocate role for parent participation in education. I believe in full participation by the maximum number of parents. I recall, as far back as 1964, in a small community on the west coast of Newfoundland, I was assigned a class of Grade X students. Early in the school year, I hosted a meeting for parents. The topic I had chosen for discussion was ‘literacy’ and the important role parents could play to ensure that their teenage sons and daughters read widely. This, I informed the parents, was one way they could assist if they wanted their children to experience success. It would seem that, at the
early age of seventeen, I was somehow aware that, as a beginning teacher, I could not fulfill the mandate to educate without support from parents. Unfortunately, while there was an excellent attendance at this meeting, there were no questions asked and no comments made. I was the only person who spoke.

Throughout my career as a classroom teacher and as an administrator, I have attempted to work extensively with parents through offering second language programs designed to help parents to assist their children, especially those registered in French Immersion classes. I have also provided opportunities for parents to work as tutors and volunteers in the classroom. I have relied on the research of Joyce Epstein and John Bastiani to help me to understand the role that professional educators, such as myself, must play to promote meaningful participation in decision making at the school level. As a doctoral student, therefore, the opportunity to observe parents and community members with educators, within the formal structure of a school advisory council, enabled me to further understand the crucial role that parents can play at this level of participation.

The earliest decision in this study, therefore, related to research design. A design was required that enabled an in-depth description and interpretation of the relationship between educational advisers and their principal from the multiple perspectives of those within the advisory group, those outside the group, and members of constituent groups which the advisers presumably represented. I believed that the ideas, beliefs, and intentions of individuals moving within a particular setting or context would help to
create a composite picture of the realities of the relationship between and among the individuals. I further believed that the ideas, beliefs, and intentions would emerge from an examination of multiple sources of information such as documents, discourse, and observations.

A research design was therefore required that was relational, meaningful, and illuminating: relational in that it permitted me to develop a relationship with those who agreed to participate in the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 1994); meaningful in that it enabled me to see and to hear how individuals constructed and interpreted the rules of agency within the setting (Burgess 1985) or unique context (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983); and, based on a personalized version of the conceptual framework of Adams (1996), illuminating in that it provided information from multiple sources. These sources included (1) the documented realities or the information available to the community through written documents such as policies, plans, reports, and minutes; (2) the experienced realities or the expressed ideas and opinions of those directly involved as advisers; (3) the directed realities or the ideas and opinions of the leaders who directed the formulation of policy that guided the operations of the group; and (4) the observed realities or the voiced perceptions of those not directly involved in the advisory group but who, because of their official status at district office or because of their place in the greater community of the school, benefited from the work of the advisers and their leader. A qualitative case study design was ultimately selected.
Qualitative research implies no set methodological requirement (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983); therefore, this design enabled me to use a variety of activities to gather information from multiple sources (Yin 1993; Burgess 1985). I studied available literature on school councils and I collected and analyzed pertinent information in documents prepared by the council, the school, the district, and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. This review also took me outside of education to study the work of Adam Curle (1968) and of Herbert Goldhamer (1978) who wrote on the role of the political adviser and difficulties confronting those who proffer advice to political leaders.

Throughout this study, I attempted to extract meaning from the total environment that governed the behaviour of the group I was studying. The qualitative design enabled me:
a) to enter into the context of a secondary school as observer; b) to become an observer during school council and district council meetings; c) to review documents prepared by the school, the district office, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and those prepared by council members related to policy and operating procedures of the advisory group; d) to develop a rapport with council members, school staff, and district officials; e) to conduct semi-structured interviews with council members, with district office officials, and with parents and teachers who were members of constituent groups which the council presumably represented; f) to attend conferences hosted by the ministry, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the school board, and The Canadian Bar Association addressing issues of parent and community participation in school councils;
and, g) to present the findings in words rather than numbers in a case study format. Table 3.1 presents the key sources of data.

**TABLE 3.1 SOURCES OF DATA**

- On-site observations during school visitation and district council meetings;
- Fieldnotes during attendance at 15 meetings, 3 conferences, and during visits to the school and to the school board office;
- Semi-structured interviews with 28 participants: 17 parents, 5 teachers, 3 community members, a trustee, a principal, and a superintendent;

3.1.2 Selecting The Site and Gaining Access

The selection of the research site was based on three criteria: (1) that the school council had been in operation for at least one year, (2) that the principal and council members were receptive to my presence at successive council meetings, and (3) that the principal and other council members would agree to participate in scheduled semi-structured interviews during the research period. In the search for a site, I made personal contacts with principals in schools that were recommended by those familiar with the school system in the greater Metropolitan Toronto area.

Site selection was limited. While many schools in Ontario are presently in the process of establishing advisory councils, few schools had advisory councils established and
functioning when this research began. In the fall of 1995, I attended a Developing Quality Schools Conference sponsored by the Department of Educational Administration at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Approximately thirty administrators attended the conference; an informal survey of the group showed that only seven schools had established a council. One school was accessible from my location.

Gaining access to the site did not follow any set plan. The principal from this school was one of the presenters at the conference. He explained that the advisory group had been established and operational for almost three years. He described the process whereby the council members came together and how their contribution benefited the educational environment of the school. In addition, this school was recommended by a fellow student who was on study leave from the school, it was highlighted by the authors of the report of the Royal Commission on Learning (Government of Ontario 1995), and it was recommended by a professor at the University of Ottawa who was researching issues in Ontario schools. These realities encouraged me to make an informal request to the principal of Shieldside Secondary to use the advisory council at his school as the site for this study.

The principal welcomed the idea and invited me to attend an upcoming general meeting of parents at the school. He explained that the meeting was planned to fill two vacancies on the advisory council. This meeting provided an opportunity for me to see and to hear
the council members as they explained to those gathered some of their accomplishments and experiences since the initiation of the advisory group.

Following this event, I spoke to the principal and felt assured that the school environment would be receptive and would facilitate the presence of a researcher. I made a formal written request to the principal to attend bimonthly council meetings as a non-participant observer. In the request, I included an abbreviated copy of my research proposal and I assured the principal that it was not my intention to do an assessment of the council nor to compare this council with others. I indicated that my purpose was to attend council meetings, to become acquainted with members, and to observe how the members attended to issues and concerns. Access to the site was granted.

3.1.3 The Sample

Selecting the participants required attendance at numerous council and committee meetings. I attended seven advisory council meetings during the period from December 1995 to May 1996, five meetings of the Working Group established at the Halloway Board of Education office to formulate the policy to direct schools in the district to form advisory councils, and two public meetings organized by the school board to receive input to the successive drafts of the proposed policy. I also attended the school board meeting where the final draft of the policy was accepted. This last meeting was an opportunity to become familiar with some of the concerns expressed by trustees with respect to the establishment of advisory councils in their area.
I relied heavily on the authority and knowledge of 'experts' to gain understanding of the phenomenon under study (Anderson 1990). The participants were not pre-selected. As the study progressed it became apparent to whom I should speak and for what reasons. I decided early in the study that the participants should represent four perspectives: the perspective of the advisers, their principal, officials at district office, and the perspective of the constituents or those whom the advisory group represented.

I, therefore, interviewed parents, teachers, and community members who were advisers to the principal. I also interviewed the principal, a district office official, teachers and parents who were members of constituent groups that advisers presumably represented. I interviewed a total of 28 participants. This number included short interviews with parents during parent/teacher night at the school wherein parents completed a school assessment questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared by the school and included questions related to the school advisory council.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 The Interviews: Approach and Rationale

Individuals' consciousness give access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people (Seidman 1991:1).

Interviews represent a form of verbal interaction between two or more individuals and provide the potential to gain access to the perceptions of reality of identified informants.
Vygotsky (1987) suggests that what participants think becomes embedded in their words so that each word reflects his or her consciousness. However, it is my experience, and this is confirmed by research (Glesne & Peshkin 1992; Merriam 1988), that successful interviews do not just happen. They result from rapport and trust which are developed between the inquirer and the participant over a period of time. To create this rapport and trust, I spent considerable time attending meetings and assisting at public functions in the school. I assisted at a Science Fair, Career Evening, and an orientation evening whereby members of the staff and the advisory council welcomed in-coming Grade IX students and their families, introduced them to programs offered at the school, and invited parents to become involved in the advisory group. These events enabled me to develop an initial sense of the context and the atmosphere of the school and to begin to establish a relationship with council members and members of the staff. Attendance at meetings also provided an opportunity to review and to re-evaluate the appropriateness of my interview questions and to acquire a final sense of which questions to ask, of whom, when, and in what manner (Wolcott 1990).

The first set of interviews took place with the advisers and the principal. These were extensive interviews and formed the nucleus of this study insofar as these informants were the élites or those who had a “particular experience or knowledge about the subject” (Anderson 1990:223). This group, consciously or unconsciously, explored the meanings of their behaviour with me and acted as teachers to help me construct a comprehensive picture of their realities (Glesne & Peshkin 1992). The semi-structured interviews
followed an outline and questions were carefully prepared, sequenced, and worded to avoid ambiguity.

The interview protocol was created in five stages: (1) after an extensive review of the literature; (2) in response to scrutiny by members of my advisory committee prior to going into the field; (3) following attendance and observations during school council, district council, and community meetings; (4) subsequent to attendance at provincial conferences devoted to the subject of school councils; and, (5) as a result of careful study of available documents.

Samples of the interviews are found in the Appendix section of this thesis. It should be noted that, during the interviews, neither the exact wording nor the order of questions was duplicated. The interviews were modified to suit the background of the teachers, the parents, the trustee, the community members, and the leaders. The intent of the extensive preplanning was to ensure that I would not omit to query any important aspect of the informants’ experiences and also that I would respect and use wisely the interview time.

Most interviews stayed within the designated forty-five to sixty minute time schedule.

Interviews focused on the following: the respondents’ background prior to coming to the advisory group, how and when they initially became involved with the group, their aspirations or what they had hoped to accomplish by becoming members, how they were socialized into the group, what they perceived to be their role and/or the role of other members, their sentiments with respect to issues and decisions, and their level of
satisfaction with the consequences of their performance. For example, I asked council members: i) how they received their position; ii) how they interpreted their position; iii) what background information they received pertinent to the issues being discussed; iv) how they interpreted the decision-making experiences; and v) how information was communicated to them and to members of their constituent groups.

At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and reiterated the purposes of the research. At this time also, I restated my status, why the interview was taking place (Anderson 1990), and the procedure or interview format. Permission to use a recording device had been received from each participant when the time and place for the interview was established. There were no objections to this method of information gathering and no one withdrew from the study or the interview process; all respondents seemed eager to inform, to instruct, and to help increase my understanding of their experiences.

Interviews were conducted in a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere at a pre-established time and location. A variety of locations was used. Some interviews were conducted at a school in the earlier part of the day, prior to council meetings, while others were conducted at the work-site of members or by telephone using a recording device. I personally transcribed all interviews. When typed, each interview averaged twenty to twenty-five pages of double-spaced text; some yielded as many as forty-five pages.

Following the interviews with advisers and the principal, I proceeded to identify key informants in 'the external group', i.e., those who could provide the perspectives of
representatives of groups responsible for overseeing and assisting in establishing the council. I wanted to understand where the perceptions, intentions, and attitudes of the external groups converged with or diverged from those of the members of the advisory group with respect to what advisers do and the standard operating procedures. At the district office, through attendance at meetings of the Work Group established to formulate the policy to direct principals to develop advisory groups, I formed a working relationship with a district office official who agreed to be interviewed. This superintendent was questioned about his personal background, his perspective as to the rationale for the establishment of advisory councils, and what he perceived to be some of the positive and negative consequences of the change. This interview was conducted at central office at the end of the work day.

The third group of participants were representatives of the constituent groups that the members of the advisory council presumably represented. Because I did not live in the community or work at the school, I spent much time designing a workable strategy to identify whom, when, and where I would interview informants in this group. I wanted to speak with teachers and parents who were not official members of the advisory council but whose interests were supposedly represented by the members of the advisory group. My intention to schedule interviews with teachers on the staff of Shieldside Secondary presented its own challenges. Most of my time at the school was in the evenings attending formal public functions or regular council meetings. This made it difficult to
meet teachers on staff. I sought and received permission to visit the school during the regular day. I met one staff member through my course work at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; another while sitting in the staffroom and chatting informally with staff members who wandered in and out; and the third, the vice-principal, Pam, agreed to be interviewed when she knew of my difficulty attracting participants. She was a recent Doctor of Education graduate from The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Identification of parents in the external environment of the school presented another problem. Through the efforts of one teacher, Fay, I was introduced to two parents who had children in the school. These parents were interviewed by telephone. Since I wanted to speak to a larger sample of parents, I received permission to circulate in the corridor of the school on the evening of the parent-teacher interviews in the spring of 1996. In this manner, I spoke to ten parents using a questionnaire prepared by the school and which contained questions related to school programs and the advisory council. Each questionnaire yielded three to four pages of information.

No interviews from any group were rejected or withdrawn. The interviews provided information about the experiences of others and the meanings that they derived from these experiences. Such information could not have been obtained in any other way.
3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Analysis of the Interviews

All interviews were typed verbatim. There was no attempt to paraphrase or summarize. I continually worked to reduce the information to manageable text; however, I took extreme care to safeguard the informants' voices. I interpreted what was said but, to maintain an honest account, I did not insert my words; the informants spoke for themselves. As Seidman has cautioned:

To substitute the researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what the participants say for their actual words is to substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participant. Although inevitably the researcher's consciousness will play a major role in the interpretation of interview data, that consciousness must interact with the words of the participant recorded as fully and as accurately as possible (Seidman 1991:87).

Transcripts were shared with respondents from the advisory council prior to analysis. This exchange was time-consuming but helpful. Most participants reviewed the transcripts and either confirmed or elaborated upon the discussion by adding further text.

During the analysis period, important and significant phrases, sentences, and paragraphs were initially identified, highlighted, and labeled. Transcripts were read and re-read in their entirety to allow for the identification of themes and sub-themes. Information that seemed extraneous was extracted and moved to another file. This process resulted in multiple layers of codes and sub-codes that evolved and continued to evolve from start to finish of the analysis process. Information in each transcript was labeled at first to match
the broad categories of the conceptual framework and the research questions, i.e., context, personal background, issues, meta-issues, and decision-making processes. As I went deeper into the pool of information, new categories emerged until all information fitted into general themes that were representative of the great supply of data.

Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit the presence of multiple observers during the data-gathering procedure nor during the interpretation phase since I was the sole researcher. This project was undertaken to fulfill the requirements of a degree program and not a project undertaken by a research team. I am aware that the participation of multiple observers could have ensured consistency and reliability of the data and possibly permitted convergence of themes with respect to interpretation (Miles and Huberman 1994). In defense, my interpretations confirmed and were confirmed by the conclusions of previous researchers such as those of Pateman (1970) and Beattie (1985) who studied participation and by Goldhamer (1978) and Curle (1968) who wrote about the role of advisers in political contexts. Therefore, triangulation or convergence of themes occurred through the following three-fold process: (a) study of related literature, (b) personal observations, and (c) quotation of participant statements given in response to interview questions. I feel that the data are linked to the categories which I have selected by theories of participation and by theories of advisement. Furthermore, I believe that validity is ensured through the generous use I have made of participant and document quotations throughout the presentation of findings in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven. These quotations, I feel, strongly support and verify my interpretations.
3.3.2 Analysis of Fieldnotes

Observations took place during various meetings including those of the advisory council, the school board Working Group, and during community meetings hosted by both the school and the board. I took copious notes throughout. I recorded what was said, by whom, and in response to what issues.

Throughout the observation period I was looking to understand the advisory process. During council meetings, I sought answers to such questions as: Who is giving advice? What kinds of advice do advisers give? What advice is accepted or rejected? Who has the greatest amount of access to the principal? What is the response to opinions and ideas expressed by advisers? During meetings at the school board office, I sought answers to such questions as: What issues do advisers discuss? What are some concerns with respect to the selection of advisers? How are advisers and principals briefed to ease their adjustment to the new roles? During community meetings, I sought answers to such questions as: How much interest is shown by the community to the reform to establish advisory councils in each school? What are some of the concerns of community members related to the reform? What information do members of the community have with respect to the responsibilities of council members and the issues that involve them?

I began the analysis of fieldnotes early to understand what I had observed. As the notes were analyzed, memo writing became a form of reflective thinking and analysis of events, people, and issues (Vygotsky 1987). The notes were later transcribed, coded, studied for
patterns and consistency, and placed in files; files matched the preliminary coding scheme of the interviews.

During this period, I moved from a description of the members and their activities to explanations of how their actions produced effects (Malen & Knapp 1994); according to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), I was moving from complete subjectivity to adopt a more objective data analysis approach. Finally, after a process of elimination and inclusion, I was more certain about which information I would include in the final case study.

### 3.3.3 Analysis of Documents

Documents represent written archival messages “produced by an individual or institution in the normal course of life or work and which provide a record or part of the history of the individual or institution” (Saran 1985:213). I collected documents that could help contribute to the construction of a body of knowledge. The documents I required were easily accessed and included minutes of earlier council meetings as well as policy documents and information handbooks which had been produced and circulated within the district both prior to and during the period of my study. All documents had been produced within the past two years; I did not experience the retrieval problems of someone seeking information produced a decade or more before.

To obtain documents, I depended on a large number of individuals such as council members, school staff, and district office staff. Documents were readily available. The recording secretary of the advisory council devoted considerable time to selecting
photocopies of minutes and articles which had been distributed to the staff, to parents, and to the school community during the general meetings hosted by the principal prior to the formation of the council. At the district office, my name and mailing address were placed on the mailing list; I received all notices of the district council meetings and each re-edited copy of the district policy. At the Ministry level, I collected newsletters and documents which had been circulated to the public by the Ontario Parent Council and by the Ministry.

The document analysis process presented its own set of problems. Saran (1985) suggests that documents represent archival information that needs to be carefully analyzed. During the document analysis process, I read each document, highlighted and labeled text, and in this manner tried to abstract meaning from the 'messages' the documents were intended to relay (Saran 1985). I had to subjectively decide what information was significant and could serve as data and what was insignificant. Using a process described extensively by Saran (1985), I developed a step by step process whereby I identified and coded the factual information in each document, organized the information to match the order of categories in the conceptual framework and the research questions, and continually verified my understandings by making comparisons with information generated from the literature review, the interviews, the observations, and previous document reviews.

A document summary format was developed following a design developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This procedure helped me to organize and to summarize information
from the lengthy and often technical documents. I identified the document by its title, I
placed the document in a context or category, summarized its contents, and outlined its
significance; I allowed space for notation of categories, themes, and codes.

3.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical problems can relate both to the subject matter of the research and
to its methods and procedures (Anderson 1990:18).

Descriptive, qualitative research follows rules of research ethics as do other research
designs. Since research ethics are regarded as professional standards or controls to
safeguard against any possible abuse of research participants (Anderson 1990), my study
was submitted to and successfully passed an ethical review by the faculty of Educational
Administration in collaboration with the research ethics committee of The Ontario
Institute for Studies in Education and the University of Toronto before I entered the field.

Throughout the research period, a code of behaviour guided my approach during
meetings and during the interview sessions. Participants were informed of the intent,
extent, and methods I would use to gather information (Anderson 1990). A letter stating
the problem and related research questions was sent to the school principal in advance.
Permission to attend council meetings and to interview members was formally requested
and received. All council members signed a ‘Consent to Interview’ form and were
assured that I would safeguard their anonymity. Participants were also informed that
participation in the formal interviews was completely voluntary. No one refused to be
interviewed.
During the interviews I avoided influencing respondents’ answers, I maintained a natural attentive manner, and I used an active listening posture (Merriam 1988). Seidman (1992) has stated that listening is the most important skill in interviewing. I listened to what participants said and I repeated what they said to derive deeper meaning. I was continually attentive to the passage of time, to incidence of participant fatigue, and to signs of waning interest.

All interviews were conducted in a relaxed, non-threatening atmosphere. Throughout the research period, every attempt was made to maintain a friendly yet professional research manner. I felt I was able to cultivate an attitude of mutual respect with my participants by being honest and open. Participants were provided opportunities to ask questions and to engage in conversation with me about the research. I arrived on time for meetings and I remained as inconspicuous as possible as a non-participant observer.

In the final report of this study, every attempt was made to disguise the identity of participants, the school, and the district in the event that information was revealed that could be considered detrimental to anyone.

3.5 Procedural Schedule

Data collection was conducted in several phases and extended over a period of seven months. Following is a brief description of the six phase process.
Phase I

The first phase consisted of an extensive synthesis of the literature on issues related to parent and community participation in education, the origin of school councils, and the positive and negative consequences of parent participation in decision making at the school level. I studied the literature on school councils from both a national and an international perspective.

Phase II

The second phase included informal observations and conversations ‘in the field’. The purpose of this phase was to identify the exact boundaries of the case (Yin 1993). I identified potential study sites and met with principals and district office officials within the greater Metropolitan Toronto area. This procedure helped me to develop an initial sense of the context and the demographics of the study site. This phase was extremely important since the Ontario school system was unknown to me. I agree with Wolcott (1988) that a knowledge of the setting and the people in it help the researcher to get a sense of which questions to ask, of whom, when, and in what manner. During this phase, I eventually identified the final study site.

Phase III

The third phase consisted of extensive listening, observing, and note-taking while attending council meetings, provincial conferences, and district meetings. During this
phase, I gathered further contextual information and continually tried to establish a relational rapport with council members and with other élites who became significant informants.

**Phase IV**

The fourth phase included the collection of documents such as the terms of reference for the council, meeting agendas, minutes of previous meetings, the annual report for the school, newspaper articles, policy documents, and documents prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training such as the Handbook prepared to guide principals in the establishment of councils in their schools.

**Phase V**

During the fifth phase, I conducted scheduled interviews with council members, with members of constituency groups whom members presumably represented, and with district office officials.

**Phase VI**

The sixth phase was the data analysis phase. Filing, sorting, and coding were a continuous aspect of this phase. After two months of reading the transcripts, the fieldnotes, and the documents, a picture began to emerge. During this latter phase I moved from a description of the members and their activities to explanations of how their actions produced effects (Malen & Knapp 1994); I also transcended complete
subjectivity to adopt a more objective approach (Glesne & Peshkin 1992). Finally, after a process of elimination and inclusion, I was able to know with some certainty the exact nature of the information I would include in the final case study.

It should be noted that the data formed a case data base (Merriam 1988). The QSR Nud*IST qualitative data analysis program was used to index the data, scan for themes, keep records of categories, and help to manage the data.

3.6 Presentation of Data

The data are presented in the next four chapters. Each chapter is devoted to four specific realities: the documented realities, the experienced realities, the directed realities, and the observed realities. Each reality presents data from four distinct sources: a review of documents, interviews with advisers, the principal, and a superintendent as well as interviews with members of constituent groups such as parents and teachers.

3.7 Conclusion

The written narrative which follows flows from the accumulated and analyzed data derived from participant observation, document analysis, fieldnotes, and interviews. Since the intention was not to provide a formula for behavior, the interpretive design most suits the intent. I remained faithful to the stated research questions as well as the issues and themes which emerged during the research period and data analysis. In the end, this study portrays the essential characteristics and consequences of social behavior
which inevitably give structure to the social realities of human beings acting and thinking
(Allison 1990; Burgess 1985) in the bounded setting of a school advisory council.

In summary, to maintain the heuristic quality of the case study, while I extracted
information from multiple sources, I continually asked: What is occurring? What are the
implications of what is occurring? What are the relationships linking occurrences?
(Merriam 1988). The research design allowed me to mingle with and become familiar
with the 'culture' of the bounded system of the research site while citing and interpreting
the reasons, intentions, motives, norms, and values of the social group which ultimately
gave meaning to the phenomenon under study (Hughes 1990).
4.1 Desired Outcomes of Participation

4.1.1 Introduction

The current trend for increased citizen participation in public institutions in Ontario can be linked to a larger global trend which has been in progress since the end of the Second World War in such Western European countries as Great Britain, France, and Italy. The central aims of participation form the basis for two theories of participation, namely, the reformist theory and the general crisis theory (in Beattie 1985). As previously outlined, from the perspective of the reformist theory, the aims of participation are responsiveness or the belief that people respond positively when they are provided with opportunities for participation; personal development in that people gain moral and educational experiences when they have responsibility for matters which affect them; and overcoming alienation or the belief that, as people come to know one another, the more they come to understand the collective purposes of society.

The basic principal underlying the general crisis theory is that participation is essential to maintaining power and control within institutions and organizations in times of economic crisis. The aim is to ensure legitimacy by providing opportunities for citizens to be
continually informed about problems, potential solutions, and inevitable consequences of fiscal irresponsibility.

The theories of participation and the principles underlying them serve as a point of departure to determine whether the rationale for participation elsewhere parallels that of the governing educational élite in the province of Ontario, the Halloway Board of Education, and Shieldside Secondary School - the site for this study. In Chapter Four, therefore, pertinent documents are studied to identify the desired outcomes of participation. These documents present the aims of participation from the perspective of the three spheres of influence on the activities of the school advisory council at Shieldside Secondary School: the province, the school board, and the school.

Those who promote participation do so by stating the desired outcomes or the reasons why they support such an ideology. Identification of the desired outcomes of a reform may enable the establishment of a link between what is and what ought to be. This activity, according to Donald Willower (1994), is an essential aspect of reflective inquiry; it "shapes awareness of gaps between reality and ideal" (Willower 1994:2).

In this chapter, I use the documents listed in Table 4.1 to respond to two questions: What are the desired outcomes of participation? Do statements in the documents support the aims of participation stated in the reformist and the general crisis theories of participation put forward by Nicholas Beattie (1985)?
I begin by examining statements in documents from the province of Ontario and discuss these within the framework of the following constructs: responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy.

4.1.2 Provincial Perspective

4.1.2.1 Introduction

In Ontario, the educational debate has swirled around the question of why participation is high on the government’s agenda and whether parents and the general public should participate in organized school committees. For example, Gerald Caplan, one of the authors of the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, "For the Love of Learning" (Government of Ontario 1995), in a statement to The Globe and Mail, argued that
parents neither have the time nor the expertise to manage schools; their role is to help their children at home (Caplan 1995). Government, on the other hand, has stated that parents and the general public not only have a democratic right to be informed about their children's schooling, they also have the right to question and to participate in discussions of issues in order "to provide advice to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board" (Government of Ontario 1995:3). The question addressed in this section is: Why does the government of Ontario feel that participation is important?

4.1.2.2 Responsiveness

Statements in Chapter Fourteen of the Commission Report (1995) suggest that, through participation, the education system could become more responsive to the needs of all spheres of the education community. The commission judged, for example, that through an improved information flow from the school to the community, parents would be "encouraged to participate more in the education of their children and in the life of the school" (p. 45) and, thereby, become better able to understand the educational needs of children as well as the needs of schools.

Improved communication was cited as a fundamental reason to promote the establishment of school councils according to the Commission Report. School councils would "complement the role of school boards" (p.45); parents and community members within councils would presumably provide knowledge that permitted boards to respond

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1 Herein referred to as the Commission Report
more satisfactorily to community conditions. School boards, the commission concluded, did not have access to this kind of information in the past and, therefore, could not respond to the needs of their communities.

A further benefit of school councils to school boards, according to the report, was the potential liaisons councils could create with business groups, health-care facilities, recreational and social agencies, religious groups, and municipalities. Such links, it was stated, could precipitate the eventuality of schools taking on a 'multi-purpose perspective' with the ability to respond to the social needs of students by offering multiple-service programs.

A review of a second document, PPM 122 (Government of Ontario 1995), also provided support for the theory that participation enabled the education system to respond to the needs of students. PPM 122, the document mandating school boards to direct principals to establish school councils, confirmed that the Government of Ontario viewed participation as the development of a partnership between schools and parents and as one way to share information about school programs. It was stated in the Memorandum that:

The Ministry of Education and Training is committed to encouraging partnerships that will enhance the education of the province's young people and foster increased sharing of information about the programs being offered by schools. (p. 1)

The creation of such partnerships, the Ministry assumed, helped schools to better respond to the needs of the community and thereby had the potential to enhance educational opportunities for all students.
4.1.2.3 Personal Development

Statements in the Commission Report also support personal development as one of the desired outcomes of participation. It was stated that participation in the school-community council would strengthen not only individuals but also communities attached to schools. It was reasoned that as communities were empowered to take responsibility for matters which affected them, they would “rediscover their assets” (p.44). The stated assets included commitment, understanding of local problems, a problem-solving rather than a service orientation, caring, flexibility and creativity, efficiency, shared values, and a focus on human capacity rather than deficiency.

Participation would also enhance the personal development of parents and children. The belief expressed was that, as families were provided opportunities to become better linked with school and with community agencies, participation could:

(E)nhance the primary role of parents in the education, growth, and development of their children by putting parents in regular contact, not only with teachers, but with various community agencies that assist parents in their responsibilities. (p.44)

The document elaborated that students would benefit since they were at the centre of all recommendations focusing on change and reform in the Ontario school system. From the students’ perspective, the Commission judged that participation would “... bring together many of the partners in education to reinforce their understanding of how they could influence and complement one another in their efforts on behalf of children” (p. 45).
Students’ education would be impacted on three fronts: from an improved and better coordinated academic and social program, preferably at school; from a better informed community with respect to the goals of education; and from improved understanding by the entire system of “the child’s real world” (p. 45).

4.1.2.4 Overcoming Alienation

The Commission judged that through community and school partnerships, principals could assist the cause of nurturing a more positive community attitude toward public education. The Commission believed that participation would enable principals to “move out into the community both as ambassadors of good will and, more importantly, as agents of change to establish a new understanding about the school and its responsibilities” (p.43). In this way, the report stated, principals would learn “the kind of alliance needed and the resources available in a given community” (p. 44) and, thereby, cultivate better understandings about the goals of public education.

4.1.2.5 Legitimacy

No statements from Chapter Fourteen of the Commission Report nor statements in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 identified economic benefits to be derived from participation. Drastic measures to reduce the deficit and to raise Ontario’s status on the bond market, however, cannot be ignored as reasons to explain the current trend in Ontario to encourage public participation in education. The Conservative Government, under Mike Harris, has cut $400 million from the education budget in one year. The
Minister of Education and Training, John Snobelen, explained such reductions in the language of economic reform with reference to cash flow and return on dollars spent.

Following is an excerpt from a quote by the Minister to *The Globe and Mail*:

> Ontario spends too much on education and gets too little in return compared to the rest of Canada - evidence that the province’s $13.6 billion system is “broken” and must be fixed (Lewington 1996:A1).

As statements were circulated in the print media, the Ministry distributed a document to all school boards in Ontario entitled “The Tool Kit” (Government of Ontario 1996). The document outlined the approach required to reduce educational spending. Attached to the document was a Memorandum to the Chairs of School Boards and Chairs of Minority Language Sections that elaborated the theme ‘Savings in Education’. In the introductory statement, the Minister identified those whom he had consulted to determine how the government could achieve “significant savings in the education sector” (p.3).

> I have consulted broadly with trustees, school board officials, teachers and students, as well as parents and taxpayers, on ways to make the education system in Ontario more affordable and more accountable, while still maintaining quality programming (Government of Ontario 1996:4,5).

The Minister elaborated that, through government consultation and public participation, everyone was convinced that savings in education could be achieved, that there must be opportunities to develop cost-saving measures at local schools, that solutions take time to be developed, and that funding to classrooms should be protected but that non-classroom expenditures should be reduced. The document clearly stated that “opportunities should
be provided for local decision-making and locally negotiated solutions” (Government of Ontario 1996:5).

Actions by the present Conservative Party support the contention that the Government in Ontario is slowly downgrading the role of school boards as local governing agents and enhancing the role of schools to govern their own affairs. Recent actions by the Minister, such as the reduction in the number of school boards, also support the theory that current efforts to keep parents and the general public involved and informed about economic realities could achieve greater levels of support for or legitimacy of the governing party.

Critics place government’s call for participation in the realm of schemes to involve the public to inform and to explain economic reform under the guise of consultation and advice seeking when, in reality, decisions have already been made. Participation, it can be concluded, enables government to maintain power and control in times of economic uncertainty. Only time will tell whether the present Progressive Conservative government can ward off serious criticism and maintain power when public institutions, such as education, are forced to operate under severe budget restrictions.

4.1.2.6 Summary

In summary, these documented realities support the view that the aims of both the reformist and the general crisis theories of participation are reflected in statements in documents from the Province of Ontario. The rationale for participation discernible from the global and provincial perspectives, therefore, brings us to question whether a similar
case can be made to explain the call for participation from the perspective of the Halloway Board of Education. The challenge is to look at statements in pertinent documents to identify this rationale.

4.1.3 District Perspective

The Halloway Board of Education has jurisdiction over Shieldside Secondary School, the site of the advisory council which served as the central source of data for this study. In this section, I briefly describe the county in which this board functioned, identify pertinent school board documents, and use statements in the documents to identify the aims of participation from the perspective of the school board.

4.1.3.1 Introduction

The Halloway Board of Education serves a large school district in southern Ontario. According to Townsend (1995), the board had jurisdiction over five cities where farming, manufacturing, and housing describe the predominant use of real estate. As for the people, there is a mixed blend of rich and poor (Townsend 1995). With respect to community support for education, the Halloway Board recently surveyed parent attitudes toward education and found a 75% confidence level with the system. The survey included questions to determine how schools related to and communicated with their community, how parents rated teacher performance, and how they viewed the visibility of the principal and the vice-principal.
The superintendent attributed the high level of community satisfaction to the long history of parent participation in this district. The district, he explained, worked conscientiously to cultivate an attitude of openness and cooperation among its schools and the members of its community. As an example, prior to the Ministry mandate to begin the formation of school councils (PPM 122 1995), a large percentage of the district schools, both elementary and secondary, had some form of parent involvement either in formal organizations such as PTAs or in programs to involve parents as volunteers.

The superintendent stated that the recent activity in the district to establish school councils simply reflected increased efforts to broaden participation to involve community members and to establish formal organizations where they had not previously existed. He said:

"We are giving parents a formal organization to work with and we are broadening the perspective to invite community members to be a part of that. We are taking the context of 'school as community' and giving it a different perspective because it is more than just the students and the parents who are directly involved in schools. (John)"

Interestingly, as the superintendent lauded the high participation level of parents within the Halloway Board of Education, local newspapers reported that parents were feeling snubbed because of the failure of the board to consult with the community on the issue of layoff notices to more than 1,500 board employees and also with respect to program cuts for special needs students. The board threatened to cut 25 percent of non-teaching professional positions such as speech language pathologists and social workers.
According to newspaper articles, parents strongly felt that they needed to organize in order to seek information and to fight the intended changes.

The purpose of this section, however, is to identify the aims of participation or the rationale for participation as stated in appropriate documents distributed by the Halloway Board of Education. The documents selected for review were the Board Renewal Plan (1995), Facts to Parents (1995), and the Policy Statement on School Councils (1996). These documents were relevant because they contained statements to explain the desired outcomes of participation at the district level and they were circulated within the district between October 1995 and October 1996, the period, according to the superintendent, when efforts to improve participation in the district began. Once again the aims are interpreted using the constructs of responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy.

4.1.3.2 Responsiveness

In May, 1995, the Halloway Board of Education passed a motion to form a committee to respond to the Ministry's directive to develop a policy directing schools in the region to establish school councils. The superintendent for educational services was charged with this responsibility. As a result, The Policy Statement on School Councils was developed and passed by the Halloway Board in June, 1996. Opening statements in the policy reiterated that one of the central aims of participation was to foster open communication with all sectors of the education community: "the (Halloway) Board of Education
believes that education is a shared responsibility involving students, parents, staff, and community members” and “the (Halloway) Board of Education recognizes that consultation with students, parents, staff, and community members is both useful and desirable.” Schools, it was stated, could better respond to the needs of all sectors of the community when all parties communicated as partners.

4.1.3.3 Personal Development

Statements from the document, The Policy Statement on School Councils, supported the theory that through participation the personal development of students could be enhanced: “(T)he (Halloway) Board of Education recognizes that parental interest and involvement at home and at school positively influence student achievement” and that “community participation in public school enhances educational opportunities for students.” Such statements lend support to the theory that personal development, in this case the personal development of students, was one of the aims of participation.

4.1.3.4 Overcoming Alienation

The Policy Statement on School Councils offered statements to support participation as a strategy to curb the emergence of negative attitudes toward public education. They read: “the (Halloway) Board of Education believes that community participation in public school can play a significant role in promoting and advancing public education” and “the (Halloway) Board of Education believes that interaction among students, parents, staff, and community members will foster mutual recognition and understanding and encourage
the integration of community services and resources.” There was an emphasis on participation as one way to reduce or to overcome a growing public alienation toward education that seemed to threaten the system. This is surprising considering the superintendent’s report of the results of a recent survey of parent attitudes which indicated strong (75%) support for the Halloway Board of Education.

4.1.3.5 Legitimacy

There were no statements in The Policy Statement on School Councils to support maintaining legitimacy as an aim of participation. However, in October, 1995 the Halloway Board of Education began a renewal process. The aims of renewal, as stated in the document The Board Renewal Plan, connected the rationale for participation with problems of fiscal restraint and concerns to maintain legitimacy in the face of difficult decisions to reduce educational spending throughout the system. Through the renewal plan the board aimed to: (1) “effect long-term budget savings”; (2) “develop a strategy to re-think the school system in a comprehensive manner”; and (3) “enhance the quality of critical educational programs and services while reducing non-classroom expenditures” (Halloway Board of Education 1995:1). The document stipulated that school administrators and board trustees, as well as teachers, support staff, parents, and taxpayers, would participate in the renewal effort.

Immediately following the school board receiving approval to proceed with the renewal process, a document entitled Facts for Parents (1995) was prepared for distribution. This
document outlined for parents the rationale for the process, how the renewal process would develop, what would be reviewed for renewal, how the process differed from "previous cost-cutting measures," what the implications were for staff, who would be involved in the process, and how parents could become involved. For the purposes of this study, the most significant statements were those stating why participation was necessary.

Renewal efforts were targeted specifically at reducing current spending in the system; however, before the board proceeded with cost-saving measures, consultation with the community was crucial. The document outlined that renewal affected "every participant in the system including parents, students, taxpayers, teachers and support staff, trustees, and officials." The rationale for participation was discernible from such statements as: "Renewal is a powerful strategy for controlling our own destiny as parents and teaching professionals, and re-shaping the system to suit the needs of every student within it ... to achieve long-term budget savings." The board saw participation as one way to maintain legitimacy while achieving the desired outcome of reduced spending in the face of assured reductions in transfer payments to the district from the provincial government.

4.1.3.6 Summary

In summary, the desired outcomes as identified in documents circulated by the Halloway Board of Education support the aims of participation put forward in the reformist and the general crisis theories of participation; namely, responsiveness, personal development,
overcoming alienation, and retaining legitimacy. The first aim was reflected in the appeal on the basis of shared responsibility and shared information, the second a commitment to offer relevant educational programs, the third a desire to reduce public criticism of the system, and the fourth a need to commence a program of economic restructuring. The district desired participation as a strategy to keep the community informed about efforts to achieve long-term budget savings through a reformed school system and reduced non-classroom expenditures. It could be surreptitiously concluded that the board could not do anything to risk loss of its high (75%) parent confidence rating. It could also be concluded that a public that is involved and well informed is one that is convinced that current decisions are the only possible and reasonable solutions in the face of declining government expenditure for educational programs. A well-informed public, it would seem, would demonstrate continued support and confidence in its governing élite in times of economic crisis.

The study now moves to the context of Shieldside Secondary School to examine documents to help determine the rationale for participation from a school’s perspective. The section begins with a brief description of the unique context of the school and a summary of the documents studied.

4.1.4 School Perspective

Shieldside Secondary School, selected as the site for this study, was a new school within the jurisdiction of the Halloway Board of Education. The school was selected because a
school advisory council had been established prior to commencement of construction of the school and had been operating two-and-a-half years before this study began.

4.1.4.1 Introduction

Shieldside Secondary School was constructed in a catchment area of a city marked for rapid population expansion. When plans for construction were accepted, the Ministry agreed to fund for an enrollment of one thousand (1000) pupil places. The Board decided that, in anticipation of growth, it would debenture for another five hundred (500); the enrollment after two years was approximately nine hundred (900) students. The school began formal operations in the autumn of 1994; the principal was appointed three years prior to the school’s opening.

The history of parent participation, however, began prior to the opening of the school. The principal believed that parents and community members had a role to play not only in the architectural design of the building but also in the design of programs and policy. He scheduled monthly meetings in community schools which, according to the principal, permitted people to talk about education, to criticize it and, “to look at the system of education and not at individual schools and teachers.” As a result of the community meetings, a school advisory council was formed. The principal believed this action brought a formal structure to a relationship that he had created with the community.

The documents selected for review in this section were The School Annual Report 1994 - 1995 and Creating a Successful Learning Organization; however, the first document
provided most of the essential information. Both documents were released in the spring of 1995 and were among the first to be formulated and circulated by the new school. As in the previous sections, I interpret the desired outcomes of participation using the concepts derived from the reformist and the general crisis theories of participation; namely, responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy.

**4.1.4.2 Responsiveness**

The opening text of The School Annual Report provides the school’s rationale for participation and states that the formulation and presentation of the report were intended as a strategy to keep the community informed and in touch with the school. The report opened with the school’s Mission Statement. This statement served three purposes: it showed that the school wanted to be responsive to its community, highlighted the school’s special assignment to meet the educational needs of the community, and indicated how the school intended to fulfill its responsibility “to be a centre of life-long learning responding to the community through education” (Annual Report 1995:1).

The goals of education which followed the mission statement also supported the school’s aim to be responsive by providing “... the opportunity for direct input from the community.” This statement is followed by a recognition that the input from the community came especially through the participation of the twelve-member School Advisory Council which had been established at the school prior to its opening.
An entry in the document Creating a Learning Organization also supported responsiveness as an aim of participation. The school aimed to respond to the needs of students and to ensure that "the knowledge, skills, and values of graduates would continue to remain relevant (and) prepare students for the interdependent world they would face upon graduation." Participation could also increase the staff's ability to respond to students' needs by providing the educational experiences necessary to maintain program relevancy.

4.1.4.3 Personal Development

Statements in The Annual Report provided support for participation as a stimulus for personal development. The establishment of the advisory council was viewed as one way for the school to reinforce the family by responding to the needs of families through communication and education. This kind of liaison was viewed as one way to enhance the personal development of students. As evidence that the school placed significant emphasis on the personal development of students, the report included a statement from a letter written by a grateful student: "I am amazed at the caring, concern, and openness that teachers have for their students." The student claimed that this attitude saved him from becoming a school dropout.

4.1.4.4 Overcoming Alienation

Through family and community participation, the school aimed to provide an environment whereby individuals came together in a spirit of cooperation and equal
opportunity. The aim, as stated in the Annual Report, was to provide a culture which fostered “cooperation and collegiality” (p.5). The report outlined how the school opened its door to the community so that parents, students, and community members could use school facilities such as the gymnasium, conference rooms, and other school facilities as they would use facilities in any sphere of the wider community. The Annual Report contained many statements reflecting the school’s desire to make the school more permeable by providing opportunities for people to come into the school and to use the school; in this way, the school hoped to break down negative attitudes toward education.

4.1.4.5 Legitimacy

The challenge for any organization is to provide services while staying within budget guidelines. The school wanted to keep the community informed of its responsibility to keep its eye fixed on the need for economic prudence when planning educational programs. A statement in this document reported that the school wanted “to provide educational and social services to the community in a fiscally responsible manner.” Such a statement suggested that the school had not ignored its fiscal responsibility and the importance of impressing on its community that it operated under financial constraints set by an external agency. By reminding parents, students, and community members that changes could result as a result of budget restrictions, the school was attempting to maintain its legitimacy as a responsible public institution in a time of budget constraints.
The reference to 'fiscal responsibility' supports the thesis that while many statements in the report supported the reformist theory, the general crisis theory also applied.

4.1.4.6 Summary

In summary, the documented realities at Shieldside Secondary, especially those from statements in ‘The School Annual Report’, supported the view that the desired outcomes of participation were responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy. The documents outlined, also, that the aims would be met through improved information flow, the maintenance of relevant programs for students and for parents, a welcoming atmosphere in the school, community use of school facilities, and a commitment to render educational services in a fiscally responsible manner.

4.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, statements in the documents distributed by the province of Ontario, the Halloway Board of Education, and Shieldside Secondary School support the aims of participation outlined in the reformist and the general crisis theories of participation. It was desired that the outcomes of participation would benefit both the organization and the individual. From the perspective of the organization, for example, schools would become more responsive to their community through continuous sharing of information; the goals and practices of education would receive community support; and schools would continue to offer relevant programs in times of fiscal restraint. From the
perspective of the individual, students and family members would enjoy enhanced personal development through partnerships established between families and schools; and the needs of individuals in the community would be better understood by the principal, the school board, and the school.

Unfortunately, while statements in each document present the positive benefits of participation to both the organization and to the school, the documents fail on three fronts: they fail to outline the approach required to foster participation; they fail to identify situations participants could encounter; and they fail to elaborate any potential negative consequences of participation.

In the following chapter, this study assumes a more vibrant approach: it describes and interprets data from interviews with members of a school advisory council to mirror the realities of participation from the perspective of those who participate. Findings respond to the questions: Who are the participants in this advisory council? What expertise do they bring as a potential resource to the service of the school? What situations do participants approach and how do they approach them? What negative consequences of participation do they identify? What are some of the positive benefits?
CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERIENCED REALITIES

5.1 Reality of Participation: Status and Expertise

5.1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and interpret the experiences of those who have participated as members of a school advisory council in Shieldside Secondary School. In this chapter I identify the expertise members bring with them, approaches they use to respond to various situations, negative consequences resulting from their participation, and positive outcomes to participants and to the institution of this form of participation. The data were derived from personal observations and from semi-structured interviews with five parents, two community members, two teachers, and a trustee.

In this section, participants are introduced, their social status is elaborated, and their expertise is described. The section concludes with a table illustrating the collective experiences of members. Statements from participants reveal that members of the advisory council brought with them extensive personal expertise as a result of their family, work, academic, and community volunteer experiences. Statements also show that members of this group were zealous to use this expertise to enhance the educational environment to benefit all students and that they wanted to assume a meaningful role in the pursuit of the goals of the school as an organization.
It should be noted that the following section presents statements which participants gave in their introductory remarks. The terms “status” and “expertise” were not used in the interview questions; they reflect my interpretations.

5.1.2 Status of Members

Shieldside Secondary School is built in an area where most students come from families with a mid to high socio-economic status. From the principal, I learned that a small percentage (<10%) of students are from families in which no parent is employed and that the school serves a predominantly Anglo-Saxon (>80%) community.

According to reports by teachers and parents, parents of students represent middle-class values with respect to education, i.e., they hold high educational expectations for their sons and daughters, they provide a variety of learning opportunities outside of school such as travel and access to modern technology, and they support school outings and extra-curricular activities.

In an informal conversation with the principal, I learned that most parents are keenly interested in the content of the academic program and seek constant feedback concerning the academic progress of their sons or daughters. Parent representation on school committees and participation at school functions is generally high. In an interview, a teacher confirmed this observation:
I have been overwhelmed by the parental support. We have so many parents that come out at Parent Night. They haven't been judgmental, they have been supportive. I find there is more of an equal partnership between parents and teachers in this school. I don’t think the parents are necessarily unique. I think they have finally found a school that meets their needs. A lot of the parents who are continually involved are parents of younger kids, like grade 9 and 10 students. I think these parents have found a school that meets their philosophy as parents of children who need to be educated for the next century. (Fay)

Shieldside Secondary School began formal operations in the fall of 1994. Rob, the principal, reported that he believed parents should be actively involved in the education of their children. Three years ago, before the school was constructed, he sought to establish a community school and introduced, to both the community and the school board, the concept of a ‘seamless education’ whereby the new school would offer programs from kindergarten to the end of high school. He organized a series of community meetings which occurred monthly prior to the opening of the school. Meetings were well attended, as many as one hundred and twenty-five people came to some. Rob stated why the meetings were important:

We talked about education, we criticized it; we looked at the system of education and not at individual schools or teachers. I was attempting to surface the concerns that people had so we could create something that would address those concerns. (Rob)

The community overturned the idea of the community school and voted for the establishment of a high school. Since the school was constructed in a growth area, during the first year of operations, the enrollment was about one-third the school’s potential but by the end of the second year numbers were up significantly.
According to the principal, community involvement in discussions during the initial planning stages of the school enabled parents to raise issues that reflected some of the public's concerns in education. However, it soon became evident that a 'formal structure' was required whereby representatives of parents and of the community could continue to discuss the issues and address the concerns. The principal, therefore, invited volunteers to form an advisory group. The principal explained that he informed the group that numbers needed to be limited if the group was to function effectively. Rob selected twelve members from parents, community members, students, and teachers to constitute the membership of the council.

The rules, with respect to membership, are found in the school's document entitled 'Creating a Learning Organization'. They state that "the School Advisory Council represents the entire (Shieldside Secondary School) community as defined by the boundaries for (Shieldside Secondary) School." The breakdown and designation of members was as follows: four parents of active students in the school, one parent from the community, two representatives from the business community, two teachers, two students, the principal, and a trustee (Table 5.1).
TABLE 5.1 MEMBERSHIP OF SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEMBERSHIP</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>PARENTS OF ACTIVE STUDENTS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENTS FROM THE COMMUNITY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHERS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS (ACTIVE &amp; RECENT GRAD)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPAL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUSTEE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A review of the background experiences of those who became members of the council demonstrates that this was a group who held a high status in the community in that most parents and community members were employed in highly responsible positions. For example, most of the parents had financial management skills and worked in such financial institutions as banks and trust companies; one was a career planner and two managed their own private business. I concluded that the principal, in selecting his advisers, favoured those with market-place skills - despite the fact that the rules governing council operations, with respect to membership, indicated that there would be equality of representation among all members of the school’s community.

Between December, 1995 and May, 1996, I attended 10 meetings of the advisory group and conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven members. Throughout the discussions, and as a result of observations, I concluded that the education of students
placed high on the list of priorities for parents and that the personal resources owned or
controlled by them (Epstein 1992; Goldring 1990; Hickson & McCullough 1980)
allowed me to conclude that they held a middle socio-economic status. The following
section outlines the specifics of the 'expertise' or the resources owned and/or controlled
by the group.

5.1.3 Expertise of Members

During the semi-structured interviews, the statements of participants revealed that the
central figures in this council were not churchmen, lawyers, nor statesmen as were the
advisers in Goldhamer’s (1968) study, but they had accumulated expertise which I
determined had been acquired from their family, work, education, and volunteer
experiences. The statements of one council member, a teacher, supported this
conclusion:

The expertise that these parents have is directly related to their knowledge
of their children. They know their children and know as best they can
what is going on in this building and the effect it is having on their
children. I think that is their most important contribution. There are
members with a variety of business and academic and other experiences
that are interesting and provide them with slightly different perspectives
perhaps and I think that’s valuable. It’s always better to have as many
different points of view as possible when discussing broad issues which is
usually the case in education. (Don)

In addition to the knowledge members held of their children and the expertise derived
from their business background, they also had acquired expertise from participation as
volunteers in a variety of community activities. In the following section, I identify some
of experiences of the members and I conclude the section with a 'Classification of Experiences' according to member type (Table 5.2) and an "Inventory of Expertise" (Table 5.3) which presents the rich accumulated expertise of the members.

The Parents

Ashley had three children who ranged in age from fifteen to twenty-four; her youngest child was a student at Shieldside. Ashley has lived in southern Ontario for most of her life, except for a six-year period spent in Winnipeg. After high school, she worked five years with an employment agency as a recruitment officer and four years at what she concluded was "a wonderful job" with the Taxation Data Centre as a tax auditor. Following this Ashley moved with her husband and children to Winnipeg where she worked with the school system. She summarized her job as one which allowed her to connect kids with employment in order to get them "thinking about career education, career awareness, and what it is that they (were) going to be doing when they (left) school."

In the meantime, she and her husband began a family business which they continued to operate after their return to Ontario. In her discussion of her work experience, Ashley admitted that she and her family lived very busy lives. Since returning to Ontario, she has worked with the Halloway Board of Education and was employed as a Teacher Assistant in career education at Shieldside Secondary.
Along the way Ashley gained valuable experience as a volunteer. She explained that this began in Winnipeg:

In Winnipeg, I did a lot of volunteering. It was a very community-minded city. Somehow it was not a question of ‘Will you become involved?’ but, ‘Where would you choose to be involved?’ It was just expected and it wasn’t unusual to find the same attitude in every neighborhood. (Ashley)

Ashley experienced a ten-year involvement with Girl Guides where she worked to revamp the Guiding program to make it more vital and “more fun for the girls.” She spoke proudly of her volunteer experiences and her statements underlined the importance to her of community involvement. She was actively involved with the advisory council at Shieldside and had been one of the original members before the school opened.

Joan had two sons, one was attending university in his second year and the second was a Grade 12 student at Shieldside. Joan’s father was in the military and, as a family, they lived on various military bases. During high school she attended a variety of schools.

Joan shared some of the history of her experience:

My high school experience was different in that there were actually only two hundred of us on an air-base. We were extremely limited in what courses we were able to take. That was one of the negative things; one of the positives was that our classes were very small. When we got into the senior years at high school there were some military personnel who wanted to upgrade their education so that made it a little different. At the time I was in high school, I was in three different high schools, one in Canada, most in Europe. I guess like everyone else there were some good things and some things that I would have liked to have changed. (Joan)

Joan worked full time in banking until her sons were born; at the time of this study, she worked part-time in a bank in Toronto.
As a volunteer, Joan had always been involved in some way with the schools her sons attended. She happily informed me that she had done everything from helping out in the resource centre to working with a sexual abuse prevention program: “I have just always been involved with the schools one way or another.” Joan noted a difference between her experience as a member of the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary and her previous experience as member of a Parent/Teacher Association at one of her son’s other schools. The first experience was not as satisfying as the last:

A lot of what was going on at (names another school) required that you were there during the day, like Tuesday at 10:00 a.m., and I wasn’t able to do that. The parent committee was loosely formed and was more of a fund-raiser as opposed to being involved with the school. (Joan)

In her statements, Joan expressed a deep satisfaction with her experiences as a member of the council at Shieldside. She, like Ashley, was one of the original members.

Matthew was a newcomer to the council. He had two daughters from a previous marriage, one of whom attended university in California, the other was a student at the University of Toronto, and his son attended Grade IX at Shieldside. Matthew was an independent real estate development consultant who contracted his services to various companies. He was educated in Britain and explained that he hoped that through his participation he would learn more about the Canadian education system.

I was brought up in a completely different system in England. I see certain things happening here that I frankly don’t understand. I could stay on the sidelines and continue to say that I don’t understand or conversely I can get involved and try to understand in that way. (Matthew)
Matthew explained that he did not have other experiences as a volunteer, but his present wife was actively involved, through her company, with the Junior Achievement program for students at their son’s former school.

Ann had two children in high school, one a son in Grade X at Shieldside and the other, a daughter, completing her last year at another high school in the area. Ann previously taught English in schools in both Quebec and Ontario but, in recent years, she worked full time in banking. In an informal conversation she explained she always wanted to work in a bank, so seven years ago, when an opportunity arose, she applied for a position and was successful. She continued to participate in certificate courses to upgrade her credentials in her new profession; during the time of our acquaintance she was completing an accounting course through correspondence. Ann said her volunteer activities included serving on a hospital board and canvassing for the Heart Fund.

Lillian came to Canada from Bermuda; she, like Matthew, said she received a British-style education. Her two sons, aged seven and eleven, were in elementary school. She did not have children at Shieldside. Lillian represented a parent from the community on the council. She came to Canada to study veterinary medicine and completed six years of pre-medicine before going to Veterinary College. Since graduation, Lillian has established her own veterinary practice in a neighbouring community. Her volunteer experience included some activities at her sons’ school; she reported dissatisfaction with the discipline policy at her sons’ school and the manner in which one of her sons had
been recently disciplined. During a conversation, she shared the contents of a letter she had written to the school expressing her dissatisfaction.

Parents represented the majority of the membership of the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary School, but representatives from the community, the student body, and the school staff were included among the total membership as well. This arrangement permitted "a representation of a variety of people involved in the school", the principal explained. The following section describes and interprets the background experiences of community members.

**Community Members**

Charles did not have children in this school. He had three sons. The eldest was in Grade VIII and would attend Shieldside at Grade IX. Charles had taught in the community college system in Toronto but was now employed as director of a Career Planning Program in the community. This program was financed by various local alliances, including the school boards. Charles explained his position in this way: "I coordinate activities to help schools and community groups to set up career fairs and other career awareness events."

Charles was an active community volunteer. He worked with the Boy Scouts and coached various sport teams. He related why this occurred:
We got involved in such things as cubs and scouts because our kids were involved in them. My passion for soccer has translated to all three kids. I have also coached soccer. We have been fairly involved in the community and we got to know a lot of people in the area where we live through taking kids to school, soccer, cubs and things like this. (Charles)

Charles was an avid soccer fan and coached neighbourhood teams. He also became an active volunteer in school affairs when his first son began kindergarten. He attended Parent/Teacher Association meetings and said he believed in expressing his point of view - this may explain some of his heavy involvement and why he was invited to become a member of the council at Shieldside Secondary.

Walter was recently appointed as the second business representative. He was married and had three children, aged sixteen, fourteen and ten. The teenagers were students at Shieldside. Although Walter lived most of his life in southern Ontario, he traveled within Canada and spent four years in Regina and two-and-a-half years in Winnipeg. He followed in his father’s footsteps and, as a result, worked in banking for more than twenty-four years. He had a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from the University of Western Ontario and had taken the ‘Certified General Accountancy Designation’ by correspondence. He recently passed the ‘Canadian Securities Course’. Walter admitted that he was involved in some aspect of education all his life. This, he said, explained why he was interested in taking a position on the advisory council.

Walter’s experiences as a volunteer paralleled those of Ashley. While in Regina and Winnipeg, he was involved on the Board of Directors of the community Family Service
Board, which coordinated services for the Victorian Order of Nurses Meals on Wheels program. He was involved in the scouting movement as a Beaver and Cub leader and served as soccer coach there and elsewhere. Walter explained that “out west life was different.” He and his wife were very involved with community and school affairs and, like Ashley, he felt this was expected. Walter learned that, in some cases, there were limits on the extent of involvement. The following anecdote reflects this experience:

Even though I had only been in the city two months, I ended up being the one to go to the school board and arguing to have the bus service continued to take our kids to the school [offering the French Immersion program]. I realized, that while schools expected parents to be somewhat involved or quite a bit involved in terms of PTA groups and fund raising, lunch room supervision and that type of stuff, they didn’t really want us meddling into how the education system was run. They were quite taken aback and quite nervous about the fact that a delegation of parents, led by myself, actually wanted to challenge a decision that they had made.

(Walter)

His group did succeed in having the decision rescinded. Walter concluded that school boards liked input from parents when the input was supportive but, in his opinion, they really did not want information about how they could manage schools more effectively.

Teachers

Two teachers, Don and Kent, were members of the original staff of Shieldside Secondary School. They volunteered to accept positions on the council as part of their contribution to ‘process areas’ which were an aspect of the responsibilities of all teachers in this school.
Kent spent most of his youth and completed high school in the area. He took a little time after high school to work with a steel company in Hamilton but went on to complete a physical education degree at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay. He began a Master's Degree in Education at the University of Western Ontario and completed it at the Faculty of Education at Brock University. Kent worked for six years as an elementary school teacher and, while this was a positive experience, he was happy to move to the high school. He is presently working in guidance at Shieldside Secondary. He did not elaborate upon any volunteer experiences outside of school.

Don had eight years teaching experience and, prior to becoming a teacher, he had worked briefly in radio and technology. He was married but did not have children; he lived in the community near the school. Don had a teaching certificate in English from the University of Toronto and a degree in Radio and Television Arts from Ryerson Technical Institute. He served as Associate Head of Instructional Technology at his previous school and this prepared him for his present position at Shieldside, where he played a major role in setting up computers and computer programs for students. As a member of the advisory council, he represented the Leadership Team. Don did not elaborate upon any volunteer experiences.

**Students**

There were two other groups represented on the council, the students and the school board trustees. Other members of the council informed me that the students played an
active role when the council first began; however, I observed that in this, the third year of council operations, student participation had waned.

As the students were not present at council meetings during the six month period of my research, I was unable to meet them or to schedule interviews. Any information I have on students came from written documents, from interviews, and from a public presentation at the school whereby council members presented information related to the organization and goals of the council to the general community. Students were present at that event.

From school documents I learned that the two students represented two distinct groups within the student body, students who were presently active in the school and students who had recently graduated. I was informed that the active student had taken a part-time job which involved work on Wednesday evenings and, therefore, he could no longer attend meetings. At the end of my research period, another student, a member of the Student Council, was selected by the principal to fill the 'active student' position. I have not interviewed the students and, therefore, cannot cite their family, work, or volunteer experiences.

The Trustee

Beth was a trustee with jurisdiction for the zone which included Shieldside Secondary School. She had two children who attended elementary school in her area. Beth had worked for twenty years in various capacities with Bell Telephone; in her present position she was a manager in sales and services. As a community volunteer, Beth was a
confident and committed individual who tolerated no barriers to her understanding of an issue. Events leading up to her election as a trustee support this conclusion.

As a member of the Residency Association Committee, for example, Beth became aware that a K to 13 school was to be constructed in her area. The association, however, considered the designated site too small for such a large structure. An investigation began. In her description of her quest for information, Beth highlighted the value of sound research before decisions are made. She explained that when the association queried the school board on the potential size of the school, the appropriate number of students, the amount of space the school would occupy, and the nature of the research that had gone into plans to establish the school, the answers were not forthcoming. "It seemed," she said, "they had latched on to an open-school concept but hadn’t done any research - nor had they done any groundwork to convince the community to buy into the idea."

Beth pulled out all the stops. She believed that to have a voice in public policy, you needed to be elected. Her next move sealed the death of an idea: "It was an election year, I ran and I won. The community agreed with my perspective on the school and quite decisively." Neither she nor the community supported the decision to construct a K to 13 school; a new secondary school was constructed and anticipated problems associated with enrollment did not manifest themselves. The school anticipated reaching capacity enrollment in the third year of operations.
These events mark the early history of Shieldside Secondary School. They also identify the zeal and determination of a community volunteer who gained leadership status within the Halloway Board of Education and the Shieldside Secondary School community. This background may further explain why Beth, as trustee, was selected as one of the members of the advisory council at this secondary school. It would seem that her selection was a first step, by the principal, to regain some of the credibility he may have lost through the destruction of his idea to create a school that would offer students a ‘seamless education’.

Beth held a rather anomalous position on the council: she was a member without voting power, she was a parent without a student in the school, and she was not a member of staff. Beth, however, was a board trustee with access to information denied to most other members of the group, except possibly the principal. It was noted in the school document that the trustee was responsible for providing information related to ongoing events at the school board and for keeping the school board informed of concerns within the Shieldside Secondary School community. Beth reported that she had attended community meetings with Rob a year before the school opened and she was committed to developing a working relationship with the principal, the staff, and with parent groups, not only at Shieldside Secondary, but with four other schools in her zone as well. Shieldside Secondary was the only school in her area with a formally established advisory council.
5.1.4 Summary

The reality of membership in the advisory council confirmed past research: participation among parents and community members from middle class settings is generally high and participants bring with them a considerable resource (Epstein 1995) in terms of personal, academic, and technical expertise. While it is true that when members came to the advisory group, they assumed new roles in relation to their previous position within the school and the community and in relation to other members of constituent groups which they represented (Chapman 1990), the group in this study had a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with the principal and indirectly with the school and the district. It could be argued that with the establishment of the advisory group, the principal had given voice to an already advantaged group of parents and community representatives.

In selecting his advisers, the principal favoured those with financial or market-place skills: most parents held responsible positions in such institutions as banks or trust companies, one member was a career planner, and two managed their own private businesses. While the rules governing council membership identified equality of representation among members of the school’s community as one of the goals of the organization, the reality failed to support this goal. The membership, it would seem, represented a select group. Table 5.2 presents a summary of the accumulated experiences according to membership. Table 5.3 presents ‘An Inventory Of Expertise’. These tables present the resources this group placed at the service of the school.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Family Experience</th>
<th>Educational Experience</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>Volunteer Experience</th>
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<td>Banking</td>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
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<td>Accounting</td>
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<td>Management</td>
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# TABLE 5.3 INVENTORY OF EXPERTISE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>An Inventory of The Accumulated Expertise of Members of the Shieldside Secondary School Advisory Council</th>
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## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Parenting: Members support and care for a total of fourteen children.

Community Service: Guiding, Scouting, Coaching, parent groups, Victorian Order of Nurses, and Hospital Board of Directors.

## ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Personal Education: All are high school graduates. In addition there are four Bachelor of Education Degrees, one Master’s in Education, a medical Degree in Veterinary Medicine, a Bachelors of Psychology, a General Accountancy Designation, a Canadian Securities Certificate, and a Degree in Radio and Television Technology.

Counseling: A Guidance Counselor; A Director of a Career Management Centre.

Educational Experience from other Countries: Members attended schools in England, Bermuda, and Germany.

Educational Experience from other Provinces: Members’ children attended schools and they were personally involved in schools in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

## TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE

Independent Business: Owners and operators of a Veterinary practice; a Private Real Estate Consultancy; and a family business.

Technology and Communications: Radio communication and computer technology.

Finance: Of the ten members, eight have financial experience either in banking, taxation, business management, real estate development, or employee services. Parents, community members, and the trustee have this experience.
In this section, I have presented a general overview of the social status and the accumulated expertise of members within the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary School. I have concluded that participants have both formal and informal educational experiences; that they all, with the exception of one teacher, have extensive parenting skills; and, that through their work and volunteer experience, parents and community members, especially, have accumulated a significant background in community and financial affairs.

My next challenge is to describe and interpret what these people actually do with their expertise as members of an advisory group. In the next section, I respond to the question: What are examples of situations and approaches which demonstrate how these members use their expertise?

5.2 The Reality of Participation: Situations and Approaches

5.2.1 Introduction

One question asked by administrators and teachers attending a conference on the theme of school councils in Ontario was: ‘Why do we need these advisers?’. In a discussion of the difficulties confronting advisers who are appointed to projects in developing countries, Curle (1968) suggested that advisers are needed for many reasons but, principally, they are needed because they have a certain expertise which can be of value to leaders. In the previous section, while I cannot say with certainty that parents and community members were selected because of a certain expertise, I identified that through their educational,
volunteer, and family experiences, they had acquired an extensive expertise. In the following section, I describe and interpret situations and approaches which enable me to understand how members use this expertise. When individuals define situations, determine what is expected of them, and select courses of action, they are defining their role (Turner 1978:344 in Duke 1996:9). Based on this premise, data from interviews with key members of the advisory council were used to describe and to interpret various advisory roles.

5.2.2 Situations and Approaches

In the interviews, members were asked to think about their role on the council. They responded by describing various situations and how they approached them. To present the information, I use conceptualizations identified in the literature review to discuss various roles such as the adviser as executor, as friend, as informant, as educator, as critic, and, finally, as adviser. It must be emphasized that at no time did members use these terms to discuss their respective roles. These are my interpretations.

5.2.2.1 Adviser as Executor

Parents

Ashley offered statements in support of the role of the adviser as executor. She elaborated that, in the early stages of the council’s evolution, members worked to define the mandate for the council and the rules governing membership. Now, as they moved to
the next stage in their evolution as an advisory group, Ashley recognized that she would be involved with what she said were "issues such as authentic assessment of what the school and the council were doing." She also voiced concern that the council was not receiving input from the community and suggested that the members would have to devise a more workable plan to facilitate this two-way communication.

Joan also provided information to support the role of the adviser as executor; this was especially evident in her expression of the need to devise a better plan to access input from parents and community members as to how the school and the council were performing. Joan avoided laying any blame as she voiced dissatisfaction with the approach used last year to access information from the community and the manner the group intended to approach the issue in the coming months:

Last year we had attempted to do an evaluation of the school and did it by survey. It was not as successful as we would have liked; we got some good information, but it was not as successful as we would have liked. That's really the first thing we will put a lot of emphasis on; it will take us a lot of time. We have decided, for example, that we are going to do focus groups, different ones for parents, students, teachers and everyone involved with the school. We will use small groups of about twelve people. That's really going to be our primary focus between now and the end of May for this year. There are goals for the school and goals for the council. [The assessment] will tell us if we are doing as well as we think we are and where we need to put our emphasis for next year. (Joan)

Joan emphasized there was still much work that needed to be done to access parent and community response to the quality of the programs the school was offering. She gave the impression that this was a major part of her role.
Ann also presented information to support the view that the adviser plays an executor role. Once again she spoke about the goal of the organization to assess the effectiveness of the school and the council. Ann voiced the opinion that members had not set realistic goals and that her role was to convince them to take a second look at their expectations with respect to assessment. She elaborated that their expectations were too high with respect to the school receiving feedback from the community.

Ann reasoned that this process took time, that the council should not expect immediate response because the community had not yet adjusted to the establishment of the council and, furthermore, members of the community were unaccustomed to giving feedback on educational issues. Ann reported that she was prepared to explore a variety of strategies to access the information needed: “I think it’s going to be a gradual thing and maybe we have to go about it in a different way.”

Community Members

Charles also assumed that assessment was an important aspect of his advisory role. He used the plural ‘we’ to suggest that in order for the school to know if it was doing a great job of putting out ‘top-notch graduates’, members of the advisory council needed to find out how well students were doing. He outlined a question to be answered and a task that required attention in order to acquire the information needed:
We are getting closer to putting out that top notch graduate', but there has to be a whole bunch of things that we need to look at. Are the marks there? Are the students leaving with the right skills? We have to interview parents and students to find out their perceptions. And even if we are giving them everything or making everything available but nobody is aware of it or the perception is that we are not doing it, then we are not doing the job; we have to devise a way to assess what it is we are doing.

(Charles)

From my observations, Charles was available to do whatever it took to access the information from the community. It should be noted that Charles was employed as Director in the Career Management Centre, which was supported by financial contributions from the school boards and community groups. Charles received a direct invitation from the principal to become a member of the council. Rob stated that Charles had a contribution to make in helping to design programs for the students at Shieldside Secondary.

Teachers

Don outlined duties of the advisory role which coincided with the executor role. He felt it was his duty to set agendas, respond to issues that developed in the school, and ensure, through his participation, the school's continued effectiveness. In executive fashion, Don assumed that as a council member he was responsible for everything that impacted the school as an organization. He said: “I am dealing with everything from the structure of the school day, to budget issues, to giving directions to (Rob) in terms of issues such as the school store.”
The Trustee

Beth also offered statements to support the role of adviser as executor. It should be noted that Beth referred to members as ‘they’, this could indicate that she did not consider herself a member as the others were members. In her comments she suggested that council members were responsible for determining the goals of the organization which they had set when they devised the ‘Exit Outcomes’. In the same sentence, Beth observed that members were now responsible for the design of a better strategy to assess whether the goals were being achieved. She said:

There is still a major problem as far as getting the communication out to the parents and the community at large and, also, getting input from them. There doesn’t seem to be a good enough vehicle established to get that input from the community. (Beth)

5.2.2.2 Adviser as Friend

In the interviews no adviser identified a situation or an approach which suggested that he or she supported the view that the adviser acted as a friend either to the leader or to one another. In fact, one member of the council informed me that outside of the group, members did not socialize. I did observe, however, that all members were friendly and cordial toward one another but that the teachers especially demonstrated a close relationship with the principal. This was remarkable on two occasions.

On most issues, the principal brought forward information and answered questions posed by the parents and the community members on the council. I noted, however, that during
discussion of the issue to enter into a contract with a sporting goods distribution firm, there was a different arrangement in that the teachers assumed this role. Kent, for example, provided the information and answered the questions. He also assumed responsibility for speaking to the firm and researching the responses in other schools to the distributor's proposal. In his manner and tone he gave the impression that it was he who introduced the concept to the school. I also interpreted from his approach that he consciously or unconsciously wanted to shield the principal from any blame should the decision to enter into the contract result in negative repercussions for the school. Related to this same issue, the second teacher, Don, had surveyed student opinion and brought forward to the council their concerns, questions, and ideas. My impression was that the principal made every effort not to seem to be directly involved.

Beth confirmed that the teachers on the council usually took up the gauntlet when the principal needed a 'second mate'. She referred to a situation which had occurred before my arrival when discussion centered on who was to fill the vacancy left by the business representative. Beth observed that when the principal indicated he did not want to be involved in the selection, one of the teachers, Don, immediately spoke up and suggested a name. "He would not have done that without (Rob's) agreement," Beth said.

While these are examples of how advisers respond as friend to the leader, they also support the theory that advisers who work in the same institution as leaders experience a number of advantages over other advisers: they have easy access to the leader, more
frequent opportunities to discuss issues and to access information, and, most often, their opinions support decisions made by the leader.

5.2.2.3 Adviser as Educator

Parents

Ann’s statements supported the view that the adviser assumes the role of educator. She was convinced that her role was not only to educate the leader, but, to educate all members of the advisory group who used educational jargon. She was frustrated with those who continued to talk in a language which, she felt, the ordinary citizen could not understand and which distanced people from schools rather than achieving the opposite and desired effect. Her comments reflected those of John Ralston Saul, one of Canada’s recognized commentators on political issues, as she gave the impression of being in search of ‘a clear language’. The following text is illustrative of her frustration:

Educational jargon is rampant, it’s ivory tower, it’s gobbledygook in many cases and it’s not a clear thinking type of language; it distances people, myself included. Having been in education, I may understand it but I don’t like the way it is presented and I don’t think it always speaks to the real world. I think it’s a lot of the reason why parents are staying away. It distances people. I think my role is to cut through the garbage, get to the basics, and try to clarify what it is we are talking about and what we want to do. (Ann)

Ann was frustrated because she felt that members did not understand the seriousness of the communication problem: “I feel like the little kid crying out, ‘But, the emperor isn’t
wearing any clothes!’. I feel that no one is listening.” Ann illustrated her concern by reporting on a situation which had recently developed in council.

The board had circulated four questions to all schools as part of the board renewal plan and principals were directed to distribute these to members of the school’s community. Rob approached the members on the council with the questions. During a council meeting, a period was set aside for members to respond. The silence which followed illustrated the problem which Ann had identified.

The questionnaire opened with a list of the Halloway Board of Education’s desired outcomes for graduates. These were followed by the four questions. The first question asked was: “What is currently being done in the (Halloway Board of Education) which best supports achievement of these outcomes?” The members of the advisory council looked at the questions, there was a long pause, and after ten minutes, Rob suggested that, since it was time to adjourn, they could postpone the effort until the next meeting.

Ann admitted that there was not a lot of jargon in the wording of the question but the incident served to illustrate the extent of her role. She said, “It’s the whole notion that it is not specific and it’s not clear.” Those who had formulated the questions, she concluded, assumed that parents had access to information concerning the programs the board had implemented to achieve the educational aims they had set. Her function, she reported, was to educate Rob and others concerning the limits of the ordinary parents’ background knowledge with respect to educational policy and programs.
Community Members

Walter also was critical as he provided statements to support the view that advisers assume an educator role. He felt that educators needed to be instructed on how to make schools more efficient. He talked about duplication of school services and that schools needed to learn how to cooperate. His discussion of how he approached the situation elaborated the course of action an adviser may choose to carry out this role:

I had a brief chat with (Rob) at one point about the fact that perhaps schools are going to have to specialize to some degree. Rob indicated that perhaps there is a great deal more cooperation between schools in different boards then there is between schools in the same board. I think there’s that turf protection attitude of all the school principals and staff and maybe the board itself. I think parents, such as myself, especially those with a business background, may have an ability to influence that. (Walter)

Walter assumed that under his tutelage, schools would change and would discontinue the practice of duplication. He outlined the approach:

Having one school about a mile away and another school across the street from them and then us, all trying to be all things to all people, is not going to be possible anymore. That means that some courses are going to have to be cut and some courses will not be getting the same type of support. So, I think ‘working together’ will have to happen. (Walter)

Walter’s language was that of the business world as he said:

We have to put the interests of the tax payer and the general population forward where perhaps schools in the past have not had those considerations. So I think helping to find the best path to satisfy all stakeholders is going to be a major part of my contribution. (Walter)

Walter determined that his role was to instruct the educational leaders. The ‘best path’ to change, from Walter’s perspective, was traveled with the needs of groups such as tax
payers in mind; he did not discuss the needs of the individual student nor of teachers.

Walter supported the view that schools needed to be managed like businesses. He liked the idea of the school entering into a contract with the sporting goods distribution firm; the ideas and opinions he expressed during meetings when this issue was discussed, indicated that he was committed to educating the members of the council on how to approach educational issues with a more efficient financial management orientation.

**Teachers**

Kent also reported situations which he approached as an educator. However, Kent's comments did not infer that he educated the leader. Instead, he felt it was his duty to educate parents and community members on the council about the perspective of students - it was evident that his reference to 'members' meant those who were not staff members. He said: "I can share a student's perspective because I am aware of student concerns. I express what I feel they would want me to say and the ideas can be hashed around and be confirmed or questioned." Kent underlined that he was a good listener and as such he was able to identify perspectives not represented during discussions of issues. He did not support his conclusions with a specific example, but he said that he identified the gaps in people's understandings and acted to crystallize obvious misconceptions. In so doing, I conclude, he acted as an educator.
Don reported that all council members had an obligation to instruct the school board to ensure that it understood the council’s response to financial decisions made by the board, especially when the decisions negatively impacted programs in the school:

I would say that the council’s job is to make sure that the trustees and the senior administrators who are making those choices fully understand the ramifications of those choices. It isn’t the council’s job to make the choices; we are not setting the mill rate. But we need to make sure that (Beth) understands the exact consequences of her choices. (Don)

It is interesting to note the difference in perspective of participants. As an example, in his comments, Don focused considerable attention on the role of advisers to educate district officials concerning their approach to fiscal restraint; Walter, however, took a narrower view and talked about his personal responsibility to educate the school principal on efficient management strategies. In the interview, both teachers referred to the parents and community members on the council as ‘they’; Don seemed to imply that it was ‘their’ responsibility to educate the school board and not ‘his’. Such a distinction was not detected in the interviews with parents and community members.

In the next section, I present findings to support the role of the adviser as informant. The distinction between ‘the adviser as educator’ and ‘the adviser as informant’, however, is not always clear. I used the language of participants to guide my interpretation: when they talked about a duty to make people understand, I interpreted this as an educator role; however, when they discussed communicating information, I interpreted this as support for the informant role.
5.2.2.4 Adviser as Informant

Parent

One of the key aspects of her position, Ashley assumed, was to inform. She discussed this from the perspective of the adviser informing members of the community and not, as Goldhamer had done, of the adviser keeping the leader informed of the community’s response to reforms or of events occurring in the community. Ashley insisted that as a member of the council, it was her role to “offer information to (the school’s) neighbours”:

Parents like to be informed, to know what is going on, and some of them are very satisfied with hearing that these are the issues we are tackling and this is the way we would like to tackle them. I think we need to be able to share with not just our children’s peer group and their parents but anyone else who knows that we are a part of the council and want an opportunity to come in and listen to what’s going on and who wants to have a voice. That’s also a role I have to play and the council has to play. (Ashley)

Ashley emphasized that she would like to communicate with a larger sample of the school’s population but that she found this extremely difficult. In her statements, she reflected back on a key issue which challenged other members: the determination of a suitable and workable strategy to solicit feedback from and to relay information to the community.

Teachers

Don assumed that because he was involved as a teacher with the school, it was important to keep members of council informed about school events. He was also convinced that,
as a representative of staff, he was not responsible for relaying information or ideas from teachers only but from everyone in the school:

I am not representing the views of teachers only. I am representing good sense, I am representing ideas that lead to the school being a better place for education to occur. I think when I do that I am representing the interests of all of the residents in this building. (Don)

Don felt it was important for the teachers on the council to act as a link between the school and the council; he assumed teachers could access information not available to parents and could, therefore, keep them informed: “We have a perspective of the daily ongoing patterns of the school and I think that’s information we can provide.” Don spoke, however, about two kinds of information teachers could provide: the first related to students and the other to teachers. Besides keeping members of council informed about ongoing events in the school, Don assumed he should communicate information from staff meetings, especially if there was any disagreement about a council decision.

Don distinguished between the role of teachers as informants and the role of parents. In his opinion, while teachers had the responsibility to inform the council concerning school events, parents, as informants, had a responsibility as well: “I don’t think the information is one way from the school to the parents. I think that parents on this council provide all sorts of information, to (Rob) and to council members who are not parents, about their children’s views of the system and the programs and everything that is going on.”
The Trustee

Beth admitted that it was her role to keep information flowing from the school board to the school. She explained that her role was to serve as the ‘linking pin’ to bring an outside perspective to the council. She was convinced that parents and community members were uninformed with respect to the changes coming down in education; she also felt assured that neither the principal nor the teachers on the council would provide the necessary information to enable the group to discuss options. It was, therefore, her role to ensure that a ‘balanced’ perspective was maintained.

I observed during council meetings that she kept the group informed about strategies, such as increasing property taxes, that the school board was considering to counteract decreases in government funding to education. She also elaborated barriers that teachers’ unions constructed to prevent effective negotiations between the school board and teachers. On one occasion she informed the meeting that “unions usually refuse to negotiate with the boards. The stronger the union, the more complex the situation.” Neither of the teachers nor the principal responded to this piece of information.

Beth predicted that as each school in her area established an advisory council, her role as informant would increase. She said, “(I will) have to spend more time with each council to make sure a balance is maintained between the information principals and teachers are giving to parents and the truth!” With predicted changes in education in Ontario such as
the intent to decrease the number of school boards, only time will tell whether the role of trustee will survive.

It is important to note that no adviser spoke specifically about keeping the principal informed about events occurring in the community. Their statements focused on passing information from the school to the community and, in the case of the trustee, from the school board to the parent and community members on the council.

5.2.2.5 Adviser as Critic

Parents

Critically examining an issue and condemning an unwise decision were approaches Ashley used as a member of the advisory group. In the interview, Ashley provided support for the adviser as critic but I concluded that Ashley’s criticisms were not usually directed at the principal or teachers but rather at parents and community members who were critical of the actions taken by professional educators. For example, I observed that in response to the issue of whether or not the school should become involved with the sporting distribution contract, not all council members agreed with the decision. One parent felt strongly that this would place the school in direct competition with local businesses. Ashley’s response was as follows:
As in everything, there are those who agree and those who disagree, but that’s good, that is how we feel and we let it be noted that this is in fact how we feel as parents, as business people, as community members. We say up front these are the kinds of things we want to have our kids involved in or not involved in. (Ashley)

Ashley remained on the side of those who agreed with the venture. It is important to reiterate that Ashley was a teaching assistant in the school and sided with members of staff with respect to most issues. In terms of the business contract, she was critical of those who expressed concern about the long-term negative effects of the school doing business with a sports distribution firm; she was convinced, that should any problem occur, the council would control the situation:

We can handle the ethical questions, we can control how much it’s infringing on our neighbouring retailers, or how much of a captive audience we have [among the students who will purchase the goods], or how much we are going to cater to that audience, or whether there is fairness in that or not. (Ashley)

Ashley was critical of members who questioned the ethics of the school’s involvement in a business opportunity. The venture, she felt, gave students, especially her daughter who was following a business program, an opportunity to be involved with an “authentic” learning activity. In her view, members could control the extent of the school’s involvement and that discussion around the whole incident merely provided an opportunity “for students and staff and parents on the council to have input into how small or how large (they were) willing for the school to get involved with a business venture” and not whether the school should become involved or not. At no point did Ashley consider the option that the school should not become involved. She was
prepared to accept that the principal had the knowledge and the authority to make the necessary decision.

The decision to enter into a contract with the sporting good distribution firm foreshadows the inevitable: as schools become more autonomous, they take on a market-driven mentality and choose to maintain their status and their standards for academic excellence by entering into a business arrangement to yield higher financial gains in times of diminishing public funding.

Matthew, also, gave statements to support the role of the adviser as critic. However, he, unlike Ashley, did not hesitate to question the wisdom of educators whom he felt were heading down "the wrong path." He willingly adopted the role of critic, especially in relation to the sporting goods contract, and he reported how this action could infringe on the rights of businesses in the community whom he said "were trying to survive." He wanted to raise everyone's awareness of what he felt were the "moral issues." He said:

They were discussing a situation whereby the school in fact would sell directly to the kids and they would have this contract and obviously the school would make a profit from it and it would help swell their funds. In principle, that sounds all very good and proper and so on. The point that I raised and the concern that I have is meanwhile: What about the retailers in (town) who are in business to make money? They pay their taxes and ultimately help to support the school system. But, meanwhile, those retailers now find themselves in competition with the school selling the same items. I sort of have a problem with that. (Matthew)

I observed that Matthew was the only member to vote against the decision to enter into the contract with the sporting goods distributor. He explained his actions thus: "I sort of
dug my teeth in there as much as anything else in raising those concerns and what the outcome of this would be.” He tenaciously held his position even when his advice went unheeded. As he said, his role was to “look at issues from a slightly different aspect other than the obviously good aspect of the school being able to make some money.” He felt it was his duty to “raise the consciousness of everybody (because) ...sometimes,” Matthew said, “we can operate in a warp and not exactly see all points of view.” Matthew gave the impression that the staff was blinded by the $30 000.00 such a project could bring into the school annually. This situation lends support to the research by Whitty (1997) that involving parents and business representatives to make decisions at the local school level has the potential to encourage schools to adopt a quasi-market mentality. The specific goal of such an approach, according to Whitty, may be to increase the attractiveness of schools to potential users and potential donors without necessarily enhancing or changing student achievement.

5.2.2.6 Adviser as Adviser

Parents

Ashley described situations which supported the concept that the adviser advises. She outlined that, as a member of the advisory council, she debated issues, listened to opinions expressed by others, and usually voiced her opinion on all issues. She said she especially felt comfortable speaking on behalf of students. It appeared that Ashley’s experiences working with students in the cooperative education programs inspired her to
use her advisory position to advise members and the principal on behalf of students; she also acted on issues which directly affected her own daughter’s education, as in the case of the sporting goods distribution contract. Her advice was based on the belief that bringing a business into the school provided an opportunity for students to have a ‘hands-on’ experience.

Joan also assumed the role of ‘expert adviser’. Her first response to the question of how she viewed her role on the council was that she listened to the issues, expressed her opinion, and raised concerns by asking questions to clarify issues. Her questions and comments, she said, usually reflected the concerns and questions of her neighbours, as well as her own. Joan implied that, in reality, when she gave advice, she was speaking on behalf of her neighbours as well as herself.

Ann also gave statements to support the view that one of the central roles of the adviser is to advise. She admitted that when financial matters were discussed, her expertise in banking helped her to offer advice which she felt helped to improve everyone’s judgment:

I am in customer service. I deal with a lot of financial stuff. When there is talk of budgets and financial statements I key into that and relate to it very well and easily. I bring some of my work (experience) as a benefit to the council. (Ann)

I noted that Ann used an indirect route to offer advice; like Joan, she usually advised by asking questions. This was especially noticeable during discussion of staff ‘cut-backs’ following the announcement by government of decisions to reduce transfer grants to
school boards. During the March meeting, for example, Rob informed the group about reductions in government funding and of the possibility that the district office would respond by cutting fifteen hundred (1500) teaching and staff positions. It appeared that the principal and the teachers expected parents and community members to respond with a loud protest.

Ann, however, was not taking the bait. Her approach was to withhold advice until she understood the situation more clearly. Her response in this situation was to ask numerous questions such as: Do we have the Tool Kit yet? (Government had promised to distribute an idea package on how boards were to manage with reduced funds; this package was referred to as ‘The Tool Kit’), Am I right when I say they cut $10 000 000.00 ?, Is the fifteen-hundred cut the worst scenario?, If we are given the worst-case scenario, could this number change any moment?. From my observation, Ann’s advice to members of council was to remain calm and do nothing until all facts were known.

Ann seemed more aware than other members that the council played a ‘middle of the road’ role between those who made policy and those who implemented it. Members of an advisory group, she rationalized, did neither: “Councils could be moving on one track and the Ministry on another.” Ann was not convinced of the council’s ability to influence any governing agency to change its course of action in the present political climate of fiscal restraint, nor did she intend to fight any potential employment-related battles for teachers.
Matthew assumed that his business expertise was fundamentally the reason why he was on the council. During the interview, he offered many examples that confirmed his view that one of his major responsibilities was to advise the school on effective strategies that could potentially link it with the business community. Unfortunately, the council chose to not heed his advice not to enter into the contract with the sporting goods distribution firm. Based on Goldhamer's experiences, this begs the question: How many times would Matthew’s advice go unheeded before he would decide to resign his advisory role?

**Community Members**

Charles assumed that he provided advice on two fronts: (1) to prevent this new school from erecting barriers which could isolate it from the community and (2) to help in the design of relevant programs for students. He reported that he derived satisfaction from contributing to discussions and giving advice to define the kind of students who would graduate at the end of “their high school career.” Prior to the establishment of the council, Charles determined, professionals designed programs with a total focus on academics; they neglected, he said, “to look at outcomes and the well-rounded person.” Charles’ expertise in career planning enabled him to also advise educators on how to design programs that were relevant and that ensured that students survived after graduation. As one would expect from the director of a Career Planning Centre, Charles spoke passionately about wanting students to have employability skills and the flexibility to adapt to change when they finished high school:
So if we put out a student who is only academically sound but is unable to apply that knowledge, not able to be flexible, and so on, we are doing a disservice to that student and we are doing a disservice to the community and the larger world. My role is to prevent this from happening. (Charles)

Walter also expressed the view that all his actions since coming to the council were aimed at bringing education in line with ‘the real world’; he gave the impression that he accepted that his role as a council member was to advise educators on how to adjust to inevitable budget shortfalls: “I’m not convinced that the education system is doing what I think an education system should do at this particular point in time and I think I can make a contribution.”

I observed that Walter’s expertise in banking and in financial management was used to advise members on how to word a letter sent by the advisory group to the school board protesting the recent approach to fiscal restraint by reducing the number of teachers in schools in the area. Paradoxically, while Walter chastised schools for not managing their affairs according to an effective business management plan, he found himself leading the troops in sending advice to the school board on how it should act more responsibly on the matter of ‘lay-offs’. It will be interesting to observe the actions of advisory councils when and if they are given full responsibility for school budgets. Research in England (Deem, Brehony, & Heath 1994) shows that school governors have followed a course of severely reducing staff sizes in order to maintain balanced budgets.
Kent stated that he was ready and willing to advise the administration on the direction he felt the council wished the school to take. He expressed the opinion that he was in an ideal position as staff member to do this and, also, he felt that this was what he did best. He did not elaborate, but I did observe that it was Kent who brought forward the idea of the school entering into a contract with a sporting goods distribution firm. He favoured the idea as one way to increase the school's revenue by at least $30,000.00.

5.2.3 Summary

A review of the assumptions of participants corroborated the views put forward by Curle (1968), that advisers educate, discuss, debate, and perform all sorts of tasks, but they do not do the work of managing the institution. In summary, members approach tasks in a variety of ways. Generally, the approach was determined by the nature of the task and the background experiences of the individual. For example, those with business experience, such as Matthew, Charles, Walter and Ann drew upon their expertise to approach issues of a financial or business nature; those with community contacts, such as Joan and Ashley, approached issues with a community perspective. Table 5.4 presents a classification of the approaches and identifies those who gave statements to support them.
A review of Table 5.4 reveals that there were statements to support all categories but that there were more differences than similarities with respect to support for the six advisory roles. No adviser offered statements to support each approach. Most advisers supported the roles of executor and adviser; however, only one teacher identified situations he approached as a friend of the leader and only two parents identified situations they approached as critic. It can be concluded that members were not aware of all the roles they could play within their advisory capacity; it could also be concluded that the members of this particular council were kept busy carrying out functions determined for them by the principal and which basically fell within the agency of the executor role.
The final sections of this chapter respond to another reality of the advisory experience. Based on the assumption that all relationships are characterized by highs and lows, positives and negatives, successes and failures, I now focus my lens on the data to describe and interpret some of the negative consequences of the advisory experience.

In looking at consequences, I am reminded of the work of Donald Willower (1994) who has written on values and administration. Willower maintains that looking at consequences is essential since it forces the inquirer to connect the desired with the real, the theory with the practice. In the following section, I describe and interpret technical and psychological issues which have precipitated a variety of negative consequences. This approach, according to Willower, may help identify gaps which can exist between theory and actual practice.

5.3 Reality of Participation: Technical and Psychological Issues

5.3.1 Introduction

In this section, I describe and interpret data from interviews with members of the advisory council as well as data from situations which I observed at council meetings and during frequent visits to the school. As in the literature review, I distinguish between technical issues and psychological issues and identify problems associated with each.
5.3.2 Technical and Psychological Issues

I have concluded from a review of the literature on the role of the adviser that problems associated with this role come from two sources: technical issues and psychological issues. The technical issues include selection, number, and access while the psychological include adjustment, inaction, and rivalry. In the following section, I identify the participants and describe and interpret problems which they reported in the interviews or which I noted during my observation during attendance at meetings or during visits to the school.

5.3.2.1 Access

The Trustee

The trustee, Beth, was the only member of council who discussed issues related to access. She referred explicitly to the inability of parents and community members on the council to have access to information coming from school board officials. In the interview, Beth expressed the opinion that principals and teachers, as members of unions, blocked parents’ and community members’ access to certain information that they felt uncomfortable sharing with the general public. Beth elaborated that the principal had access to information which he could choose to share or not to share. As an example, she referred to the renewal efforts of the Halloway Board of Education whereby the board had directed schools to prioritize their needs in anticipation of significant budget cuts.
resulting from reduced government funding. According to Beth, the board expected to have to reduce as much as $10 million from their operating budget.

The problem, according to Beth, was that principals and teachers had been advised by their unions not to “suggest a single thing that could result in job loss.” She said that the principal was, in effect, in charge of meetings of the advisory council in that he set the agenda. In this way, he kept parents from discussions related to operating better, prioritizing, or making suggestions related to cost-cutting.

Beth was also convinced that parents and community members would not have access to accurate information because “the people who are leading and facilitating and bringing the issues to the council” presented a “one-sided view.” She concluded that she needed to attend the upcoming meeting of the advisory council when the issues surrounding ‘renewal’ were again discussed. Her presence was essential, she said, to ensure a “balanced discussion.”

5.3.2.2 Number

Each participant was asked about the number of members on the council. They were unanimous in stating that there were no issues related to over-crowding or the inability of the council to be effective because of the appropriate number of participants.
5.3.2.3 Selection

All but two members of the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary became members by invitation when the group was first organized after community meetings sponsored by the principal. Two new members had recently joined the group, but the process whereby they were selected was differed from the original selection procedure. To replace a parent representative who had resigned, an election took place within the school. The process enabled members of the school's community to vote for the first time. The business representative, however, was appointed by members of the council as per the rules of the organization and, also, as per a recent directive, Policy/Program Memorandum 122, from the Ministry of Education and Training. It should be noted that the business representative selected did not represent any particular business in the community; he was employed by a large bank in the nearby city of Toronto.

The Parents

Joan identified a problem associated with selection. She noted a difficulty with attracting participation from members of minority groups in the school’s community:

> What I think may be lacking as far as representation on the council is the cultures in our school. Certainly not representatives from the different walks of life, I think they are all represented. Again it’s a Catch 22, for a lot of the cultures this is very different from what they are used to. It’s not something they would normally volunteer for or get involved with. So if our council does not reflect culturally the school, I think it's important that we recognize that and deal with it. (Joan)

Joan did not suggest how the problem could be addressed.
The Trustee

It has been stated that the process to select advisers may be democratic or non-democratic. It is non-democratic when leaders select the advisers they want in order to ensure they have persons they can depend on to relieve them of some of the responsibilities of decision making. According to accepted political practice, it is democratic when advisers receive their position as a result of a vote by members of the school’s community. Most members of the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary had received their position by a non-democratic process in that the principal selected the parents, community representatives, the teachers, and students to the advisory group. In the autumn of 1995, the council was faced with the task of replacing two vacancies left by the resignation of a parent and a community member (or business representative, as this position was called). From the time the council was established to the first resignations, the Ministry of Education and Training had circulated PPM 122 (Government of Ontario 1995) which stated that “Community members shall be appointed by the council” (p. 3) and parents would be elected by parents.

The principal’s response indicated a desire to align the operating procedures of the group at Shieldside with the Ministry’s directive. There was, therefore, an election to elect the parent representative. The principal announced, however, that he would abstain from nominating a replacement for the business representative and that members of council would make the selection. Beth observed that while the principal abstained, this did not prevent one of the teachers from immediately voicing support for a particular candidate.
She opined that this would not have happened if the principal had not indicated his preference for a candidate in advance, prior to the meeting, for example.

Beth was incensed less by the selection process as she was by the person selected. The teacher had nominated someone who was not a business person in the community, but who was a bank manager working in the City of Toronto. This, Beth maintained, blocked an opportune moment “to build a bridge to the business community.” During a meeting, she said, she suggested someone from the local mall, for example. But, her suggestion was ignored. Beth felt strongly that someone from a local business would have benefited everyone - students, the council, and the school. She said: “Occasionally our kids get into trouble downtown and when we have a fund raiser, there may be ways to make use of business contacts.” Beth also observed that once the teacher nominated a candidate, no other member of council put forward an alternative. This example further supported Beth’s view that the agency of parents and community members on the council was highly influenced by decisions and opinions of educators and, therefore, she concluded, it would be a long time before they would act independently without direction.

5.3.2.4 Adjustment

Adjustment suggests change in order to adapt or fit to new conditions or to new relationships. The underlying problems associated with adjustment, according to the research, relate to inadequate socialization, briefing, or training whereby advisers are given an opportunity to become acquainted with the people, the context, the norms, and
the values of a new environment before they become directly involved with change, reform, or reconstruction. In this section, I present statements from participants to illustrate situations which I have interpreted as problems of adjustment.

**The Parents**

Matthew had recently become a member of the group. He identified issues related to his difficulty adjusting to the education system and the community's adjustment to educational reform. He was amazed, for example, at the obvious lack of knowledge among the teachers on the council about the business world. He said:

> I have the highest, highest respect for all of the teachers I have met and multiply that by a hundred and that is my respect for the principal - it is the highest, highest. Having said that, I do have a concern that teachers generally are somewhat distanced from the reality of everyday life, of being somewhat caught up in this academic world. Meanwhile, we have some retailers down on the main street (names the town) who are trying to make a living in a very, very competitive business these days and they are being drowned by taxes and everything else. When you are in the academic world such as teachers of primary school and secondary school, maybe you get a little distanced from that because you are not exposed to that sort of thing. That's my traditional, old fashioned way of thinking and I am sure it is very different from that but that's my thinking.

(Matthew)

Matthew anticipated major changes in the way schools were managed but he admitted that he lacked background knowledge of the school system: “As a council member I feel I am going through the motions without fully understanding how the council works simply because I lack the experience over all.” Matthew identified the difficulty faced by
the council to get the community to provide information and to buy into the transition as one of apathy: "I am not sure that the community at large really cares about it at the present time." Matthew felt that the community would inevitably adjust and respond positively to the reality of reform and the need for the community to connect with schools, but he felt it would take time - just as his own adjustment as a council member would take time.

Ann's problem related to the inability of council members to accept the limited background knowledge of ordinary citizens with respect to educational matters. She stressed that everyone continued to use "education jargon" which the ordinary citizen could not understand.

Ann also criticized the advisory group's persistent complaint that members of the community were not responding to the call for input. Ann discussed the issue in terms of the adjustment of council members to the reality that it took time to change people's attitude. She viewed the situation this way:

> Just because there is a council now and because it is a community-oriented school and we really want parents to be a part of their child's education, it's not going to happen over night. Things weren't like that in the past. There was always the PTA, a few people who were involved and the majority was not involved. It's hard to turn people around. (Ann)

Ann was quite frustrated with approaches used thus far to access information from the community. She was not critical of the community; she assumed that people needed to adjust to the idea that the group existed and also to adjust to the notion that their opinion
mattered. Ann insinuated that, traditionally, parents were not encouraged to have input into issues of educational reform.

Charles elaborated on the difficulty of adjusting to a different way of operating. He implied that usually when parents became involved in discussions about their children's schooling, their comments reflected personal concerns. He understood that this was not acceptable as a member of the advisory council and the adjustment was a little painful. He said:

I don't think any of us got involved with a burning personal agenda that was all consuming. But I think we had personal agendas that were more subtle. Certainly, I am always conscious that given my job and given my leaning, I may focus too much on the career side of things. I need to keep that in check and in balance and I think the rest of the committee needs to do that too. (Charles)

Charles' comment forces a look back at a statement made by the principal to a group of educational administrators in a discussion of how he had selected the original members of the advisory group. Rob indicated that he had refused membership to a man who seemed keen on becoming a member to improve education to benefit his own child. Charles has insinuated that when members of the present group became involved they did so because they had a personal agenda. As time went on, personal agendas were pushed back and members, such as Charles, began to focus on issues affecting a larger portion of the school's population. There may be a lesson here for administrators who may too quickly discount the potential of a questionable candidate. More will be said about the issue of selection in a later section.
Walter expressed the frustration of an adviser who has just arrived to a new situation: "I am very low on the learning curve." He expressed uncertainty about his role, unacquainted with members of the group, and handicapped because he did not know any of the early history of the council. He said:

It seems to be fairly ambiguous as to what the advisory council does, which is understandable. I think it is evolving and will continue to evolve. But, I have been trying to figure out exactly what is expected of us and where we can make a contribution. (Walter)

Walter was not happy with the initial briefing he received, or did not receive, when he first became a member. He outlined the contents of a brochure that could be prepared for new advisers to improve the briefing process.

I think (the brochure) could give a quick little history of the board, who the players are in terms of not just their names and the name of their child and their telephone numbers, which I found interesting to see on the newsletter introducing us to the community. But, we need to indicate that we are much more than parents, we come at things differently. (Walter)

Walter was anxious to know the background of each member. He assumed this would help identify the contribution that each could make; he outlined what he had observed:

We have for example a very vocal veterinarian who is obviously a self-employed business woman and brings those types of skills and experiences to the board. We’ve got bankers, I presume that’s what (Joan) is although I haven’t really figured out exactly what she does yet. Not that I am saying that who they are makes a difference. If they are a housewife, that’s fine, that’s a completely different experience level as well. But it helps to understand maybe where they are coming from, what issues are really important to them, and what contribution they could make to the board as a whole. (Walter)
Walter had difficulty adjusting to the principal’s approach. He felt that Rob’s attention to punctuality and his refusal to devote time to social gatherings, coffee breaks, or small informal chats, hampered the adjustment of new members.

The Teachers

Kent described a problem that could be interpreted either as a problem of number, rivalry or adjustment. I have decided to discuss it as a problem of adjustment. Kent expressed difficulty adjusting to the presence of a new group within the school. He explained it as a problem of learning how to work with a large number of people who were trying to express their opinion and taking a longer than acceptable time to do so. He talked about the problem in terms of ‘group dynamics’: “In terms of any kind of hassle, it would be in terms of any group dynamics. There is always a hassle sorting through the personalities of a group and having that group become a useful voice as opposed to a forum for various personalities.” Kent complained that certain members consumed more time than was necessary expressing their point of view.

Although Kent had been with the council since its origin, he was still trying to adjust to operating with a group comprised of parents and community members. The issues, he said, often became confusing both for him and for them. Kent implied that because parents and community members had such little background knowledge of educational issues, they had difficulty expressing their views and getting at the central focus of their concerns. He did not suggest a solution but indicated that time would resolve the issue as
members inevitably became more familiar with the system and he began to adjust to their presence.

**The Trustee**

Beth elaborated a number of negative consequences related to the adjustment of members of school councils. Her assumptions did not always reflect situations within the advisory council at Shieldside, but because they were formulated as a result of her general observation and reflections, I felt they formed a body of data to extend and to elaborate concepts in this section.

Beth identified briefing as a problem. This was not whether there should be a briefing process to assist new advisers to adjust to their new positions, but rather she focused her comments on who should be responsible for its delivery. She emphasized that briefing should not come from the district or from people in the school, but that it should come from the Ministry. She explained: “Because if it came from the locals, people will be trained to look only one way; teachers can influence the direction of a view quite masterfully.”

Beth spoke about no one in particular when she said that administrators at the local level carefully select both the information and the answers they want people to have. This procedure, she stated, left people both uninformed and misinformed: “You have to know the questions to ask.” Although she had been accused of ‘meddling’ and of mistrusting her information sources, experience had taught her the valuable lesson that information
was not easily accessible and “you had to dig.” Beth concluded by saying that parents would need a long time to adjust to this reality.

Adjustment and accountability were strongly linked concepts for Beth. She talked about schools and the school board adjusting their budgets to meet the demands on school resources made by parent groups. As a result, Beth reported, the board was in the process of developing a policy that would serve as an accountability instrument for schools which set guidelines for the use of photocopying machines, fax machines, and the like. Beth explained: “Things were going on that remain(ed) unchecked ... there was no coaching, no outside intervention.” In Beth’s opinion, across-the-board budget adjustments were required to accommodate the presence of these new advisory councils in schools.

Beth calculated that the unmonitored use of a school’s resources involved costs that were unaccounted for in school and school board budgets. She felt an enormous amount of training was required at all levels, but especially within councils themselves, to allow people to understand the burden of these extra costs on the education system. The system, she said, also had to adjust to absorb the expense of the existence of these new councils operating within schools.

Beth discussed the emergence of school councils as the entry of ‘special interest groups’ into an area traditionally closed from outside observation or interference. She spoke generally when she referred to ‘power-loss’ and the inevitable painful adjustment of
professionally autonomous groups such as teachers and principals to potentially
‘controlling groups’ from the external environment. Beth stated the problem as follows:

These people [teachers and principals] have operated pretty autonomously
with very little interference from parents and they [teachers and principals]
have been able to successfully whip them down and out. Now they may
not have the luxury of doing that. I think there is a real concern that there
will be somebody sitting in their classroom or telling them how they want
things done and after all they are the experts and the parents aren’t! (Beth)

Beth said it was all a matter of attitude. Principals and teachers, as professionals, could
no longer hold the attitude that ‘(t)his is the way we operate and you are going to have to
work with us instead of us working with you’. The school board had the responsibility to
give principals the necessary briefing and principals in turn had the duty to brief teachers
to help calm the fears she knew they experienced.

The problem of briefing, according to Beth, related to: “the type of person in the
leadership role.” She estimated that about sixty percent of the people in leadership
positions did not have the required leadership skills to make school councils function
successfully: “Principals have operated in such an insular mode for decades, they can’t
see another perspective or they are not willing to see it.”

Beth doubted that those who adopted a patronizing, ‘union-oriented’, ‘insular’ mode of
behaviour could change: “You have to decide what you need in a leadership capacity and
then get the type of people you need and these people must not be connected with the
union.” Beth’s statements juxtapose the current popular neo-conservative trend that those
who cannot adjust to change must be released from their position if the organization is to operate efficiently; this often means breaking the stronghold traditionally held by unions.

5.3.2.5 Inaction

Parents

Joan reflected that there was more action when the council was first initiated. She stated that the time had come to move on to the next stage. She wanted to be more actively involved in the “life of the school” and she wanted students to be more aware of the council’s presence and of its work. From her experience, members who did not have children in the school would benefit from a more direct acquaintance with students and their needs:

I was [in the school] last week for a meeting and I realized how strange it was to be in the school when students (were) there. Everyone on the council works full time so that’s going to be very difficult. But, I think there are ways that we can actually get involved with the school. The teachers recognize the role we play. I don’t believe the students do. (Joan)

Joan did not suggest that the students on the council were failing in their role to keep other students informed. Rather, she discussed the problem in terms of council members getting a feel for what went on in the daily life of the school and increasing students’ awareness of the council’s presence. Joan’s comments hinted at the problem of access - parents did not have the same kind of access to the leader, to the institution, or to information coming into or out of the institution as did those who worked in the school; parents whose children did not attend the school had even less. Joan’s statements suggest
the existence of an 'access continuum' which reflects the different levels of access experienced by members of a school advisory council. Teachers have more frequent and easier access to the leader; parents with children in the school have legitimate access on the pretext that they may want to discuss the implications of a decision for their son or daughter; but parents and community members who do not work in the school or who do not have children attending the school may have limited or controlled access. They may have to depend on infrequent and scheduled meetings to present their ideas and opinions. The further away a group operated from the principal, the least amount of access it would have to the principal. Table 5.5 presents an access continuum.

TABLE 5.5 ACCESS CONTINUUM

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Access</th>
<th>High Access</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>members and</td>
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<td>business</td>
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<td>representatives</td>
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<td>without children in the school</td>
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Both Joan and Matthew wanted action to improve what they considered to be a serious problem of poor communication. Joan was not comfortable with the response that some counselors gave 'that no news was good news': “I’d like to spend some time communicating with the community and opening as many doors as we can to the community for the good of the whole school.” Joan was not quite certain of a workable approach to solve the communication problem, but I remarked that many suggestions
were discussed during council meetings such as reformatting the survey instrument used the previous year, setting up ‘voice mail’, and discussing issues with parents through a series of focus groups.

Matthew also expressed a frustration with the council’s inability to surface a satisfactory strategy to communicate the presence of the council to the community; there was a sense that he wanted to stop paying lip-service to the problem and to begin immediate action to improve the situation. He said:

Somehow we have to get the message out to the community explaining what this is all about and why it’s there, what it can do, and what it can’t do and so on. (Matthew)

Matthew wanted action on another issue as well. He wanted more involvement with issues related to curriculum development. He assumed that his experience in business was a valuable asset to those who were occupied with designing educational programs:

I think with people like myself represented on the council who are in business and who know what’s required out there, it’s a part of my job to interview students for jobs. We can do a lot to close the gap. The curriculum is what it’s all about at the end of the day, it’s what students know and what they don’t know. I welcome this whole process, I do really. I want to get more involved with it not only with Rob but with the teachers who teach the subjects as well. (Matthew)

Matthew was frustrated that the council’s agenda did not provide opportunity for this kind of activity.

Lillian had been with the council since it was first established, as were Ashley, Joan and Ann. She expressed the view that when she became involved she was under the
impression she would be more actively involved in issues related to school policy and practice; but, this had not materialized. She was hopeful that, as Joan assumed the chair, the group would begin to really make a difference. She said:

I have been waiting for this moment when (Rob) would actually step down (as chair) and a parent would take over and we would get an opportunity to say what concerns us as parents about education and schools as opposed to well ‘Here’s a council let’s develop a council.’ This is really all we have done over the past couple of years. (Lillian)

Lillian identified other problems related to inaction. In the initial stages of the evolution of the council, Rob had distributed material circulated by other councils. Lillian read this information with interest and learned that some groups were directly involved in decision making. It angered her that this group was not: “I thought that we would actually make decisions on issues and the principal would actually have to carry them through on our behalf.” Lillian conceded that she sat “in eager anticipation” waiting to act on some of the things she had read.

Community Members

Charles expressed satisfaction with the activities of the advisory group. In response to my question about the ‘downside’ of his experience, he could not find anything that troubled him. He hinted, however, that the council could become more actively involved in things they had charted to do when they were first established: “Lately we have been focusing a little too much on systems issues, things that have happened in the past, and we have not been moving forward.” He felt that with Joan in the position of chair, there
would be changes. Charles suggested that the issue of communication with the community and assessment of the school’s effectiveness needed attention: “I think we have started to move in the right direction, but these are still issues.” (I have interpreted Charles’ concerns as problems related to inaction, but Charles did not speak of them as problems; he spoke of them as future goals.)

A problem for Walter was the decision-making approach adopted by council. He assumed that, until recently when council members voted on the issue of the entering into the contract with the sporting goods distribution firm, all decisions were reached by consensus and that nothing was decided by majority vote. He elaborated the slow pace of such an approach:

> It (is) the Japanese method of ‘consensus building’ which is fine and probably the best way to make decisions in the long run but, probably unrealistic in today’s society, in that I don’t think we have enough time to do that. Consensus building takes a heck of a lot of time. (Walter)

Walter also assumed that change was in the wind and that the group would be forced to move faster; issues would begin to escalate and intensify as everyone became aware of the significant changes that would result from the decrease in government transfer of funds to school boards. Schools and councils, he assessed, would have to deal with strategies to accommodate larger numbers of students with reduced staff allotments.

From his perspective, such issues could not be resolved by consensus: “There are people there with particular agendas, they are coming at issues from a particular point of view. We’re not going to be able to satisfy all of them.” He elaborated:
I firmly believe in consensus building but, I guess I joined thinking that we should be operating more like a Board of Directors, looking at the issues and making decisions and deciding strategic directions and moving on. I get the feeling right now that it’s more like a Parent Council, let’s have a lot of discussion and gradually the time will come to reach a consensus. That’s really great if the time allows, but I am not sure the time will allow for this. (Walter)

Walter also expressed a hope that the council would act on the ‘real issues’ now that a parent had assumed the chair. At first, he saw nothing wrong with the principal as chair but, with the change, the council could become more actively involved as a Board of Directors. He said: “I’ve kind of got the feeling that there is a huge tidal wave coming of tough decisions to be made.”

The Trustee

Beth also discussed the council’s approach to decision making. Her comments supported those of Walter’s that the advisory relation at Shieldside was a “consensual relationship,” which from her perspective, handicapped advisers. She felt that parents and community members, within the council, had reached a stage of complete inactivity: “They are looking to the teachers and the principal and saying ‘tell us what to do’.”

Beth cited the recent situation of selecting a chair to support her contention: “They had to struggle with the decision to elect a chair”. Beth observed that parents and community members depended on signals from the staff before acting. “The staff is leading the council by the nose in the direction they want it to go, ... (council members) do not have
the training or the background to know where to place the emphasis,” she said. In her opinion, the group was a long way from taking a role as a completely autonomous group.

5.3.2.6 Rivalry

Parents

While Ashley admitted complete satisfaction with the manner in which the council functioned, she identified a situation of ‘interpersonal tension’ that I interpreted as a problem of rivalry. The problem, according to Ashley, was that one member talked too much about issues unrelated to topics under discussion: “It was a bit of a downer when one member would take up so much time.” This person, according to Ashley, “would jump on the bandwagon to talk about her background, where she was educated, how it was there, and what was wrong with things up to now.” Ashley was frustrated that there was no mechanism in place to indicate to speakers that it was time to move on.

Teachers

Don had experienced the same problem as Ashley had and with the same member. The situation suggested that there was a silent rivalry between two groups of advisers: those who worked in the school and a representative from the community who did not have a child attending the school. It appeared that this parent talked endlessly about issues unrelated to topics under discussion and also took time elaborating her positive experiences with the British educational system.
Goldhamer, however, may have identified this as a problem of access. Since this mother did not have a child in the school and since she worked during the day, she had fewer avenues to gain access to the school on a regular basis and fewer opportunities to make contact with the principal. It would seem, therefore, that she took full advantage of scheduled meetings to air her views. As stated earlier (Access Continuum Table 5.5), there were three types of access: those who worked in the school, such as teachers and the teaching assistant, with ready access to the principal; parents with children at the school who had legitimate access under the guise of discussing their son's or daughter's progress; it seemed that community members with no children in the school were outside the envied circle and, therefore, were forced to take advantage of every opportunity to gain access. Lillian, apparently, was outside the circle and used meetings to access information, to instruct the leader, and to express her ideas and opinions. Unfortunately, this situation seemed to have fueled tension and rivalry.

5.3.3 Summary

Data from observations and from interviews with members from this advisory group help to identify and to describe some of the negative consequences of the advisory relation. Table 5.6 presents a visual image of issues and those who described them.
Table 5.6 TECHNICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES (ADVISERS)

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<th>MEMBER</th>
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<th>ADJUSTMENT</th>
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P=Parent  CM=Community Member  TR=Teacher  T=Trustee

Three conclusions can be drawn from the findings: not all members identified problems related to the same issues; some members described and experienced more problems than others; and some members, especially those connected to the school such as teachers and the teaching assistant, identified minimal concerns. The trustee, however, expanded on more problems than anyone. The psychological issues of adjustment and inaction seemed to have plagued advisers most. Members, especially parents, community members, and the trustee reported frustration with the response of the advisory group to issues that had been unilaterally identified by the principal. Members, especially new members, strongly felt that the issue of adjustment required attention. The process of briefing new members with respect to the role of members, the past history of the group,
and the issue of future goals needed attention. Walter emphasized the importance of having a brochure produced to introduce new members to the council.

It is often less complicated to focus on the dark side or the negative consequences of any experience and to ignore or fail to mention the positives to be gained from the experience. Because I believe that reality is a mix of both the negative and the positive, I conclude this chapter by presenting some of the positive realities of the advisory experience as presented in statements of the advisory group.

5.4. Reality of Participation: Findings and Analysis

5.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I review data from interviews and observations to identify and interpret the positive benefits of participation from the perspective of members of the advisory group. Findings reveal that the statements support the aims of participation as outlined in the reformist and general crisis theories of participation; namely, responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy.

5.4.2 Positive Outcomes

5.4.2.1 Responsiveness

The Parents

Joan determined that her participation benefited students, parents, and teachers. "They can't do it alone," she said in reference to educators. And, similarly, Joan assumed that
as more parents became involved, they would want to remain involved to be better informed and better able to respond to the educational needs of their children:

In a lot of cases, like my son’s, they (students) don’t know what they want to do. So the more we can help them - whether it’s getting involved with co-ops, the Career Fair - the more they can see what’s going on in the whole world or in their part of the world. I think they will be better off for it. (Joan)

Joan assumed that giving parents an opportunity to participate meant giving students an opportunity to connect with the “reality of the real world.”

Ashley elaborated that the establishment of the council had provided an opportunity for members, including herself, to respond better to educational issues. She described what participation meant to her: “I come to every meeting. I want to see it continue. I will offer to call members.” Ashley’s comments supported the assumption that the more people have opportunities to participate, the more responsive they become and the more they will seek opportunities for further participation.

5.4.2.2 Personal Development

Parent

Ashley elaborated that she had learned much since becoming a member of the council: “I have learned a great deal. I have learned about groups and how they function. I think I have learned a great deal about the education system and the people that work in it.” She expressed gratitude that participation had provided opportunities for self-improvement.
Matthew’s participation was personally enriching in that he felt he had an opportunity to contribute something to enhance the educational programs offered to students. He was certain that, through participation, he could share his experiences of the ‘work world’ with students: “Education is not a means to an end, it is a means to the beginning.” Matthew wanted to help students respond to the changes which had occurred in the job market and, eventually, he hoped they would have the skills to find work, raise a family, and become contributing members of society: “That’s what it’s all about really.” In turn, Matthew hoped to learn something about the education system in Canada.

Participation had benefited Ann as well. She learned about consensus building, about rules of debate, and about ways to express her point of view without losing sight of personal and organizational goals:

I have benefited from my work on the council because working on a committee and coming to a consensus is very beneficial and helps you in all walks of life. You have to be aware of what is going on. Yes, you may feel frustrated but you have to realize that you are part of a group and you have to work toward the group’s goals whether it may go against your individual sense or not. You have to not take things personally but always keep your eye on the goal. You may disagree with other people but there are ways of disagreeing and you have to be very careful about always keeping things in a positive light. Those are very good lessons in life to learn. (Ann)

Ann admitted she had experienced frustrations from participation, but that learning to operate in a small group situation was a valuable experience.
Community Members

Charles talked about the ‘give and take’ of the advisory experience in terms of using his expertise to effect change and helping in the design of expectations for graduates. His comment was: “We are not saying we want a student who does math only, we are saying this is the end product and we are looking at how the school as a whole is achieving this.” Charles spoke confidently that the Exit Outcomes or graduate requirements, designed by the advisory group, ensured that students graduated better prepared to face future challenges. This was a personally enriching experience for Charles.

The Trustee

From the trustee’s perspective, the establishment of the advisory council meant that the business community could now take responsibility for matters which affected it to the mutual benefit of both business and students. Beth anticipated that participation promised a greater possibility for emphasis on the provision of cooperative education programs in schools and the provision of more people from the business community to work with students. Also, schools could benefit, she felt, as business provided financial resources to support school programs. Beth also assumed that with a business representative on the council, students would be better connected with business opportunities and with “the wide scope of careers available to them.”
5.4.2.3 Overcoming Alienation

Parents

Joan admitted that becoming a member of the council had improved her ‘comfort level’ in the school. She now felt more comfortable coming into the school and speaking with her son’s teachers. Joan related an anecdote to illustrate how becoming a council member had uncovered a support system she had not felt comfortable accessing in the past:

I was in the school last week with my son. My younger son is not sure what he wants to do, so really what we have to do is ensure that the courses he takes will leave many doors open. That was new for us. So while I thought I knew how to help him and we had talked about it a lot, when he decided that he was going to talk to one of the counselors I said to him, ‘Do you want to talk to him alone or do you want me to come?’ He actually suggested that I come in and talk to the counselor. I was glad we both attended because we got some additional information. And it was only because I have the comfort level to visit the school that I would have asked about joining him. Before, I would have seen myself or would have been concerned that the school would have perceived me as a totally ignorant mother getting involved where she doesn’t need to be. I know the school is not like that. (Joan)

Joan realized that not all parents were aware of this benefit of participation: “I don’t see many parents doing that type of thing.” One of Joan’s personal ambitions, as a member of council, was to cultivate, among parents, an acceptable level of comfort so that they could use the education system to the utmost benefit of their children.

Lillian admitted that, prior to coming to the council, she held a negative perspective of the education system generally and was convinced that other parents and teachers in her
community really did not care about their children’s education. After her experience on
council she reported:

I really feel uplifted every time I leave one of these meetings because I am
always thoroughly convinced that everyone here, no matter what their
background or their own personal agenda, that they all really do care
what’s happening, including the teachers. I had not felt good about
(teachers) prior to becoming a member. (Lillian)

Lillian did not have children in the school, but she was an active member of the council.
She attended most meetings, volunteered to contact parents, and was eager to organize
focus groups to learn more about parents’ concerns. I also observed that during the
interview and during one council meeting, Lillian volunteered to go from house to house
in the catchment area with the assessment surveys. Participation, she felt, had helped her
develop a deep commitment to breaking down some of the barriers separating parents
from their children’s schools. From a critical perspective, Lillian’s efforts to gain access
to people’s homes through the assessment scheme could be construed as a business
approach and one way to advertise her veterinary clinic. However, Lillian’s actions and
comments could have implied a keen interest in improving the education system.

**Teachers**

Kent assumed that as parents learned more about the teaching profession, they would
show greater support. He referred to the presence of the council as the presence of an
outside group that was now more supportive of the work of teachers simply because they
were better informed: “What I see from our own council is that they defend the teachers
that work so hard here and they are getting a better picture of what is involved in the profession.” Kent determined that parents who did not participate in school affairs were less supportive and not usually prepared to defend the work of teachers.

Don’s participation also enabled him to experience respect and support from parents on the council. In Don’s view, parents had every right to be involved in the education of their children and he was happy to see that their participation in the advisory council resulted in the development of positive attitudes toward professionals: “I appreciate them most when they recognize the value of professionals and respect their opinion. I think it’s a two-way street. The relationship can be most effective when it is one of mutual respect and support.” Don’s comments suggested that council members had an opportunity to understand and value educators and, therefore, to form positive attitudes; this, in Don’s view, helped them overcome negativism towards professionals and helped educators develop more positive attitudes toward parents. I am not sure that Don was prepared to offer the same support to parents, his comments suggested that support came from one direction, i.e. from parents to teachers.

**Trustee**

In comments that offered support for participation as a way to overcome alienation, Beth focused on benefits to business members on the council. Business members, Beth assumed, learned more about students through their involvement. She reported that because they saw students in the school rather than down town or at the malls, they saw
them in a more positive environment: "They see students at school rather than at the mall where all the kids hang out." Since she believed students behaved differently at school, Beth assumed, participation of the business member had the potential to eliminate some of the negative attitudes and thereby raise the image of students in the community.

5.4.2.4 Legitimacy

Trustee

From Beth’s perspective, school councils linked parents with the realities of education: "They can see how things operate." She referred to such specifics as how classes were organized and how the school was run. Beth reasoned that, through participation, support would come from parents who saw how "the dollars (were) used"; Beth assumed that participants, especially business representatives, would respond to their new educational knowledge by "shelling out sufficient amounts of money to the various fundraising projects" to maintain programs.

5.4.3 Summary

The statements of advisers tell us how participation has benefited those who have volunteered to advisory positions. Through participation, parents, teachers, community members and the trustee have experienced a more responsive system of education, they have experienced personal development, and their experiences have enabled them and others to overcome negative feelings directed toward the system of public education. In addition, the trustee reported that through participation, schools would maintain their
legitimacy and members of the community would support school initiatives to fundraise during times of economic upheaval. Table 5.7 presents the positive outcomes and those who identified them.

**TABLE 5.6 POSITIVE OUTCOMES (ADVISERS)**

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<tr>
<th>MEMBER</th>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>OVERCOMING ALIENATION</th>
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<td>P-Matthew</td>
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<td>P-Ann</td>
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<td>P-Lillian</td>
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P= Parent    CM= Community Member    TR= Teacher    T= Trustee

From Table 5.7, it can be concluded that all participants supported one or two positive outcomes of participation, but there was no clustering of responses. The statements of Joan and Matthew offer support for the view that participation enables parents to be better informed concerning their children’s education and, therefore, enables them to better respond to their children’s and the school’s needs. Five participants supported the view that participation enabled members to overcome negative attitudes toward education and educators. Lillian, the community representative, spoke strongly in favour of this as a
benefit. Beth, the trustee, was the only participant to recognize that participation had the potential to add or to maintain legitimacy in times of fiscal restraint.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have presented the experienced realities from the perspective of members of an advisory council at Shieldside Secondary School. As a result of studying the accumulated data I have concluded that members, taken as a whole, hold a middle-class social status; that they derived their expertise from their family, educational, work, and community experiences; and that they approached situations as executor, friend, educator, informant, critic, and adviser. Data illuminated specifics of the advisory role in an educational context. Findings show, for example, that according to the advisers, the executor defines rules governing membership, devises a satisfactory strategy to assess the council and the school, and sets agendas. As critic, the adviser determines the ethical response of the school to issues such as whether the school should enter into a contractual arrangement with a sporting goods distribution firm. In such cases advisers, in this study, provided a critical review of a situation that could potentially place the school in a conflict of interest position with the business community. Findings show that the role of the adviser as executor and the role as critic are decidedly different from the role of the adviser as educator. As educator, the adviser instructs educators on a number of issues including: the need to use a jargon-free language to communicate with
the public, the need to offer programs more efficiently and the need to educate the school board when their decisions to decrease school staffs negatively impact school programs.

Findings also permitted an elaboration of some negative consequences of the advisory experience. Statements supported the view that problems resulted from issues of access, selection, adjustment, inaction, and rivalry. I concluded that the most serious concerns resulted from issues of adjustment and inaction. Issues of adjustment, for example, centred on five concerns:

1. that parent and community member advisers were expected to discuss educational issues without background information;

2. that parent and community member advisers were now forced to look at educational reform from the perspective of educators and students rather than from their own or their child’s perspective;

3. that advisers, in general, must learn to function amidst ambiguity of role definition;

4. that briefing was an issue of chance;

5. that teacher advisers had to adjust to the reality of advice now coming to the principal from outside the institution.

Inaction also presented significant negative consequences to participants. Parent and community member advisers wanted to participate more actively in issues affecting educational programs. When the council was first established, they were actively involved in establishing rules governing council operations and helping to establish the graduate outcomes for students. In recent months, involvement in significant issues had
declined and the principal continued to control the issues addressed by the group. With the change from the principal to a parent as chair of the group, members expressed a wish that this situation would change and they would become more actively involved in more meaningful issues.

Finally, while there were negative consequences associated with the advisory experience, there were positive benefits as well. These benefits supported the aims of participation outlined in the reformist and general crisis theories put forward by Nicholas Beattie (1985). The positive benefits included responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy. The most powerful statements of advisers were interpreted within the category of 'overcoming alienation'. As a result of participation, for example, parents now felt more comfortable coming into the school and discussing educational issues, parents and teachers formed more positive attitudes toward one another and, from the perspective of the trustee, members of the business community had opportunities to see students in a more positive light, away from downtown malls. The statements in this section provide fuel for those who advocate participation as one way to improve the education system to benefit parents, students, and citizens generally.

In Chapter Six, I look at the advisory experience from the perspective of those who receive advice; I look at the assumptions of the advised.
6.1 Reality of Participation: Status and Expertise

6.1.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I described and interpreted the experiences of parents, community members, and teachers who participated as advisers to the principal within an advisory council in a secondary school. I attempted to crystallize the complexity of the advisory experience by identifying the social status and expertise of members, as well as various situations and approaches used. I also highlighted negative consequences and positive outcomes of the experience.

The purpose of this study is to understand this form of participation from multiple perspectives. I believe, therefore, that the opinions, interpretations, and assumptions of those most reliably placed to experience the effects of a reform help promote understanding of the reform and enhance its success or failure. In this chapter, the statements of the principal and the superintendent are described and interpreted. According to Goldhamer (1978), this is the group to whom advisers proffer advice and from whom they presumably receive direction. I have determined, also, that the statements of the principal and the superintendent may represent the views and opinions
of those from whom this group has received direction. In this chapter, therefore, I present the ‘directed realities’.

The challenge is to describe and interpret participation following the conceptual framework used in the previous chapter. Data from semi-structured interviews with Rob, the principal of Shieldside Secondary School and with John, a superintendent with the Halloway Board of Education, help to elaborate upon their views of (a) the status and expertise of members; (b) the manner in which advisers approach various situations; (c) negative consequences of the advisory experience; and (d) any of the positive outcomes.

6.1.2 Status of Members

The Principal

The principal of Shieldside Secondary School was assigned his position three years prior to the school’s opening. Rob was an eager, confident, and energetic administrator whose style of dress - suspendered slacks, the inevitable blue cotton shirt, and patterned ties - together with a tall, lean physique, presented the demeanor of someone in charge. Rob’s approachable and friendly manner sufficiently demonstrated his keen interest in people and helped to ensure that everyone, especially students, parents, and staff, was comfortable working with him. One teacher remarked:
Rob has a philosophy of education that I have always dreamed that I wanted to be a part of and I wanted my kids to be a part of. ... I think Rob definitely has to take credit for creating an atmosphere. His commitment to education and his vision of education is different from any other principal I have ever worked for. (Fay)

At a provincial conference for administrators sponsored by The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1995), Rob explained that his school was organized as a "Learning Organization" in that each department operated according to the principles proposed by a leading educational writer from The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Kenneth Leithwood. He also reported that the management plan for his school was based on the principles of management as proposed by W. Edwards Deming so that there was a focus on six key process areas: leadership, purposes, teams, client, process, and assessment.

Rob was also a member of the "Developing Quality Schools Network," a network established for administrators in Ontario by a former head of the Department of Administration at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Steve Lawton with assistance from Martin Barlosky. The network was established to promote and to share experiences of educational leaders attempting to develop quality schools in the province of Ontario. Finally, Rob reported to the assembly of administrators attending the conference sponsored by the Developing Quality Schools Network, that he was influenced by the writing of Margaret J. Wheatley. In her book *Leadership and the New Science: Learning About Organization from an Orderly Universe*, Wheatley (1994) elaborates upon such themes as order and change, autonomy and control, structure and
flexibility, and planning and innovation in organizations. Her principal thesis is that organizations can be accused of doing too much planning and not enough action.

Rob was the central actor in the establishment of the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary; most participants complemented the role he played and the open and careful manner he continued to display in the effective operation of the council and the manner in which he continued to encourage parent participation in school affairs. From previous research (Leithwood 1992; Sheppard 1992), it can be concluded that, in his speech and in his actions, Rob displayed characteristics of the transformational leader in that collaboration and teamwork were central to his administrative style. Early in his appointment as principal, Rob attempted to create an open and cooperative atmosphere for sharing ideas and opinions about educational issues among teachers, parents, and students; he promoted opportunities for leadership among teachers, parents, students, and community members; and he continually espoused the goals of shared purpose and innovative planning for both the school and the council. One member of the council and a teacher on staff reported that Rob simply stated what needed to be done and everyone joined forces to see the plan through. Rob reported that in his experience, when people were empowered, the results were staggering.

Specific examples of Rob’s transformational leadership style came from statements by teachers and parents. Teachers talked about the reality that the school was not administered by one or two administrators but that there was a ‘leadership team’
comprised of the principal, vice-principal, and eight subject specialists. From the reports of participants, the leadership team reflected a new phenomenon in school administration. The team met regularly to plan and discuss issues; decisions were made by the group; and one teacher on the advisory council was a representative of the leadership team.

There were also opportunities to receive advice from students. In addition to the Student Council, students met each Wednesday morning with a teacher. The sessions were designed to give students opportunities to meet weekly with their teacher adviser and with students of various ages and grade levels to discuss concerns and issues. For example, the information that Kent, the leadership team representative on the council, reported concerning the responses of students to the issue of entering into a contract with the sporting goods distribution firm, came from a survey of student opinion conducted during the Wednesday morning sessions. It was felt that the sessions gave students an opportunity to voice their opinions, to listen to other ideas, and to feel consulted before changes were made in the school. Rob spoke of these sessions as a way to access valuable information related to how to improve the educational environment to benefit all students.

I observed, also, that Rob did not miss opportunities to provide information to community groups. For example, when the Halloway School Board was looking for input into the first and second drafts of the policy statement on school councils, Rob, and members of the advisory council, prepared a brief to present at the meetings. The
advisory group at Shieldside was regarded by other schools as a pioneer group in that it was among the first to be established. Rob was invited to present his experiences to teachers in various schools, to parent/teacher groups, and to conferences of school administrators. Rob also encouraged leadership among council members by inviting them to speak when he was unavailable.

Rob explained that his appointment as principal before the school opened was unusual. In the following excerpt he shares a little of the history of his appointment:

> I was appointed as principal of this school three years prior to the opening based upon a concept that I had for a community school. Part of that concept was not only the utilization of the building by the greater community but also involvement in the school by parents and by the community certainly at a level that we were not accustomed to within (the Halloway Board of Education) and, for the most part, not in Ontario. Traditionally, architects and business service people built schools... then educators were hired at a later date. So there was recognition that things would be a little different in this case. (Rob)

Subsequent to his appointment, Rob began to host community meetings. From these meetings, the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary was established. When Rob spoke of the advisory council, he referred to the members with great respect thus giving the impression that he placed them in high esteem. In his comments he referred specifically to the business people on the council:

> Once again we were trying to have a group of people that provided a variety of perspectives for us to help us make good recommendations. There is more than one person who is in business on the council. They have been very reinforcing for us in terms of some of the things we are doing. Number one is in terms of some of the skills that we expect students to have when they graduate. (Rob)
Rob related an anecdote which exemplified how he determined that members reinforced the work of the school:

When we talked about education for a global perspective and what that meant being the driving force behind the provision of the curriculum and the whole recognition of the interconnectedness of the world and kids as global learners and technology and all that that encompasses, one of our council members said ‘Exactly, that’s my life and on any given day I talk to Paris, and I had to learn Japanese because I travel to Japan because we sell to Japan directly. Our kids must have those skills to be successful’.

(Rob)

The members of the advisory group, according to the principal, had the potential to link the school with the outside community. Rob felt this group could, for example, explain to members of the community why the school was doing what it was doing and why it was making the decisions it was making. He was convinced that parents and community members could help the school build essential partnerships with the community.

The Superintendent

The Halloway Board of Education appointed John to coordinate educational services in the district. As superintendent, he was responsible for a number of high schools in the senior panel including Shieldside Secondary. John felt he had achieved his present position because, in his more then twenty-year history with the board, he had moved up through the system from classroom teacher, to department head, to vice-principal, and to principal before assuming his present position two years previously. As principal, John established an advisory council in his school; throughout the interview he supported his
assumptions about who advisers are, what they do, and some of the consequences of their actions by relating examples from his personal experiences.

From his statements, I concluded that John determined that those who became members of organized school groups achieved a high status since they came with knowledge about their children and about community programs and with ideas of how to improve the system. Parents and community members were, therefore, a valuable resource:

There are lots of good perspectives that people who don’t actually work in the education system have, so it’s a matter of finding that out. Most of the principals that I have worked with over the years would agree that there is valuable input, valuable energy, so why not engage it to determine how well we are doing. (John)

John spoke of those who offered their service to help make the system more effective as ‘partners’. He reported that it was his duty as superintendent, therefore, to ensure that such partners were engaged in partnerships that were well organized and meaningful: “I believe in engaging people in a meaningful partnership.” I concluded that this was a fundamental reason, from John’s perspective, to justify the establishment of advisory councils. From John’s perspective a school council meant the establishment of a structure to allow for more meaningful participation than was possible through Parent/Teacher Associations, for example.
6.1.3 Expertise of Members

The Principal

'Expertise', I have concluded, is contingent upon the family, work, education, and volunteer experiences that determine the historical background of an individual. It has been suggested by Goldhamer (1978) and Curle (1968) that advisers are desired because they have a particular expertise needed by leaders. In this section, I look at the statements of the principal and the superintendent to identify and interpret their perspectives concerning the expertise of advisers who are members of advisory councils in an educational context.

Rob believed that members of the advisory council at his school had sufficient expertise to respond to issues related to the formulation of school and school board policies. He said:

We have been meeting for over two-and-a-half years every two weeks and we have dealt with everything from whether we will have school uniforms or not, to local issues, concerns we may have about behavior of students in the community, behavior of students at the school, of smoking issues, you know things like that. Where in fact anything that is a community issue is a school issue I want to put it before the council for council input. With the idea that they are your kids, they are influenced by this so how do you feel about it. We've got involved somewhat in terms of responding to draft policies that have come from the board to say that this is what we believe to be important representing (Shieldside Secondary). (Rob)
Rob was confident that, as changes were enacted with respect to funding for school programs, the group had the expertise to become more involved with issues such as budgeting and funding for school programs.

We are heading into a difficult period with cutbacks and they will have dramatic effects upon this school. We need the council to be very involved and work with the staff in this. I have no concerns that they are capable and will become more involved. (Rob)

There was no sign of any attempt on Rob’s part to conceal the difficulties that the school would encounter as a result of ‘cutbacks’. Rob seemed to find solace in the fact that he had an expert group to assist him during this time of difficult budget decisions.

In addition to policy and budget issues, Rob discussed the expertise of parents and community members in terms of advice on how programs should be designed to respond to the needs of students and, also, how this knowledge would be assessed:

The council established guidelines for the assessment process, and it was up to the school to provide the program to ensure that all kids go through the stages that they need in order to get to that point. (Rob)

Rob admitted that the council meant extra responsibilities, but as educational reforms put added strains on the administrator’s role, the expertise that members brought with them compensated for the extra output of effort on their behalf.

The Superintendent

In his comments, John spoke specifically about the expertise of members of the council at Shieldside. He attributed members with having skills that helped Rob, the principal, plan
the architectural design of the school and, as well, establish priorities for school
programs:

As parents they had an opportunity to shape the school. They had an
opportunity to surface priorities for (Rob) and his role, they had a chance
to mirror or act as a sounding board for some of his proposals, some of the
directions he was proposing for the leadership team and some of the
design features of the building. It was the ideal environment and if you
are starting a school tomorrow, you need to engage the parents in that
community before the bricks are in place and say ‘What do you really
want this place to be when the doors open?’ (John)

John’s statements also suggested that council members had a particular expertise in that
they could provide the school, and indirectly, the school board access to ‘an external
point of view’:

They can give a detailed analysis of what’s working and what’s not
working and give the principal advice and say, for example, ‘We really
need to give attention to how the early literacy is going in the school.
Let’s take a look at our grade three test results. Kids in this school seem to
be at the norm for the region. Let’s look at why.’ I think that’s the kind of
issue you can get into. You now have an external point of view, you are
not just looking at it from a practitioner’s point of view. (John)

John believed that the unique expertise that parents bring to the school had been ignored
in the past:

I think that parents know their children better than anybody else in the
system and, therefore, should have a voice. They know the needs of their
children and should have the power to question where education is going,
to assess where their kids are, and to have a say in the delivery of the
program. I don’t think that as an educational system we have asked
parents for that kind of input in the past. With councils you are looking at
a different approach. (John)
John looked ahead to government reform which would give schools more responsibility. He believed that councils would assume more governance authority as schools became more autonomous; his attitude reflected the belief that he did not doubt that parents and community members within councils had the expertise to meet the challenge to assume the extra responsibilities.

6.1.4 Summary

In this section, I have viewed the status and the expertise of advisers from the perspective of the leaders. The principal felt that because business representatives could link the school with the outside business community, this gave advisers considerable status. Their presence within the school, according to Rob, ensured the continued relevance of educational programs for students. From the perspective of the superintendent, parents and community members became partners with the school system. Such partnerships meant that their knowledge and energy provided a valuable resource to education.

Findings show that both leaders agreed that council members had a varied expertise. Rob focused on the special knowledge of business members and the expertise which allowed all advisers to inform the formulation of school and board policies. The superintendent admitted that parents derived a unique expertise from the knowledge they had of their own children and from ongoing programs within the community.
It is important to note that neither the principal nor the superintendent referred to the status and expertise of teachers or students. Their remarks focused on parents and community members only.

6.2 The Reality of Participation: Situations and Approaches

6.2.1 Introduction

In this section, I describe and interpret situations and approaches identified by leaders in their discussion of what advisers do. I depend on personal observations and the semi-structured interviews with the principal of Shieldside Secondary School and one of the superintendents with the Halloway Board of Education to support the interpretations.

Findings show that with respect to what advisers actually do, the principal and the superintendent outlined two realities - situations and approaches which they actually observed and situations and approaches which they hoped would occur with the establishment of advisory councils.

6.2.2 Situations and Approaches

The Principal

When the council at Shieldside was first established, Rob explained that he emphasized that members would define their own role. He said his approach was both directive and collaborative. I understood this to mean that, initially, Rob outlined some goals for the council and for the school. This approach permitted members to independently and
collectively determine the part they wanted to play in the fulfillment of these goals; in this way they outlined their own roles. Rob did not want to impose a role on any member:

I thought it was really important that this should be clarified up front. So we had a lot of discussions about the role of the council. I directed most of that, to be honest. I directed this discussion around issues that needed to be dealt with. These were resolution of our mission and goals, the mandate, and clarifying all those things. Also exit outcomes for our graduates. So I wanted this council to determine what they wanted their kids to know and value and be able to do when they left here. I also wanted them to be involved in the process. The council created the outcomes itself, everyone got their own agendas clearly identified though this process, what they valued. They were able to come to an agreement with others about what they collectively valued. (Rob)

Rob admitted that his experiences with courses in group dynamics and group facilitation helped him to help members define their roles.

The Superintendent

The superintendent insisted that roles needed to be carefully defined early so that everyone understood what was expected of them: “This was all a part of front-end-loading.” John gave a more in-depth elaboration of this concept in his discussion of how principals could eliminate rivalry among members. This is presented later in this chapter. In the following sections, I use statements from the principal and the superintendent to identify the specifics of the advisory role. As in the previous chapter, the statements support the view that members of advisory councils serve as executors, educators,
informants, critics, and advisers. However, no statements supported the role of the adviser as friend.

6.2.2.1 Adviser as Executor

The Principal

Rob outlined a list of situations and approaches which supported the view that members approach situations as executors. Advisers, Rob suggested, discussed educational issues as they arose such as student behaviour and protection of school property; they responded to requests for input from the school board office to such issues as the renewal process and recent decisions related to staffing. Members also attended formal occasions at the school such as the official opening, orientation night for parents of incoming students, and community meetings hosted by the school board.

Rob outlined an assessment role for council members; he said they ensured that staff and students met the aims and objectives of the school as established by the organization and outlined in the document entitled “The Exit Outcomes.” Rob maintained that advisers determined the ‘ends’ while the school determined the ‘means’: “They assess regularly, determine what we are doing, make recommendations, and it is up to us (the educators) to implement them.”

While Rob repeated that assessment was one of the more substantial roles of the council, it was evident from the interviews with council members that they were not as certain as Rob that they had achieved their goal. It is interesting to recall that council members
reported frustration at not finding a satisfactory assessment strategy that allowed them to access feedback from the community nor which enabled them to make recommendations that educators would implement.

According to Rob, the advisers in this council played a communication role, albeit, an emerging communication role. He elaborated upon the struggle advisers experienced in their search for a satisfactory strategy to establish two-way communication with the community. They had already sent out newsletters, set up a ‘voice mail’ system, and invited the community to attend open meetings of the advisory council. Nothing seemed to provide the input they required as assurance that the school was responding to the educational needs of the community. Rob stated that improving communication with the community was an ongoing challenge.

Rob outlined an active executor role for advisers. They attended meetings, visited other schools to give presentations about their experience as council members, discussed the contents of briefs sent to the board, and experimented with various ways to communicate with parents and community members. At no time, however, did he identify an aspect of the advisory role which indicated their direct involvement with policy implementation or direct involvement with the work of the school. In this way, Rob’s statements supported the view that advisers perform various tasks for the organization, but they do not become actively involved in the work of the organization.
The Superintendent

The superintendent reported that advisers assess the effectiveness of schools and the work of administrators. He referred to council members as ‘measuring sticks’ and stated that they had the responsibility to assess and to evaluate the work of educators and the manner in which the system functioned.

6.2.2.2 Adviser as Friend

Neither the principal nor the superintendent offered statements to support the theory that advisers approach situations as friends.

6.2.2.3 Adviser as Educator

The Principal

Rob thought that business members on the council acted in an educative capacity: “They provide a variety of perspectives to help us make good recommendations. They know what skills employers are looking for in young people.” It was obvious that Rob valued and learned from the opinions and ideas presented by those with business management experiences.

Rob, however, said he depended on parents and community members to educate the community as to why drastic changes were necessary in school operations:
They can represent us in the community and say, ‘We’ve looked at it folks and these are all of the issues before us and these are the recommendations that have been made about how we can best deal with this’, so that there is a real understanding about why we are doing what we are doing, why we may be changing the length of the school day, why we may be changing lunch periods, why we may be modifying some things we have been doing already because we now have different variables - but to involve them in that process. (Rob)

Rob reported that council members helped those in the community understand why the school was forced to make changes. It was more than just sharing information.

The Superintendent

The superintendent believed that when parents understood what was going on in schools, they could instruct educators by helping them understand what went on in the home and in the community with respect to programs for children:

If they have a good understanding of program offerings in the school, then they should be able to give a detailed analysis of what’s working and what’s not working and give the principal advice and be able to say, for example, we really need to give attention to how the early literacy is going in the school. (John)

John concluded that parents and community members educated those within the school about programs and initiatives in the community. He felt that while schools may have known about community programs before, they did not have the details needed to understand how such programs impacted on educational programs in the school and, alternatively, how school programs would influence community educational programs. Council members, whom he assumed had this information, would now be in a position to fill in the gaps in educator’s knowledge base. John’s assumption supports the view put
forward by Goldhamer (1978), that the community keeps the leader informed about issues upon which decisions are ultimately made.

6.2.2.4 Adviser as Informant

The Principal

One of the goals for the establishment of the council at Shieldside, according to the principal, was that the school would have better communication with the community. Rob admitted that the advisory council continued to struggle with finding ways to both inform the community and to be informed by the community. He outlined approaches used by members of the council to inform the community of both council and school activities:

The advisory council is now sending information in newsletters, we have just started ‘voice mail’, and the advisory council has its own mail box. Parents can call in and find out exactly what’s going on and attend sessions if they choose. (Rob)

Rob said that members took their role seriously. They had also suggested that they set up ‘focus’ groups which involved scheduled conversations at school between members of the advisory council and members of the community to assess citizen attitudes about the work of the school and of the council. This was a ‘personal approach’: “This is something we have learned, if you call people, if you do it personally, then they will come out.”
Rob also stated that the council had a role to play to keep the community informed as to why drastic decisions were made, such as the move to reduce the staff by thirty members:

I want the council to be directly involved with that process so that they understand what we are dealing with and they have input into how we are going to manage this school with a reduced staff. They can represent us in the community ...and explain why we are doing what we are doing. (Rob)

There were other imminent changes coming down, Rob suggested, in the length of the school day and in programs. Council members, Rob concluded, had the task of relaying this information to the community.

The Superintendent

John felt that as parents and community members learned how schools functioned and how professionals worked, they could inform the community about school practices:

If (parents) read in the paper that educational standards in Ontario are dropping but they know that because of their involvement in the council that this is not the case in their school, then they become a strong advocate for what’s been happening. (John)

Alternatively, parents and community members become informants to inform schools about events in the community: “You are now hearing it from people who can say what they’re doing as a community to promote literacy and what’s happening at home before children come to school.” The role was a reciprocal one.
6.2.2.5 Adviser as Critic

The Principal

Rob assumed that parents would improve the system by being critical of it: “Anything that is a community issue is a school issue and I want to put it before the council for council input.” Input, from Rob’s usage of the word, could mean criticism, approval, or clarification. Rob demonstrated an exceptional confidence level in his proactive approach to soliciting criticism from the community. He hosted several community meetings, before the school opened, in which he encouraged those in attendance to voice their concerns and their criticisms: “We talked about education, we criticized it, we looked at the system and not at individual schools and teachers.”

Rob admitted that while there were school boards and trustees to develop policies to direct education, he felt there was room for a critical review of the system by parents who had children in the system. From Rob’s perspective, the council provided the formal structure that gave parents a forum to ask questions and to voice opinions and, in this way, to be critical; this, according to Rob, was one way to improve the system:

What we are talking about are parents being directly involved in the schools. We do have school boards and the trustees elected by the community and they are involved with developing policy. But, we are talking about parents who have children in the schools being involved in the schools. Parents want to know more than policy. They want to know, I believe, how we are doing, what we are doing and more about the process of education. In establishing the council, we have tried to respond to that. (Rob)
In the past, Rob said, parents were invited to become involved in the education of their children, but the approach used prevented them from taking a critical stance:

We paid lip-service for years as educators regarding parental and community involvement but.. as a system we put up road blocks to prevent that from happening such as when we scheduled meetings and dictated the issues to be discussed, ... rather than giving an open forum to allow issues to surface. (Rob)

He believed that through the establishment of school councils, schools were providing a necessary and open forum to allow issues to surface.

Rob outlined the manner in which members responded to a draft school board policy; this confirmed that advisers not only criticized school policy, they provided a critical review of school board policy as well:

I get a draft policy and I make copies of it, give it to the council so they have a chance to read it over. Then we discuss it fully, how we feel about it, recommendations they would make. I then draft a response, get it out to council members to see if this reflects our discussion, make any changes based upon their input and then submit it from the advisory council. (Rob)

Rob concluded that, in the present arrangement, he acted as executive director and the council acted in a governance role. He admitted that the council was gradually taking on more functions in its governing capacity; but, more changes were required at the school board before schools became more self-governing and autonomous and before councils would assume more responsibilities.
The Superintendent

The establishment of school councils, from John’s perspective, meant that the education system was inviting a critical review from outside. He stated that by establishing school councils, principals were inviting input from people who potentially had diverse opinions related to how the system of education could improve. In his comments, John underlined the necessity for ‘diversity’ of opinions and the importance of this critical review process. He talked about the value to be derived in education from having dissenting as opposed to consenting voices:

I think you want a diversity of people. I don’t think you want a group who will agree with the principal all the time. A part of that will have to do with the level of confidence of the principal in himself or herself, how they see themselves in the community. A diversity of opinions is what is needed. There is nothing wrong with having dissension. Dissension is not always negative, from dissension comes ideas that can be viewed as a mirror to see how things are going. So you don’t want a council of people who are (sic) 100% satisfied with the school. We need people who will identify areas that need to be worked on. You want people in there who see a need for change. (John)

According to John, council members who assumed the role of critic performed a necessary service for the education community. A school could not benefit from a council which served only as a rubber-stamp for decisions made by the principal. A little dissension was beneficial.

John concluded that nobody should be excluded from participation. Parents with their own personal agendas could contribute: “If you have a diversity of interests and a
diversity of opinions there is a balance, there are those who say ‘Hey, we need to look at this’.” In the end, the school benefits from the critical review process.

6.2.2.6 Adviser as Adviser

The Principal

Rob said he depended on the advice he received from members of the advisory council to make decisions. Rob referred to the advice most frequently as ‘input’. The issue of school uniforms, for example, became one of the heated discussions in the early stages of the council. One parent was highly in favour of uniforms while a number of advisers were strongly against the notion. The policy which was eventually developed did not include uniforms as a part of the dress code for students. The group used consensus building as a form of decision making:

Most decisions are made through discussion and consensus and a lot of input from groups and that’s in fact how I see this. Input from people who are very interested in what is happening. (Rob)

Rob energetically worked to develop trust and to let everyone feel their opinion mattered; there was no indication that he had knowingly ignored the advice proffered by members. In my conversations with members, I received the impression that they felt their opinions mattered and that there was ample time given to discuss each issue. One parent, however, reported frustration in her efforts to impress on educators the importance of using a clearer language when communicating with parents and community members.
The Superintendent

John believed that advisers were not "managers of schools" and did not have "the right to raise funds." He thought that advisers should provide advice on a wide range of activities including: the use of funds for staffing, programming and capital resources, the conduct of students, behaviour codes, and ... expectations for teachers and students."

John conceded that context determined the level of involvement of advisers. He concluded that there were various levels of advice-giving and advice-receiving; in effect, his comments presented the concept of a 'continuum of advisement'. At one end, he said, advisers gave advice and some principals responded by saying: ‘Thank you very much but I don’t think that this is the kind of information or advice we need’; at the other end of the continuum, principals and members of the community were engaged in a satisfying “meaningful relationship,” a firm partnership where no one was excluded and where everyone expressed ideas and opinions that were acknowledged in a positive manner. In this respect, John expressed the belief that it was the attitude and philosophy of the principal that determined the nature and the extent of the advice given and received.

6.2.3 Summary

In summary, the data derived from observations and from semi-structured interviews with the principal and the superintendent supported the theory that parents and community members who become members of school councils take on the roles of executor, educator, informant, critic, and adviser. They are executors when they participate in
various functions at the school; when they assess the performance of the school and of the council; and, when they report their findings to the community. Rob felt it was more effective for members to determine their own roles; that he should not impose roles upon them. He assumed that his role, as principal, was to facilitate discussion and, in this way, cultivate group cohesion. Rob concluded that changes in the political environment in the province of Ontario could effect major changes in the priorities and responsibilities of members of advisory councils in Ontario.

John concurred that advisers acted as executor, educator, informant, critic, and adviser. Like Rob, he did not suggest that advisers were friends. John expanded upon levels of advisement and the reality that some principals may genuinely consider the advice given by their council members, but the potential was there for some administrators to openly reject the advice. Table 6.1 presents the approaches and those who identified them.

**TABLE 6.1 APPROACHES (LEADERS)**

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<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Executor</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Critic</th>
<th>Adviser</th>
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<tr>
<td>P-Rob</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-John</td>
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From the table it can be concluded that leaders attributed advisers with all roles except that of friend. Goldhamer (1978) emphasized that leaders are lonely figures in need of solace, support, and friendship. Findings show that leaders, in this study, are possibly unaware of this need or fail to recognize the potential for advisers to serve as friends.
In the following section, I use the statements of leaders as support for the view that the advisory experience has both negative and positive consequences. In the following section, I elaborate upon the negative consequences.

6.3 Reality of Participation: Technical and Psychological Issues

6.3.1 Introduction

The findings present potential and observed problems related to both process and attitude and are discussed under the headings of technical and psychological issues. The technical issues include access, number and selection. The psychological issues include adjustment, inaction, and rivalry.

6.3.2 Technical and Psychological Issues

6.3.2.1 Access

Neither the principal nor the superintendent identified problems related to access.

6.3.2.2 Number

The Principal

The only reference to number as a problem was made by the principal as he discussed decisions related to the size of the advisory group when it was first constituted. Rob had researched councils using examples from Britain and the United States where councils had been operating for some time:
I talked to people who had been involved in councils and created, with help, a possible mandate for this council and a possible membership. Once again I used research in terms of effective group size and since we are looking at decision making we are not looking at thirty or forty people because you can't be effective in that way. It's more of a board concept and also there is attention paid to the representation that we needed for the variety of people involved in the school. (Rob)

Rob established a group of thirteen members, including himself, and indicated that this was a satisfactory workable number, but that a larger group size could present problems. He did not elaborate upon the potential problems.

6.3.2.3 Selection

The Principal

Rob identified a problem experienced by organizations when leaders choose or are directed to access advice from outside the organization. The problem has been discussed as 'outsourcing'. The issue becomes problematic when organizations are forced to bypass the expertise of internal personnel in order to achieve higher profits for the organization or when technical equipment and technical expertise are acquired from external sources at a lower cost to the organization.

Within education, outsourcing suggests that principals no longer depend exclusively on the professional experiences or 'expertise' of staff members to define educational problems and solutions. They are now forced to go outside the organization to seek opinions and ideas from individuals, such as business people, to presumably help make better decisions.
An anecdote related by Rob illustrated how teachers from another school viewed this procedure. A teacher attending a staff meeting at a school where Rob was requested to speak asked: ‘Why should parents be allowed to give any advice to principals? The principal is there because he has earned his position; he has demonstrated that he can make sound judgments. They have no right to question that at all’.

In the present climate of citizen involvement in public institutions, the argument can be made that this is exactly the right that parents and community members can claim.

Principals and teachers have one of two choices: they may accept the change as one that can benefit their work or they may reject it.

When Rob established the advisory council at Shieldside, consciously or unconsciously, he declared his commitment to go outside the organization to select those from whom he would seek advice. Outsourcing, however, became a problem for Rob when the source of advice was unavailable. This was the case when Rob scheduled meetings of the advisory council, but due to a lack of quorum, they were canceled.

I observed that Rob was committed to the concept of advice seeking; he exerted tremendous energy to keep things moving - he scheduled meetings in advance, prepared agendas, attended all meetings, and regularly photocopied and distributed new information. He was well informed and was prepared to share information and respond to questions asked by council members related to current developments. There were
times, however, when Rob felt that council members did not demonstrate the same level of commitment:

I have been discouraged because of lack of support, people not showing up for meetings. I know I have been discouraged when I have wanted to get information out to people and I wanted input. So that is discouraging. But you have to look at it from a parent perspective and know how busy these people are and know that they may not have got the invitation and may not have known how important it was. (Rob)

The principal understood the reality of everyone’s hectic schedule, but this did not console the burning ambition of someone who gave up entire evenings in the pursuit of advice.

I would be remiss not to link problems of outsourcing with problems related to competition as when individuals or groups compete for scarce resources. The creation of school councils suggests that members, especially business representatives, become involved in schools because they harbour a belief that they can give their children’s school ‘the competitive edge’. It is possible, therefore, that members of councils will go outside the school and into the community for resources to augment declining school budgets.

As a result, outsourcing forces schools into competition. Rob underlined this as a ‘potential’ problem of the advisory experience.

I am not saying that the council won’t at one point decide that it is in the best interest of the kids to go out as a council to solicit support from local business and industry. (Rob)
Rob admitted that as school councils became established, he and others would have to make an effort to prevent them from directing schools in directions that would force schools to work in isolation and in competition with one another. His next comment was a verbal declaration and yet a silent plea that schools and school councils would need to actively ‘reach out’ to one another and demonstrate a willingness to keep a close eye on their primary goal - the improvement of educational opportunity for all students:

My original concept for this school was a kindergarten to OAC, a seamless education because of all of the problems in transition that I believe occur for kids. Because of the nature of the system and also because of the nature of the federations, with two separate federations, this prevents a lot of work that needs to be done in a cooperative fashion. I think councils will facilitate that, they will help with that. But we will have to actively do that so that we don’t become bastions unto ourselves. We will need to reach out to others and demonstrate that there really is that link. (Rob)

Only time will tell whether the establishment of councils will inevitably drive a wedge between schools that, prior to the current reform, worked in an atmosphere of cooperation and harmony.

6.3.2.4 Adjustments

The Principal

Problems of adjustment may be a source of major psychological concern for advisers as they adjust to new environments, new problems, and newer ways of approaching problems; they also constitute major concerns for the leader. Since initiating steps to establish the advisory council, Rob had encountered situations which required him to
adjust. Analysis of the data presented in the semi-structured interview with the principal presented three issues which illustrated aspects of the psychological problem of adjustment: time, briefing, and accommodation.

Rob viewed the process of keeping advisers informed about events happening in the school board and the school as a series of tasks that required time and attention. Because so much time was required to present information and to discuss issues, the advisory group agreed to meet at least every two weeks. Information packages were prepared for each member and updated regularly - counselors frequently referred to their 'information binder'. Rob recognized that everyone was busy: "These people have full-time jobs and are very busy themselves. They can only give so much time to this process." I observed that he respected the time commitment. All meetings of the council were opened and closed promptly; little time, for example, was spent entertaining informal chatter or sharing refreshments. The adjustment could have been smoother or things could have moved along much more quickly, according to Rob, if time was devoted to educating people about the system before they became involved. Rob volunteered, "We have not done this well."

With respect to adjustment, Rob felt that members of the council needed tremendous amounts of information to help them adjust to their new role. They needed to understand: 1) how the school functioned as part of a 'system', (2) the numerous limits imposed by that system, (3) the nature and content of educational reform both locally and globally,
(4) the latest recommendations for change coming from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, (5) the examples of 'best practices' taking place in other jurisdictions, and (6) that there were conflicting philosophies of education.

Adjustment was a problem because Rob did not have the resources to carry out the necessary 'briefing' of council members. Rob could not expect assistance from the Ministry: “Staff has been so reduced at that level they could not provide a service in any meaningful manner.” The only dependable assistance was from the district office. Rob felt that information sessions and workshops for parents and administrators would eventually “fill the gap.” In the meantime, he would continue to do what he was doing and depend on the media to act as an informant to provide information to members on local educational issues.

I noted that the local print and electronic media sponsored a regular educational section outlining and providing comment on current school board and provincial events. For example, when some of the trustees with the Halloway Board of Education disagreed with the manner in which the Director was using local funds, they contacted the local media.

Defined in terms of decreasing or increasing responsibilities for principals, the problem of adjustment becomes one of accommodation. Proponents of school advisory councils insist that principals benefit when councils are functioning in each school. They claim that principals have another group to consult with; council members share information
and resources previously unavailable to schools; and, principals’ lives are made easier because parents, who are better informed about their children’s school, become great supporters. While trying to manage an already overloaded timetable, adjustment presented a problem of accommodation for the principal because it was evident that the system had not adjusted. Rob was doing the work of an administrator of any large school, but the existence of the council meant, as Rob stated, “another layer added to the pile.”

The Superintendent

One of the most severe problems related to the establishment of school councils, from John’s perspective, related to the lack of adjustment by principals. John recognized that principals were accustomed to seeking advice from teachers and officials at district office, but as they experimented with seeking advice from those outside the educational institution, intense problems could potentially emerge. The concept of giving parents and community members a forum in which they could ask questions, share ideas, and give opinions represented, in John’s opinion, the antithesis to the traditional approach of most principals. Principals who lacked confidence and were unsure of their status in the community would experience the most severe adjustment problems.

Advisement, by its nature, John volunteered, presented a potential for diversity and dissension. When diverse experiences and opinions converged in an arena where professionals traditionally held control, dissension and opposition would find fertile
ground. The severity, John maintained, would be determined by the values and attitude of the principal. The most destructive stance, in John’s opinion, was to encourage compliance and conformity. Councils would be completely ineffective, John conceded, if everyone claimed “... one-hundred percent satisfaction with the school.”

Problems of adjustment were solved, John felt, if principals accepted that discussion and debate would reveal diversities as well as ideas and perspectives that mirrored public thinking, public attitudes, and public opinion. Alternatively, when occasions for open discussion were squashed, opportunities were lost to identify areas that might have needed attention. Adjustment to the new approach, John admitted, did not come automatically or easily. He outlined “formalized training programs” provided by the Halloway Board of Education that were designed to assist principals in the transition from the old to the new style of school administration.

One program involved a written communication and a face-to-face conference. John identified the written communication as a ‘manager’s letter’ sent between the superintendent and the principal in which the principal identified the objectives for the school year. These objectives became the benchmark or the school-year plan. The second program involved a conference which occurred mid-year. Ten to fifteen principals met with the superintendent to identify problems with the school-year plan and to discuss solutions. Together, principals and their superintendent reviewed the profile of ambitions they had outlined for the school year, identified the accomplishments, and
made adjustments. From this profile also came the objectives for each successive year. John suggested that principals who identified that the establishment of an advisory council or the adjustment to the advisory arrangement as a problem, for example, received personal assistance until the problem was corrected to the satisfaction of all concerned.

6.3.2.5 Inaction

Neither the principal nor the superintendent gave statements to support the view that problems related to inaction were a negative consequence of the advisory experience.

6.3.2.6 Rivalry

The Superintendent

John articulated competition for attention and leaders’ or group members’ attempts to control as a potential source of rivalry. John indicated that the principal, as leader, determined the nature of the relationships within a group. According to John, a strong leader would not let "... a person or an interest group take over." By implication, a weak leader could both encourage and, therefore, experience rivalrous conditions.

John stated a time-honoured solution. Most instances of ‘rivalry’, John concluded, could be prevented by using a process which he identified as ‘front-end-loading’. ‘Front-end-loading’ involved early establishment of the ground rules; John believed that his success
as a principal within an advisory council was primarily attributable to his foresight in establishing the ‘ground rules’ or the standard operating procedures of the organization.

One of the first things I did when I was a principal with a council was to establish ground rules for how we were going to behave with each other, what we were going to do if we disagreed with each other, and what issues were appropriate; and, conversely, what issues were inappropriate [to discuss]. Any principal that doesn’t invest time in laying out those things up front is going to have some big problems (laugh). (John)

John suggested that the wise leader did not encourage rivalry by pompously shunning, isolating, or showing anger to those officially placed in unofficial positions. He suggested that it would be unwise for principals, for example, to create an exclusive circle of preferred advisers and to cast aside those who were inclined to act on their own agenda. John suggested that such actions incurred rivalry among the group and the fault rested with the principal. The transgression, he maintained, was one of omission: the administrator or the group had omitted establishing ‘the rules of the organization’.

By establishing the ground rules, John believed, everyone became aware of the process and publicly accepted the generally accepted manner to approach issues. He distinguished between personal issues and whole school issues, and differentiated between contexts for discussion. Personal issues, for example, a child’s music program or a child’s music teacher, were discussed one-on-one in private; public issues, such as the music program of the school, could be discussed publicly.

But, John admitted, the success or failure of ‘front-end-loading’ was determined by the rules being set by the group and not by one person. John knew that many principals
unilaterally developed the norms and values which were adopted as the standard operating procedures for groups. This approach, said John, was wrong and encouraged dissention. When the standard operating procedures were determined by the group, the action forced dissenters to ask the moral question: 'Am I willing to stay involved with this group and use this process to get my issues on the table within the guidelines that have been established?'. Inevitably, according to John, everyone brings forward a perspective and each perspective can span both ends of the continuum.

6.3.3 Summary

The difficulties highlighted in the interviews with the leaders present an interesting distinction between psychological and technical issues. The principal and the superintendent did not, for example, offer statements to support access as an issue and, while they both related information in support of adjustment, neither identified problems related to inaction. Both adjustment and inaction received considerable emphasis in the interviews with advisers. Table 6.2 presents the issues and those who identified them.

<p>| TABLE 6.2 TECHNICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES (LEADERS) |
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<th>LEADERS</th>
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From the table, it can be concluded that adjustment was the only issue unanimously identified by both leaders. However, it is important to note that there were differences in perspective with respect to adjustment. Rob recognized that parents and community members who did not have background knowledge with respect to educational issues required briefing and background information. He admitted that neither the ministry nor the school board had been forthcoming with assistance on this matter. The superintendent, alternatively, related the issue of adjustment to principals. He sympathized with administrators who were now forced to seek advice from outside their schools. John felt that this new approach represented a new way of operating and that it was the school board's responsibility to provide the briefing to help them adjust. The superintendent did not give statements to indicate that he recognized adjustment as an issue for parents. This could explain why the Halloway Board of Education had not, up to the time of this research, designed any programs or provided resources to assist community members to adjust to their advisory roles within schools.

In the next section, I look for data from the interviews with the leaders, to support the theory that there are positive outcomes of the advisory experience.

6.4 Reality of Participation: Outcomes of Participation

6.4.1 Introduction

In this section, I move from elaboration of the problems of the advisory experience to focus on the positive outcomes. During the interviews, I asked each leader to discuss
what they considered as some of the benefits of participation. The following section presents their assumptions. Once again, I have interpreted the findings in terms of the aims of participation as put forward by Nicholas Beattie, such as responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy.

6.4.2 Positive Outcomes

6.4.2.1 Responsiveness

The Principal

In the principal’s experience, people participate when they are provided opportunities for participation. Rob voiced satisfaction with the response of the community to his request to form an advisory council. He also praised the members and the amount of time and effort the group had committed and devoted to the advisory process. Although he experienced downtimes with respect to poor attendance at some meetings, he admitted that over the two-and-a half-year period, the parents and community members had devoted huge amounts of time and energy: “Everyone has been absolutely unbelievable in terms of what they are willing to do. I believe this is a result of the way you treat people and how you can guarantee for them that they will be respected.” Rob talked about participation as an opportunity to inform people about education in a way that was open and free from restrictions:
It is important to spend the time to let people know what we are all about ... and give everyone freedom and autonomy to go as far as they can within that and not hide behind rules, not set those limits that prevent people from doing things - but just the opposite. I just believe that people will rise to the occasion. (Rob)

It was Rob’s experience that when people are given opportunities for participation, they take advantage and respond.

The Superintendent

Some of the assumptions relating to the positive benefits of the advisory experience from the superintendent’s perspective centered on participation as enhancing the ability of parents and educators to respond to the educational needs of their children. Parents, John assumed, needed to participate because they knew their children better than anyone else in the system and this gave them the right to ask questions about programs, the right to have “... a voice in the delivery of programs” and, the right to “... assess where kids are in the system.” John spoke extensively about the fundamental importance of increasing parents’ understanding of what was going on in schools. He felt that, through participation, there was the potential that schools would adjust their programs to suit the needs of students. There was also the potential for the system to assist parents in their efforts to prepare children to enter school. In this way, John felt, participation permitted a reciprocal response to the educational needs of the community.
6.4.2.2 Personal Development

No statements in the semi-structured interviews with the principal or the superintendent supported the theory that personal development was a positive benefit of participation.

6.4.2.3 Overcoming Alienation

The Principal

In Rob's experience, participation diminished the potential of community alienation towards schools, especially when drastic changes occurred as a result of reduced staffs and reduced programs. He supported his view with an example of an incident which occurred at Shieldside in the spring of 1995 when budget shortfalls resulted in teacher and staff lay-offs. The reductions had implications for students and the number of young, energetic teachers at his school. The teachers who were to be displaced had responsibility for computer programs, sporting events, and extra-curricular activities. Because of seniority rules, the younger teachers were the first to go.

Rob reasoned that because he kept council members well informed about events as they occurred, they responded positively to the cuts that were made and, in this way, they were able to respond to criticisms in the community by saying: "We've looked at it folks and these are all of the issues before us and these are the recommendations that have been made about how we can best deal with this." From the principal's perspective, when members of the advisory group understood why staffs were cut, why the school day was
shortened, why lunch periods were changed, and why changes occurred in programs, they not only supported the decisions made by the principal, they helped curb negative attitudes toward the school by explaining the situation to others in the community.

**The Superintendent**

In John's experience, parents believed they knew how their children ought to behave at school and schools responded to parent demands when they formulated Codes of Behaviour and Discipline Policies; however, in many cases, student misconduct continued to energize strife between the school and the community and served to alienate the school from its community. John expressed the view that, through participation, the school provided a venue whereby the home and the school could potentially clarify values and concerns in a mutually beneficial manner. He perceived that open discussion could foster mutual understandings about: the general tone that should exist in schools, student dress codes, attendance, time tables, and personal values. These, John assumed, were some of the basic causes of alienation between home and school.

**6.4.2.4 Legitimacy**

**The Superintendent**

John expressed the view that, through the school advisory council, parents, community members, and teachers received information to help them understand the board's resource-providing potential. Teachers on councils would see the reality of budget
shortfalls and, as a result, would possibly agree that there were some things they could let go of and still function effectively. Parents and community members, alternatively, might look to the community to augment what the school “might be giving up”: “I think the greater knowledge that people and the community have about the school when times get tough, that will be a strength.” He voiced the opinion that school systems had operated in a vacuum, nobody knew what was happening. In such an atmosphere, criticism was facile and groundless - teacher bashing and threats to school board officials flourished. I interpreted John’s statements as testimony that the decision to establish school councils had the potential to enhance mutual understanding between parties and either diminish or eliminate secrecy and, therefore, enhance or maintain legitimacy for those who had to make difficult decisions during times of economic crisis.

6.4.3 Summary

I have interpreted the data from the semi-structured interviews with the principal and the superintendent in light of assumptions related to responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation and legitimacy. One of the most interesting observations from this section relates to the difference in emphasis on why participation is beneficial. From the principal’s perspective, participation provided an opportunity to inform people about education in a way that was open and free from restrictions. While Rob did suggest that the ideas and opinions brought forward by members of the council helped him to make decisions, he did not indicate that, through participation, the school had an opportunity to
learn more about the community. The superintendent, however, discussed participation from a more reciprocal perspective. John observed that participation afforded opportunities for information exchange between the school and the home. Table 6.3 presents the positive benefits and those who supported them.

**TABLE 6.3 POSITIVE OUTCOMES (LEADERS)**

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<tr>
<th>LEADER</th>
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P= Principal  
S= Superintendent

From Table 6.3, it can be concluded that both the principal and the superintendent supported the view that the advisory experience provided opportunities for the education system to respond to the educational needs of the community and opportunities to overcome public alienation toward education; but neither the principal nor the superintendent discussed participation in terms of personal development. The superintendent supported participation as a way to ensure support for the school board in times of tough financial decisions.

**6.5 Conclusion**

I have concluded that the leaders attributed a high status to advisers and recognized their expertise. In their statements, they supported the view that advisers approach situations as executors, educators, informants, critics, and advisers. As a result of looking at the
statements. I have concluded that the leaders emphasized the executor role. They
attributed the majority of the tasks of the advisory role to the design of assessment
instruments, attending meetings and formal occasions, writing briefs and submissions for
the school newsletter, and inviting parents and community members to meetings. The
advisers did not list as many activities. It is also interesting that neither the principal nor
the superintendent presented situations whereby advisers acted as friends of the leader.
Both leaders identified problems related to psychological and technical issues, but they
did not identify the same problems and neither suggested inaction as a potential problem,
although this was a major issue identified by advisers. Both leaders emphasized
adjustment as an issue. However, they discussed the issues from different perspectives.
The principal discussed the problems of parents and community members adjusting to
their new roles within an educational context; the superintendent related the issue to
problems experienced by principals and outlined how the school board had implemented
programs to assist the adjustment needs of principals. The superintendent did not.
however, outline programs for parents and community members.

Data from personal observations and from semi-structured interviews with the leaders
supported the view that the positive benefits derived from participation are
responsiveness, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy; there were no
statements to support participation as a benefit to the personal development of
participants. The leaders were of the opinion that participation was one strategy to help soften the negative attitudes that had developed in the community toward the system.

In Chapter Six, I look at the advisory relation from the perspective of the constituents, teachers and parents who potentially benefit from the efforts of advisers.
CHAPTER SEVEN

OBSERVED REALITIES

7.1 Reality of Participation: Status and Expertise

7.1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I use findings from semi-structured interviews with representatives of constituent groups, such as parents and teachers, who are in the macro-environment of the school council. Since members of these groups have not participated as members of the advisory council, they presumably have not had direct experience with the advisory process but have observed events from a distance. Their responses are, therefore, presented as 'observed realities'.

The statements from this group helped me respond to the following questions: (a) Who are some members in the macro-environment of the school? (b) What do they understand about the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary? (c) What do their statements reveal about the status and expertise of council members? (d) What are their assumptions about what advisers do? (e) What have they observed concerning positive benefits and negative consequences of the advisory experience?

The participants in this section are three teachers and ten parents. The data from teachers came from extensive semi-structured taped interviews. The data from parents were derived from two sources: I recorded interviews with two parents who were referred to
me by a teacher on the staff of Shieldside Secondary and I administered a questionnaire, which was prepared collaboratively by staff and council members at Shieldside Secondary, to eight parents during Parent/Teacher Night at the school. The questionnaire included questions related to parents' knowledge about and attitude toward the advisory council. In the following section, parents and teachers are introduced.

**Teachers**

Adrienne was a member of the leadership team at Shieldside Secondary. She had business specialist qualifications in accounting and information management and was specifically responsible for Career Counseling at Shieldside Secondary. Her responsibilities included student guidance, special education, cooperative education, and business education programs. Adrienne was married but did not have children; she was on leave from her teaching assignment to complete requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Adrienne praised the staff and the administration at Shieldside. She felt the school was organized as ‘a learning organization’. Adrienne spoke in glowing terms about teachers and was convinced that many organizations were not as fortunate as schools in that they did not have “a whole university-educated group of people” to do the work. Adrienne’s enthusiasm for the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary served as an impetus for me to seek permission from the principal to use this school as the site of my research.
Fay was also one of the original teachers at Shieldside. One of her sons attended this school; he came through school in the French Immersion program. Fay's academic experience included an honours Bachelor of Applied Arts in Home Economics from Ryerson, a Bachelor of Education, and a Type B Certification to teach geography from the University of Toronto. Fay expressed extreme satisfaction that she was "part of the team" at Shieldside. Her present portfolio involved working with students in Cooperative Education; she had a specialist certificate in that area as well.

Pam was vice-principal and was hired one year before the school opened. She had been involved with education for twenty years and moved through the system in various capacities as teacher, department head of Social Sciences and, finally, as vice-principal. She reported that her involvement in education had been a positive experience: "I had a variety of positions and developed a rapport with a lot of people. I had an opportunity to grow up, to experiment, to practice, to try some things in a supportive environment."

Pam also had a wide academic experience. She completed a Master of Arts degree in English which enabled her to study in England and the United States, a Master of Education degree from Brock University, and a Doctor of Education from The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Pam felt her experience as a doctoral student helped prepare her for her present administrative position. Reading and reflection were key aspects of the program and, as an administrator, she felt they were integral aspects of her present role. As a student, she also learned to move cautiously and
to question the consequences of every decision before deciding. These, Pam concluded, were valuable skills for an administrator.

Parents

Grace had three children, two were twin sons in Grade Ten at Shieldside; she worked part-time. She admitted she had been more involved with her children’s education when they were in elementary school. For eight years, once a week, she helped with reading and attended Parent/Teacher events. Her husband traveled, so it was more convenient for her, “to assume the role” of keeping in touch with their children’s school.

Prior to the opening of the new school, Grace attended the monthly meetings hosted by the principal, Rob. She was happy with the new school and the principal: “I am happy with the school; I think Mr. Barrymore has made a very positive effort to have the lines of communication open.” Grace was convinced that the atmosphere in any school is determined by the principal. She attributed Rob’s success to his open and friendly manner and to his desire to receive the opinions of everyone.

Mr. Barrymore was holding monthly meetings down in the public school for a long while letting parents know what the plans were and what the time lines were and also getting input from various parents from a professional point of view and a parent point of view. (Grace)

Grace knew that an advisory council had been established and that the membership included: “representatives from the staff, some parent representatives, business representatives, the trustee and either a past student or a present student.” When the
council was first established, Grace reported that: “people were advised that they had an opportunity to become a part of it if they wanted to.” She chose not to become a member but she felt advisory councils were a good way “to have parents in the schools.”

Mary had three children, one child was a Grade Ten student at Shieldside Secondary. She was a professional nurse and was completing courses toward a graduate degree in Public Health. She, like Grace, confessed to having been more involved with her children’s school at the elementary level where she helped with reading, went on field trips, and assisted during sporting events. In the early stages of the new high school, Mary attended about ten of the public meetings hosted by the principal. She learned about the meetings through advertisements in the community newspaper and through notices her children brought home from their schools. She chose not to get involved with the advisory council because her studies took extra time and she felt “it would be too much hassle”; but, she added, the council was “a wonderful idea.”

I spoke to eight parents, five mothers and three fathers, on Parent/Teacher Night in the spring of 1996 at Shieldside Secondary School. On that night, I observed parents, students, and teachers arrive at the school to meet and to discuss recent student assessments. A large group assembled in the cafeteria at 7:00 PM to receive greetings from the principal and directions from teachers. They then moved off to assigned rooms to begin the scheduled interviews. On this occasion, I positioned myself at a table in the cafeteria and casually invited parents to fill out a school-prepared questionnaire while
they waited for their appointments with various teachers. To assure confidentiality of the exercise, I did not ask the parents their names. The questionnaire contained questions related to their knowledge about the advisory council.

From this experience, I learned that, of the five mothers, two did not work outside the home and, of those who did, one was a teacher, one a nurse, and another worked in a store. Of the three fathers, one was an aeronautics engineer who traveled frequently, another was an electrician, and the third did not reveal his work background. One father, the electrician, was raising his two sons on his own; his wife had died the previous December. He was a busy man who, like the other fathers, worked in Toronto.

Four of the mothers knew the council had been established in the school, two fathers did not. One father, the electrician, knew the advisory council existed but did not know what members did or how members were selected. He felt there should be a forum where parents brought their concerns; but, he felt that, with respect to what the school offered for parents, he was at a disadvantage because he worked outside the community and rarely had an occasion to visit the school during the school day. He repeated that this was what his wife was able to do before she became ill. There were no statements from this group with respect to the role of advisers or the positive or negative consequences of the advisory relation.

The information which follows is, therefore, based on the observed realities of three teachers and two parents.
7.1.2 Status of Members

The following represents information to help identify the status that members of the advisory group had achieved from the perspective of teachers and parents who were not council members.

Teachers

Adrienne observed that the advisory council symbolized Rob’s goal to establish Shieldside as a community school. She distinguished between the status of the council and that of Parent/Teacher Associations:

The parent advisory council operates in an advisory capacity and the principal runs ideas by them for clarification. The parent advisory council doesn’t do things like have hot dog days or fundraising activities or anything like that. They are more like a Board of Directors than a Parent/Teacher Association. (Adrienne)

Adrienne did not attribute the council with decision-making status. She concluded that it was there as a sounding board for the principal and the staff: “... I would go to (the council) just for sharing the information and possibly to get further input for further proposals.” Adrienne was confident that the council was a long way from having any influence on decisions related to staffing or to board policy on teacher reductions and teacher placements. Adrienne did not bestow upon the group any great significance with respect to its function in governing school affairs or as a support for teachers. I, therefore, concluded that she was not prepared to attribute to the group a very high status.
Fay observed that the council was a consultative group for the principal and a response group for members of the community to help parents “cut through the bureaucracy”:

If there was going to be some changes made in curriculum, for example, next year, they would be consulted or Rob might present that to them as a council and say these are what our plans are could we have some discussion on it. And on the other side of it, I think their role is: if parents in the community have concerns about what’s going on or want to say something positive, that they can approach anybody on that council whether it’s a parent or a teacher or anyone and that information will be relayed back. (Fay)

Fay concluded that the group did not have the same status as the principal. She emphasized that, in its advisory capacity, the council did not determine what would happen in the day-to-day activities of the school.

Pam did not give the council administrative status but she did give it an advocacy status:

A school council can be an advocate on behalf of educators and the education system as well as an advocate on behalf of the students. You have more people in your court helping you do the job. (Pam)

From Pam’s statements, I concluded that council members served an adjunct status; they filled a gap that existed between members of the school and members of the community.

Parents

With respect to status, Grace observed that the principal of Shieldside welcomed input, but she was not certain that he was ready to turn over governance of the school to the advisory group. Grace hinted that she was not sure that the council had achieved a status. Her questioning manner suggested that the council had potential but, at the moment, the
principal determined the amount of influence the council would exert, and from her perspective, this limited its influence:

*I think the concept has a lot of potential; whether that potential is developed would vary from school to school and how the council actually works. Is it really (speaker's emphasis) to bring about some positive impact or is it just channeling information? Is it playing a passive role or an active role? I suppose that could vary from school to school. I think it could depend on the role the principal plays. (Grace)*

Grace was conscious that, unless leaders were prepared to give the council a genuine role, the establishment of the council would continue as a form of ‘window dressing’ to give parents and community members the impression that they had a voice to influence educational reform:

*There has to be a real genuine effort that this is something for real positive action and not just window dressing and not just a political thing. Because the ‘in thing’ right now is to have more community and parental input; it’s got to be seen as something really genuine. (Grace)*

Grace was not entirely convinced that this was the present intention of those who were directing the establishment of school councils and, for this reason, she had decided not to become a member.

Mary, on the other hand, had the understanding that the council represented a body with a vast potential to reform the system:

*My understanding is that it’s a real body of people who are involved in important decisions that have to be made in the school about how the school should be run. I know there are restrictions from the ministry and a provincial curriculum; but still, there is a certain amount of leeway. It’s my understanding that the council will have significant impact. (Mary)*
Mary, like Adrienne, gave the council a higher status than Parent/Teacher Associations:

I think it would be involved in important decisions about how the school is run. As a PTA member I was more involved as a volunteer in fundraising, volunteering to be involved in school trips, volunteering to improve the life of the school but in more of an incremental way. My sense about the council is that it is more fundamental. (Mary)

Unlike Grace, Mary admitted that if she had more time, she would like to become a member of the council.

7.1.3 Expertise of Members

In this section, I look at the statements of the teachers and the parents to describe and interpret their perceptions of the expertise of those who serve on the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary.

Teachers

Adrienne observed that members of the council had extensive expertise and that they represented a broad spectrum of the community:

I would say that some members represent the business community, and some are supposed to be parents from industry, a student from the school. ... There are also teachers on the council. (Adrienne)

Members of the council had opinions to share which, Adrienne concluded, came from their work and their family experiences:

I would think that the council has been a tremendous asset (to the principal). (Members) share opinions from their environments outside of education, share opinions or comments about what their children are saying about schools and about programs. (Adrienne)
This expertise, Adrienne concluded, helped everyone to work towards making positive changes in education.

Fay reported that council members represented a “cross-section of the community that care(d) about kids” and, also, that they had a unique expertise which helped the principal in his role as decision-maker. She did not elaborate the specifics of the expertise but she concluded that should the school board give the signal to the school to administer its own budget, the council members would “take a role in that in some way.” She did not doubt the ability of the present group to act as accountants to administer the school’s finances.

Pam attributed members of the advisory council with the expertise to “check things out” and to add authenticity to everything the school did:

(M)embers of the school council, depending upon what interest groups they represent, can be, I would think, rather invaluable. If there is a member that represents business and he’s not there for his or her self-interest, either their child’s or their particular business, but is bringing that particular information or that focus or that perspective to the group, I think it makes everything that we (the administrators) do in the school more authentic. I guess because we can check it out and ask ‘does this sound reasonable to you?’.” (Pam)

While she did not elaborate the specifics of the expertise, Pam observed that members of councils in her area were a very expert group: “We have a very professional and a well educated group of people from the public to be members of these councils.”
Parents

Mary did not elaborate the specifics of the expertise of advisers, but she suggested that the council members had sufficient expertise to take ideas from the community and help determine the direction the school should take: “I feel we have more input into the real direction of the school in terms of the academic and philosophic focus.” Mary, however, was specific about how her expertise as a nurse would ensure that the school maintained a healthy environment should she become a member of the council:

I think that I would have something positive to offer, so I would like to be involved that way. I am a nurse, my other area is community health. People would have their agendas and I would have mine which would be to help the school be as healthy a place as possible both structurally, from an organizational point of view, and from an individual basis as well.

(Mary)

7.1.4 Summary

In this section, teachers and parents from constituent groups were introduced. Statements from this group present interesting conclusions related to the status of the advisory group. They ranged from observations that the council was a passive, low-status group to the view that the group served an integral function in decision making as it related to school reform. Teachers Adrienne, Fay, and Pam presented the council as an organization with a middle-range supportive status. Adrienne assumed that the group could offer ideas and opinions in a manner different from Parent/Teacher Associations. Fay attributed the group with a higher status; she assumed the group supported the principal and advised him on decisions that needed to be taken. Pam assumed that council members had an
advocacy status whereby they spoke in the community on behalf of teachers, students, and the education system.

Parents presented two directly opposed perspectives. Grace had a low opinion of participation. She attributed the group with a low status and suggested it was merely ‘window dressing’ without jurisdiction or power. She suggested the group was established to do the principal’s bidding and, therefore, she had no desire to become a member. Mary, however, concluded that participation had the potential for reform. I interpreted Mary’s statements to mean that members of the advisory council brought ideas and opinions from parents in the community and that these contributed to the decision-making ability of the principal. Mary also attributed the group with a higher status than Parent/Teacher Associations and stated that she would like to become a member of the council.

It should not be forgotten that participation had no significance for eight parents; for the most part, they did not know the council existed.

7.2 The Reality of Participation: Situations and Approaches

7.2.1 Introduction

The previous section identified the status and the expertise of members from the perspective of the observed realities of the teachers and parents in the external environment of the advisory council of Shieldside Secondary. In the section which
follows, I present data from the observed realities to support the contention that the adviser approaches situations as executor, friend, educator, informant, critic, and adviser.

### 7.2.2 Situations and Approaches

Statements of constituents, in support of what advisers do, suggest they had formed opinions about some of the situations and how members of the advisory council approached them either through discussions with Rob, the principal, or from information they received when Rob hosted the community meetings before the school opened. Neither participant in this group had served as a member of the council.

#### 7.2.2.1 Adviser as Executor

**Teachers**

The three teachers, Adrienne, Fay, and Pam, identified situations that advisers approached as executors. Adrienne assumed that advisers ensured that the school continued to offer programs that were relevant for students. According to Adrienne, the council served an assessment role and, therefore, was a part of the “value adding process in student achievement.” It ensured that students met the objectives of their programs and, also, that the council had the potential to enable the school “to deliver education better.”
Adrienne outlined who the members were and some situations they approached. In this elaboration she offered evidence to support the contention that advisers assume an executive role:

The council is a group of parents that come together twice a month and some are supposed to represent the business community, a parent from industry, a student from the school. (They) discuss issues in the school, including policy initiatives. (Adrienne)

Adrienne outlined limitations to the executive role. While it was true that the members designed the ‘Exit Outcomes’ or expectations for student graduates, “(They) did not tell anyone how to do anything.” Adrienne’s statements, therefore, remind us that she was aware that advisers do not do the actual work of managing the school: “(The council) is not integrated into the school in terms of practical hands-on work ... but it is a group for sharing information and possibly giving further input.”

Fay assumed members attended meetings and kept a log of their activities in the form of minutes: “I have never read any minutes,” she volunteered, but she felt certain such documents existed. Fay also reported that advisers addressed issues presented for their consideration but she was unsure how she would bring forward a personal concern.

Pam elaborated situations whereby members attended meetings and acted on behalf of the principal. She did not elaborate other duties within the executor role.
Parents

Mary knew, that from her attendance at some of the community meetings before the council was formed, that members helped to select the staff for the new school, they elaborated the graduation expectations for students, and worked with other people in the school to develop the school’s mission statement. She also indicated that the council published and circulated minutes of meetings and she hinted that they probably “publish(ed) a notice in the school newsletter,” but she was less certain about this.

Grace was aware that council members drew up the mission statement, the goals for the school, and had stipulated the expectations, from the perspective of parents and community members, for student graduates: “They have regular meetings on a particular issue so you get to hear what’s happening and you get an opportunity to raise any concerns and to ask questions.” Members also accepted telephone calls from community members who wanted “to discuss issues and to receive comments,” she said. All such activities correspond to the role of the adviser as executor.

7.2.2.2 Adviser as Friend

Teachers

Fay and Pam talked about situations whereby those who served on the advisory council were friends of the school. Fay cited the example of teachers, for example, who through the council, had received complimentary letters from parents. The advisers representing
teachers often read these letters aloud during staff meetings with the express purpose of letting teachers know the positive response of the community to their work. These were supportive gestures of friendship in Pam's opinion.

Pam felt that the school had gained a valuable ally when the advisory council was established. Advisers acted as “advocate(s) on behalf of educators, the education system and of students,” she said. She felt that having a school advisory council meant having more people in the school’s court, more people to support and to serve as friends of the school, especially when the public “demanded accountability” and wanted reasons for decisions. Pam was philosophical when she said: “everybody’s job looks easy if you’re not doing it.” Through the advisory council, Pam determined, the school had gained a battery of friends who “would understand some of the terrible quandaries that people are in as they try to make the best decision in hard times.”

Parents

The parents did not present situations whereby advisers assumed the role of friend.

7.2.2.3 Adviser as Educator

Teachers

Adrienne assumed that advisers from the business community had background knowledge to educate the school on how to do things differently: “The work is just not going to go away. At this school we are constantly looking at how we are going to do
things differently. This fact will probably put more pressure on the council to get more
involved.” Adrienne’s comments suggested that as staffs were being downsized, schools
were looking to outside sources to help supplement programs for students. From
Adrienne’s perspective, council members, who worked in business, could assume an
educator role instructing schools on more efficient ways to educate.

Pam also elaborated that from her experience community members on the council were
excellent educators. She discussed situations whereby advisers from the business
community made “wonderful presentations to the board when the board ask(ed) for
input,” she said. Pam knew that some advisers had demonstrated excellent “presentation
skills and ... put together wonderful packages” to present Shieldside to the community
and to the school board.

Parents

Parents did not discuss situations in which advisers served as educators.

7.2.2.4 Adviser as Informant

Teachers

Adrienne elaborated the contents of the informant role when she criticized teachers who
were council members as negligent informants: “There is little communication between
teachers on the council and the staff in terms of keeping teachers informed.” Adrienne
also suggested that other members of council were negligent in keeping the community informed:

I don’t think that the community is receiving information from the council. I don’t know that the council has explored ways to communicate with the community, the same way they haven’t explored ways to communicate further with the staff. (Adrienne)

Adrienne referred to the advisers as “receptors of information” but she obviously believed that they needed to improve their role as informants.

Fay spoke about advisers as those who relayed information and concerns from the community back to the school. She said:

If parents in the community have concerns about what’s going on or want to say something positive, then they can approach anybody on the council, either a parent or a teacher, and the information will be relayed back. If it is deemed important it would come down to us as staff in the school. (Fay)

The advisers, Fay concluded, also became ‘a voice’ for the concerns of other parents in the community: “they cut through the bureaucracy,” she said. She pointed out that during Open House sessions, advisers advertised what they did. In their ‘flyer’ was written: ‘Call one of us or approach us, we can bring your concern forward’. Fay pointed out that, realistically, parents in the larger community who brought their concerns to advisers would not always get the response they wanted, but at least they knew they were being heard.

Pam believed that the members of the council were in close contact with the community and, therefore, could keep the community informed as to the rationale for certain
decisions made at the school. Pam also assumed that there was a direct benefit in having the council because they moved about in the community and, therefore, knew more about community concerns than did principals and teachers. She expressed the view that advisers "(kept) their ears to the ground" and, therefore, heard about individual problems that other parents were experiencing. Pam’s description supported the view presented by Goldhamer, that advisers served an important role keeping the leader informed about community events and community responses to programs and to reform.

Parents

Access to information becomes very important for parents who do not have opportunities to visit their child’s school regularly. Mary identified communication as an important role of the principal and for parents on the council. She expressed the view that parents on the council could be a good source of information and, if an issue developed, she would depend on them to keep her informed. Advisers, she concluded, had the responsibility to keep the lines of communication open with people in the community.

7.2.2.5 Adviser as Critic

Teachers

The presence of the advisory council served, Pam said, “as a built-in safety feature.” When decisions were challenged in a political forum or debate, the school administrator could, for example, derive confidence from knowing that he acted on the advice of the
council. Advisers, according to Pam, served a strong public role as the conscience of the principal. They questioned and used their expertise, she believed, to ensure that the best possible decisions were made.

Parents

Parents did not identify situations advisers approached as critics.

7.2.2.6 Adviser as Adviser

Parents

Adrienne supported the view that advisers give advice. However, she outlined restrictions on the issues members could discuss: “Council members receive information on how monies are used in the school but they do not give advice on how to budget or how to spend money.” The establishment of the council was evidence, in her opinion, that the school was looking at “how to do things differently.” Adrienne assumed that in the current political climate, schools were forced to look at creative ways to keep programs relevant; she suggested that advisers were viewed by decision makers as a resource and by establishing the council, the school “was tapping community resources.”

Teachers

All three teachers assumed that advisers gave advice. Adrienne determined that the members of council who represented the business community were most valuable in terms of giving advice about how to design programs to adjust to what was happening in
the larger community outside of the school: "To have business input into the design of curriculum is very valuable because schools don't have the money and don't know what is happening in the broader world."

Fay, like Adrienne, elaborated the advisory role when she identified what advisers did not do: "They did not say this is what will happen in the school and, therefore, it will happen." Advisers dialogued and had input, but they did not make decisions or do the work of the school. From Fay's perspective, this was not a problem; it was clearly a role distinction. She elaborated her meaning by citing an example:

If there was going to be some changes in curriculum,... they would be consulted or Rob might present that to the council and say 'these are our plans, could we have some discussion on them' and they would give advice. (Fay)

Fay described situations whereby the principal benefited from having the advisory group. When decisions had to be made, Rob had a tough role to play. He was constantly "bombarded," she said, with ideas coming from students, teachers, the director, superintendents, the ministry, community support groups - she presented a long list. She observed that: "To be able to take concerns or issues to such a wonderful mix of people - a cross-section of the community that cares about kids - helps keep the principal grounded." She felt that as a result of the discussion and the advice from the council, Rob knew with certainty what decisions had to be made. During chats in the cafeteria, the principal spoke quite openly to her about the benefits of having the advisory council.
Pam said that because each member represented a particular expertise, they could advise as to whether decisions were reasonable; their presence gave the school a certain "authenticity," she said. Pam talked specifically about "the member that represent(ed) business" and the importance of this person's role in bringing "the point of view of business" to the group. She suggested that the principal asked council members: "What do you think?" and in this way she felt, "he gets input." This, Pam volunteered, did not resemble 'site-based management' or 'decentralized decision making'. I concluded from Pam's statements that advisement represented a milder form of decision making.

Parents

Mary spoke extensively about aspects of the advisory role which supported the view that advisers give advice. From her understanding, members of the advisory council collaboratively worked together to give advice to the principal on what she said were "important decisions about how the school should be run." They did not do the work of fundraising. She spoke of advisers as people who gave advice on academic and philosophical issues related, she said, "to the direction the school should take."

From her experiences in health care, Mary knew that advisers were restricted in the issues they could address. She felt sure the same restrictions were felt in education and were imposed by the Ministry of Education and Training: "Members have only so much leeway but, they could, if they desired, have a significant impact." This was especially true with respect to reducing discrepancies that could develop between schools that were
well resourced and those that were not. Mary believed in a strong public education system whereby people had a right to be actively involved in how decisions were made; but, she felt that a school in a “fortunate area,” such as Shieldside Secondary, should not receive “more than a school in a poorer area.” She insinuated that members of advisory councils had it within their power to give the right kind of advice to prevent such eventualities.

Mary determined that the elected advisers represented “different interests of the community.” In this way, she assumed that neither one opinion nor one group of interests dominated the advisory process and, therefore, she said, “the needs of the whole community are met.”

7.2.3 Summary

Teachers and parents in this section who were representatives of two constituent groups identified situations and approaches that placed advisers in the roles of educators, executors, friends, critics, students, and advisers. Some participants referred to a specific group of advisers such as teachers, others described situations and approaches used by all advisers and members of organized parent groups in general. Table 7.1 presents a classification of the approaches used by advisers based on the assumptions of the teachers and parents who are representatives of those groups external to the advisory council but who belong to the educational community of the school and are, therefore, presumed to be beneficiaries of decisions and/or activities of the council at Shieldside Secondary.
From this table it can be determined the roles that were identified and who described the situations and the approaches.

**TABLE 7.1 APPROACHES (CONSTITUENTS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEMBER</th>
<th>EXECUTOR</th>
<th>FRIEND</th>
<th>EDUCATOR</th>
<th>INFORMANT</th>
<th>CRITIC</th>
<th>ADVISER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T(ADRIEN)</td>
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<td>T(FAY)</td>
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<td>T(PAM)</td>
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<td>P(MARY)</td>
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<td>P(GRACE)</td>
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</table>

T= Teacher  P= Parent

It can be concluded that all constituents supported the theory that advisers serve an executive role, most supported their role as informant and adviser, but only two teachers supported the theory that advisers are friends and only Pam, the vice-principal, assumed that advisers served as critics. It is interesting that the parents did not discuss advisers as educators but that all three teachers recognized this function. Once again, there was an elaboration of the duties and tasks within the executor role. This group, like the leaders, placed heavy emphasis on the role of advisers to determine the mission and goals of the school, to assess the relevancy of school programs, to have input into graduate outcomes, to discuss policy initiatives, to help in staff selection, to attend semi-monthly meetings, and to keep records of minutes of meetings. It would be interesting to know the value that advisers placed on such activities since many of the advisers in this study indicated
that they were not satisfied with their level of participation in meaningful activities such as activities related to educational programs.

In the section which follows I focus attention on issues which members of constituency groups identified as problems or concerns.

7.3 Reality of Participation: Technical and Psychological Issues

7.3.1 Introduction

In this section, I describe and interpret problem situations of the advisory experience as identified by teachers and parents who are not members of the advisory council. As in previous chapters, I elaborate problems associated with attitude and process. In Chapter Seven, I presented the dark side of the advisory relation from the perspective of the leaders who had direct experience with the advisory council at Shieldside and with councils in other contexts. The respondents in this section discuss problems which they have observed or experienced or problems which could potentially occur.

7.3.2 Technical and Psychological Issues

7.3.2.1 Access

Teachers

Adrienne identified a problem related to the intentional or unintentional denial of the right of teachers on the staff to have access to information coming from the advisory group. She reasoned that a strong motivation for the establishment of the council was to
provide a forum for educators to discuss educational issues with members of the broader community. However, many teachers continued to feel “disenfranchised,” Adrienne said, because they were excluded from discussions and did not know the issues discussed in council or how much information teacher advisers were passing along:

The staff is not aware to what extent the teachers (advisers) are informing the council; there isn’t the information flow that there should be. Nobody volunteers information. (Adrienne)

Adrienne’s tone and statements expressed a strong dissatisfaction with the efforts of teacher advisers to provide information to other staff members. She wanted to know what was discussed and more about council affairs. She said representatives of the staff on the council could:

... post council minutes in the staff room and make a notation on weekly bulletins to staff indicating that certain topics were under discussion and that information could be received by contacting either Don or Kent. (Adrienne)

Adrienne judged that teachers should have been involved in the original discussions “to share ideas about the design of the council, the number of meetings, how the staff (could) have input, and how the council (fitted) into the rest of the school.” Such an approach, she assumed, would promote better contact between the staff and the council members.

Access, from Adrienne’s perspective, also meant becoming acquainted with the issues and the people. She suggested that informal socials between the staff and the advisory council would provide occasions for valuable interchange and exchange of ideas and a way to determine issues that required attention. She also felt that such social events
would be opportunities for the staff to gain access to council members and alternatively, for advisers to gain access to the staff. Adrienne volunteered that such initiatives would come only as a result of a suggestion by members of the council or members of the staff. The school administration could not be counted on to encourage such events.

Adrienne assumed that the problem of inaccessibility to information extended into the community: “I don’t think the community is receiving information from the council.” She discussed this problem in terms of the necessity to develop an effective communication strategy. In her opinion, the school newsletter was a perfect medium for the community to access information from the council; she insinuated that it was not presently used for this purpose. She suggested that a small section of each newsletter could be devoted to council news.

Access can be impeded depending on the physical proximity of those seeking access (refer to Access Continuum Table 5.5). Adrienne identified problems related to the physical proximity of parents and community members who did not work in the school. Their nine to five jobs, she observed, prevented parents and community members from having access to the school during the regular day:

If I was a council member, I would want to be involved in the school more. I would want to know the staff more, I would want to see what was going on in the school. (Adrienne)

Adrienne assumed that the daily routine of members affected the degree to which parents and community members could effectively perform their responsibilities on the council.
7.3.2.2 Number

Neither the teachers nor the parents offered situations to support number as a problem.

7.3.2.3 Selection

Teachers

The problem of selection, I have determined has four strands: (1) process, (2) age, (3) gender, and (4) outsourcing. Pam identified a situation related to process. She observed that every effort had been made in the selection of members to the council to address issues of gender, age, ethnicity, and academic background. There were advisers, she said, “from higher education, from business, from different professions as well as from the student and teacher populations.” Her concern rested with replacement of members. Pam was underlining the changes resulting from the publication of the government document Policy/Program Memorandum 122. When the council at Shieldside Secondary was first established, the principal selected the members. Adherence to PPM 122, (Government of Ontario 1995) meant that when parent advisers left, their positions would be filled through an election process. This, Pam observed, could prevent the principal from receiving advice from all sectors of the school’s community:

My concern ... is the changing of the membership, as it inevitably does and finding someone to fill that particular spot. That would be a concern; you might have some excellent people but do they meet the criteria of what you need to get a particular voice. (Pam)
In Pam’s view, the democratic process of election limited the principal’s selection potential and could create an imbalance such as an all female or male council or one which excluded members from certain families or members with certain expertise; Pam realized that the election process could also limit the principal’s access to advice and expertise he might require.

7.3.2.4 Adjustment

Teachers

Both Adrienne and Pam identified situations which mirrored the psychological problem of adjustment. Advisers within the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary, Adrienne assumed, experienced problems of adjusting to what she called, “the unstructured and open nature” of the council operations. She indicated that the council operated in an unfocused, informal manner and that this could become a problem since, she assumed, many parents and community members on the council worked in formal, structured environments. Adrienne did not agree that advisers required briefing or training to help them adjust to their new position, but she assumed that a more formal structure of decision making would assist members to adjust quickly and to experience the feeling that “they were doing something faster.” Adrienne implied that it was the principal’s responsibility to establish the operating procedures of the council and he had not done a satisfactory job.
In her statements, Pam discussed the problem of adjustment from a district perspective. She observed that teachers on councils and teachers who were members of constituency groups were experiencing stress related to the reform to establish councils and, in her view, teachers in the Halloway Board of Education viewed councils as just another new structure to deal with:

I think a lot of teachers are feeling right now that they are serving many masters and that they are getting instructions, directions, and orders from many, many different groups - they are being pressured and pushed and pulled in many directions. I think there are some teachers who just think 'I simply can't do it, I cannot respond to another pressure group, I can't meet all the needs of everyone I am supposed to be meeting now'.... I think many of them are feeling overwhelmed. (Pam)

Pam became quite emotional when she spoke about teachers who agreed to become advisers. Such teachers, Pam suggested, committed time and energy to an idea that presented tremendous risks:

(Teachers) cannot be certain that the experience will contribute to their professional growth or that they will be appreciated for what they are doing or even that they will have a significant role to play in the group.

(Pam)

She expressed the view that teacher frustration was very real and said “the adjustment required commitment, significant commitment!” The adjustment could be even more difficult for teachers who carried a certain resentment because they assumed that this latest reform was “just another idea laid on from the States,” Pam admitted.
Parents

Grace concluded that adjustment could become a problem if advisers were forced to behave in a manner which ran counter to their beliefs and values. She related this specifically to the issue of briefing parents who volunteered to become members of advisory councils. She was unsure of the kind of preparation required to help people adjust to their new positions, but she emphatically stated that “while they might be ignorant about some of the issues ... parents had an expertise that was valuable in itself.”

As for the need for training, Grace queried, “If you are going to train people, are they going to put forward the viewpoint of parents?” For Grace, training could mean swaying opinions to suit a certain agenda. She could not support the approach of forcing council members to adjust so that they responded in a certain manner.

7.3.2.5 Inaction

Teachers

Adrienne and Pam reported situations that related to the issue of inaction. Adrienne expressed the opinion that the advisory council was a passive group with limited potential for responding to the needs of teachers. She said the council received information and offered opinions, but it was not “integrated into the school in terms of practical hands-on work.” She related a situation whereby, as leader of a “School-to-Work Transition Project,” she wanted to make application to an outside agency for an equipment grant. Rather than go to the advisory council to help with the grant application process, she
organized a separate Board of Directors constituted of members of staff, parents, and members from the business community. She explained: “There wouldn’t have been any benefit going to the council, they weren’t seen as having that kind of role.” Adrienne elaborated that she would go to the council to share information concerning the project, but she could not expect the council to do the actual work of accessing a grant. Adrienne’s comments demonstrate support for the theory of advisory behaviour which states that advisers do everything except the actual work of the institution they serve.

Adrienne expanded upon this theme of council inactivity by stating that there was a problem of too much talk and too little action. She referred to “lack of task orientation” and opined that members “act(ed) as recept(ors) of information.” She predicted that an attitude of disinterest could seep into the advisory relation as parents became “disillusioned and dissatisfied over time” with their inactive, passive role.

Pam knew that when people volunteered to take on new roles, they wanted to feel that what they were doing mattered; they wanted to be actively involved, and they wanted leaders to respond to decisions they made as soon as possible. Advisers could become discouraged when meetings seemed nothing “but futile work and futile discussion,” she said. Inaction was evident when advisers “were meeting for the sake of meeting - working hours and months on things that simply (sat) on a shelf without being acted on,” Pam said. Inaction also became a problem when members of the council realized they
were simply “rubber stamping decisions that (had already been) made.” Pam used her hands to help emphasize her concern:

These people are volunteering their time! When the pain outweighs the personal gain they will say ‘I can volunteer my time elsewhere and do more good’. (Pam)

As council members realized their limited influence and the extent of external restriction on schools and school councils, the initial zeal would wane and they would discontinue their participation. Inaction had the potential, in Pam’s opinion, of sending advisers away.

Parents

Grace did not want to be part of a council that was powerless. She saw the council in “a positive light” as having potential for “real positive action, not just window-dressing or not just a political thing.” But, in the present political climate, she questioned whether it could have any “positive impact.” From her perspective, leaders were really saying: “We’ll form this group and we’ll let them all have their say, and then behind the scenes we’ll carry on as we always did.” The amount of impact, the amount of “integrity and value of the group,” Grace determined, depended on the leadership style of the principal.

Grace expressed the view that if the principal wanted to “control” the council and “be in charge of it” there would be very little action; but where a principal genuinely sought input and “showed gratitude for feedback ... then, this was a more democratic situation,” she said. She feared that in the initial stages, advisers would have to be satisfied with
playing a passive role. From Grace’s perspective, council members did not have control of staffing, since at the present time “the union seniority clause” determined who stayed and who left. She asked the following questions: “Is the council really (speaker’s emphasis) there to bring about some positive impact or is it just channeling information? Is it playing a passive role or an active role?” Based on her assumption that members of the council at Shieldside Secondary would play a passive role with little real power to act, Grace had decided not to become a member of the advisory council when it was formed.

Grace also suggested that action and inaction distinguished strong parent groups from weak groups. The amount of activity a council wanted to have, for example, was, in Grace’s opinion, often determined by the group itself. In her comments she suggested that advisers who wanted to act as lobby groups on behalf of teachers and principals could “become really active, but it would depend on how active and how involved people wanted to become.” Grace knew the difference between an active and an inactive community. She spoke as an experienced member of the wider society who had moved within communities in both Canada and Britain (which she had done).

Parents and community members complain but, when it comes to being really politically active, they don’t become active. Therefore, they don’t bring about change. It all depends on how active and involved people want to become. (Grace)

Grace was convinced that schools could benefit from strong parent action. She was curious to know the difference in parent involvement in smaller rural areas where “there
tend(ed) to be more involvement and parents seem(ed) to know one another better” and, larger urban areas where “parents (were) more transitory and less involved.”

7.3.2.6 Rivalry

Teachers

‘Rivalry’ implies competition and tension. Pam suggested that the harmony that existed within the advisory council at Shieldside resulted from: “the work that the principal did at the beginning.” She felt that Rob was a strong leader who had devoted considerable energy to what John had referred to as ‘front-end loading’. Pam predicted that situations within councils could become heavily laden with conflict when weak leaders were controlled by strong advisers or, alternatively, when weak advisers were controlled by strong leaders. From her perspective, as a vice-principal, these were unsatisfactory combinations. Pam talked about the potential of struggle and control whereby members of a council could potentially operate solely within a system of “checks and balances” with the goal of keeping a restraining hand on the actions of the principal. The only solution to prevent such conditions was “to have a strong leader and a very professional and well-educated group.” Pam was grateful that the organizations in her county were, as she said, “extremely professional.”
Parents

Mary identified the potential for rivalry. When individuals were more concerned about their own individual needs and not "the betterment of the school" rivalry could result. She would not be comfortable as part of a group that showed, what she called, "discrimination among members." "I would find those things very offensive," she said. She felt she would learn about such situations from talking to parents and from talking to teachers. She could not tolerate parents acting in this manner and felt it was her responsibility to go to meetings and to voice her concern should such situations develop.

7.3.3 Summary

In summary, in this section I have elaborated some of the problems resulting from technical and psychological issues. Problems related to access, selection, adjustment, inaction and rivalry. Table 7.2 identifies the member type and the problem identified.

**TABLE 7.2 TECHNICAL/ PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES (CONSTITUENTS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEMBER</th>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>SELECTION</th>
<th>ADJUSTMENT</th>
<th>INACTION</th>
<th>RIVALRY</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T(ADRIENNE)</td>
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T= Teacher    P= Parent
From Table 7.2 it can be concluded that: among the teachers Adrienne and Pam identified problems of access, adjustment, and inaction; Pam offered statements in support of selection and rivalry; Fay did not identify any problems. Among the parents, Grace's comments supported problems of adjustment and inaction and she particularly expressed concerns related to passive participation. Mary provided statements to support the view that rivalry was a potential problem.

There were a number of issues discussed and supported with strong points of view in this section. For example, the vice-principal, Pam, elaborated issues related to selection. She was aware that as the council at Shieldside adjusted to the ministry's directive to have parent representatives elected from the larger parent body, certain problems could develop. She was concerned that the election process could prevent the principal from having access to a good cross-section of parent opinions and, also, that the principal may not receive advice from those with expertise to offer to the decision-making process when certain issues needed attention.

Grace, one of the parents, emphasized her belief that the advisory council was an ineffective and inactive group, that it was there to do the principal's bidding. She elaborated that until this situation changed, she did not want to become an adviser. It should be noted that inaction received the most attention from this group; however, from the statements of the leaders, it was not identified as an issue.
7.4 The Reality of Participation: Findings and Analysis

7.4.1 Introduction

In the final section of this chapter, I describe and interpret data from the interviews with parents and teachers who are members of constituent groups, associated with Shieldside Secondary School, to present images of some of the real and/or the potential positive benefits of participation. The findings present images to support the constructs used in previous chapters, i.e., responsiveness, personal development, and overcoming alienation.

7.4.2 Positive Outcomes

7.4.2.1 Responsiveness

Teachers

Adrienne and Pam discussed participation as an opportunity to enhance the information flow from the school to the community and from the community to the school. Adrienne discussed the benefits in terms of an exchange among business advisers, students, and teachers. She assumed, that with a representative from business on the council, there was less chance that students would graduate into the ‘broader world’ unprepared. She interpreted the ‘broader world’ to mean the business world. Adrienne outlined other benefits:

Business would have input into the design of the curriculum, ... provide financial resources and, give schools information related to what (was) happening in the broader world. (Adrienne)
Schools in turn would respond by graduating the kind of workers business required. The response was reciprocal.

Adrienne hypothesized that, with the recent change whereby a parent had assumed the position of chairperson of the council, there could be extra efforts to integrate school and council affairs: "Members of the council will support curriculum innovations and initiatives ... and ... share information about what their children say about schools and about programs." Parent advisers would act in a liaison capacity going from the school to the community to help "people gain access to the school," she said. Such changes, according to Adrienne, could enable the school to respond better to its community and, in this way, could potentially improve the contribution the school made to its community.

Pam discussed the positive benefits of the existence of the advisory council in terms of the school's call for help. She recognized that, in a contemporary context, schools were frequently admitting they could no longer go it alone, that they needed help with "the huge and overwhelming task" of educating students and keeping programs relevant. Pam assumed that participation meant that the community would "assist in doing the job."

Fay presented a scenario illustrating how she would respond as member of an advisory council. She emphasized how participation could stimulate a multi-dimensional information flow. She explained that she would speak to parents and students to surface issues that had not been addressed or had been ignored. She would also depend on the principal and the vice-principal to help her identify problems and would speak to teachers
during monthly staff meetings. Alternatively, she would distribute highlights of council activities to the staff and devise a format whereby teachers could make their concerns known to her. Fay did not forget students. She said she would encourage students, during the weekly student advisory sessions, to bring forward their personal concerns and the concerns of their parents. She would also use regular parent conference events to inform parents that she was available as an adviser to bring their concerns to council. Fay concluded that this was the ‘give and take’ of the advisory relation. She stressed that advisors could serve a useful bridging function to respond to the school’s need to link with its community.

7.4.2.2 Personal Development

Teachers

Adrienne was certain that participation benefited teachers: “Teachers have a lot to offer. ...They have been devalued.” Business representation on the council, from Adrienne’s perspective, provided teachers with a window on the business community; this had the potential, she assumed, of helping teachers to use their expertise to meet the needs of the business community. Adrienne referred specifically to the Cooperative Education Program insisting that this program had the potential, through the efforts of teachers working with business representatives, to become a high level technology program that could serve both the school and business.
Parents

Mary observed that the collaboration that parents and teachers experienced through participation had the potential of being a personally enhancing experience. As a member of the council, “you are part of a team and there is a collaborative spirit,” she said. From Mary’s perspective, this was a very good thing. She assumed that people on the council learned from one another and benefited from the exchange of ideas and opinions.

7.4.2.3 Overcoming Alienation

Pam viewed participation as a positive spin on what had previously been a negative response to education by the community. The school, Pam observed, had erected barriers which prevented the outside from gaining access to the inside. The new situation was more open and more supportive. The school benefited because the community now had a better chance to know “the direction the school (was) taking and why,” she said. Pam believed councils could potentially help overcome negative attitudes towards schools and educators by keeping the community informed of events as they occurred. Pam also concluded that councils could encourage parents to form lobby groups to oppose government decisions, especially when such decisions negatively affected the educational environment of their children.

Fay and Pam discussed situations whereby teachers on the council could have opportunities to instruct and, thereby, improve public perceptions of teachers’ work by ‘setting the record straight’: “If there are negative comments coming across the table
about any of our colleagues, that the record is set straight or that suggestions are made (by teachers) to talk to that person.” Pam assumed that when other members on the council ridiculed teaching practices or made negative references toward education generally, teachers on the council had the obligation to inform and to remind them that teaching was, “a human endeavour” and people who served in the profession had “the best of intentions.” Pam assumed that, when teachers presented teachers’ perspectives, they educated others about the work of teachers.

7.4.2.4 Maintaining Legitimacy

I did not interpret any statements by constituents in support of the theory that participation resulted in maintaining the legitimacy of the system.

7.4.3 Summary

It can be concluded that statements from constituents offered further support for such positive outcomes of participation as responsiveness, personal development and overcoming alienation but there was no support for legitimacy. Table 7.3 presents a cumulative image of the benefits and those who identified them.
From Table 7.3, it can be concluded that all teachers identified responsiveness as a positive benefit, but that the parents did not. Grace did not discuss any positive outcomes. Pam, the vice-principal, was the only constituent to support overcoming alienation as a potential positive benefit of participation in the advisory experience. She especially focused on the potential of participation to enable the community to respond to the school’s call for help when declining staff allotments threatened the quality of educational programs. Kay outlined a procedure to follow to ensure a multi-dimensional information flow from the council to the school and the community and from the community to the council and the school. Advisers would communicate with students, parents, staff, the principal, and citizens to ensure that all voices and concerns were heard.
7.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I introduced teachers and parents who were members of the external community which the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary School presumably represented. I addressed the questions: (1) Who are some members of the constituent groups which the advisory council represented? (2) From their perspective, what is the status of the advisory group and what expertise do members bring to the service of the principal and the school? (3) How do advisers approach situations they describe? (4) What were some of the negative consequences of their actions? (5) What were some of the positive benefits?

As a result of analysis of the accumulated data, I have concluded that the constituents were teachers who had wide academic and professional experience and parents who represented a mixed group of those who worked outside the home and those who did not. I have also concluded that of the ten parents interviewed, the two parents to whom I was referred to by a staff member had formed and were willing to express strong opinions about the advisory council, but those parents whom I selected in a sample did not have adequate knowledge of the council to discuss issues related to membership or outcomes; some did not know the council had been established.

From the perspective of those teachers who presented statements related to status, council members had achieved a mid-range status in that they acted as a support group for the principal; but, in their opinion, they had not achieved the status of the principal since
they were not involved in school governance. One parent, Mary, assumed the council had achieved a high status as an active group to assist the principal but, the second parent, Grace, conceded that the council’s status was emerging. She concluded that members had little influence and were simply doing the principal’s bidding.

Constituents agreed that the expertise of members was derived from their business and parenting knowledge. Their statements supported the theory that advisers acted as educators, informants, executors, critics, advisers, and friends. There were many tasks identified for the executor role which may indicate that, from the perceptions of constituents, advisers have many tasks to perform despite the fact that the advisers themselves elaborated issues related to the inactivity of their role. Some of the negative consequences of participation resulted from problems related to access, selection, adjustment, inaction, and rivalry; nobody, however, identified number as a potential problem. As with the advisers, constituents elaborated inaction and adjustment as the most significant issues. While some members focused on issues affecting teachers, others related issues to parents. Few of the constituents discussed problems of adjustment and inaction as issues resulting in problems for the principal.

Finally, as in previous chapters, while there were technical and psychological problems identified, there were positive benefits as well. Statements from the constituents were used to support such positive benefits as responsiveness, personal development, and overcoming alienation. It is interesting to note that all teachers in this group identified
‘responsiveness’ as a positive outcome but that neither parent offered statements in support of this benefit. Julie, Pam, and Kay felt that participation could result in an improved information flow. This, they felt, could help the school respond to the needs of students and thereby graduate students better prepared for the job market.

In Chapter Eight I restate the purpose of the study and revisit the research questions.
CHAPTER EIGHT

REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

8.1 Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe and interpret the participation of parents and community members with teachers within the formal structure of a school advisory council. A basic assumption of the study was that members of advisory councils come together as advisers to the school principal and, by extension, become advisers to the school and to the school district.

The challenge was to use a somewhat subjectivist approach to analyze data from semi-structured interviews, personal observations, and from document analysis to describe and interpret the participation of advisers in what is a relatively new organization in Ontario schools, namely, the school advisory council.

The basic question of the study was: What is meant by participation in a school advisory council? To help identify and interpret the roles of participants, a conceptual framework was developed based on the previous works of the following: Ellen Goldring (1990), Nicholas Beattie (1985), Herbert Goldhamer (1978), and Adam Curle (1968).

contexts in Western Europe. He used the reform theory and the general crisis theory to explain the emphasis on participation as an ideology. Herbert Goldhamer (1978) wrote about the historical experiences of political advisers to great kings and to heads of state from the Middle Ages to the late 1970s. Goldhamer identified roles that advisers have assumed over the ages such as the role of educator, informant, critic, and adviser. Adam Curle (1968) documented the problems of advisers to government departments in developing countries. His work enabled an identification of the executor role. Both Curle and Goldhamer provided insights to identify issues that generally herald negative consequences of the experience.

To help organize the information and to add to the complexity of the study, the findings were presented from the perspective of four realities: the documented realities or statements related to the desired outcomes of participation identified in pertinent documents; the experienced realities or the experiences of advisers to a secondary school principal within the formal structure of an advisory council; the directed realities or the experiences of leaders who, under the direction of the provincial department of Education and Training, presumably sanction and assist in the formulation of policy to direct the operations of the advisory group in this study; and the observed realities or the statements of constituents or members of groups from the external environment of the council such as teachers and parents.
Chapter One presented the problem and the research questions; Chapter Two was a review of pertinent literature on participation and advisement; Chapter Three was a description of the methodology; and Chapter Four was a review of pertinent documents identifying the rationale for participation from the perspective of the province of Ontario, the Halloway Board of Education, and Shieldside Secondary School. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven presented the data from semi-structured interviews and personal observations of the experienced realities of advisers, the directed realities of leaders, and the observed realities of constituents. Finally, the research came full circle as the findings from interviews with the advisers, the leaders, and the constituents provided information to identify the positive outcomes of participation. These supported the aims of participation as outlined in the theories of participation put forward by Nicholas Beattie (1985) such as the reformist and the general crisis theories. They also supported the aims of participation identified in documents circulated from the province, the district, and the school.

In this chapter, I revisit the research questions to draw conclusions from the data presented. The questions ask: (1) What is the reality of participation of parents and community members within the formal structure of an advisory council? How does this reality compare with the definition of participation formulated from the review of the literature? (2) What are some situations which involve the advisers and how do they approach them? How do the realities of the advisers with respect to their roles compare with the directed and observed realities of leaders and constituents? (3) What are some
negative consequences of the advisory experience from the perspective of the advisers? How do their experiences compare with the directed and the observed realities? (4) What are some positive benefits of the advisory experience from the perspective of the advisers? How do these compare with the directed and the observed realities? What conclusions can be drawn from the experienced realities and the desired outcomes of participation identified in the document review?

8.1.1 Question One: What is the reality of participation of parents and community members within the formal structure of an advisory council in a secondary school? How does this reality compare with the theoretical definition of participation?

The first part of Question One necessitates a look back at the institutional setting to review the specifics of the catchment area which the school in this study serves.

Shieldside Secondary was a new school constructed in a middle class community in southern Ontario. Parents of students, generally, had a keen interest in the educational achievement of their children. There was a high incidence of participation among parents and strong support for educational projects sponsored by the school. These findings support the research of Joyce Epstein (1995) and Ellen Goldring (1990) that parents from middle-class social settings have high family involvement in education.

The findings show that the advisory council was established before this secondary school was opened. The principal established the council because he believed that schools should be linked with their community and that parents needed to be involved in decisions related to the education of their children. He reported that the advisory council
served as a forum to facilitate this kind of involvement. The parents and community members, as members of this formal organization, could claim a high social status since they were professionals with expertise in banking, real estate, sales and service, and they had parenting and community-service skills. One member was a veterinarian who owned and operated her own Veterinary clinic. Advisers, therefore, brought with them a wealth of resources in the form of expertise to support students, families, and the school. This supports the earlier research by Epstein (1992, 1995).

8.1.2 A Comparison Between Theory and Practice

Responding to the second part of Question One necessitates a look at the theoretical definition of participation. Theoretically, participation of parents in formally organized groups represents the legal organization of parents and community representatives (Beattie 1985) working with teachers and school administrators to discuss and to determine the educational environment for all students (Epstein 1992, 1995; Newport 1992; Davies 1991).

Whereas this council was a formally organized group of parents and community members who met regularly with teachers and the school administrator, when it was first established the group did not have legal authority. The Government of Ontario, however, has subsequently made participation a legal matter with the publication of Policy/Program Memorandum 122 in the spring of 1995 (Government of Ontario 1995).
But, why was participation encouraged? Statements from the two leaders, the principal and the superintendent, give a rationale for the establishment of the council. The principal of Shieldside stated that the council provided a formal structure to a relationship that he had established with the community prior to the opening of the school; it was, therefore, a venue to allow parents and educators to discuss educational issues and concerns together. The superintendent suggested that the establishment of school councils, in general, ensured that participation was more meaningful. John believed that prior efforts to involve parents in such organizations as PTA’s were superficial attempts to involve the public in education and failed to engage parents in discussions of real educational issues.

While prior research suggests that participation provides parents an opportunity to work with educators to improve the educational environment for students (Epstein 1992, 1995), findings from this study do not support this. Most meetings of the advisory council, for example, were held at night after the school day and were devoted to issues selected by the principal such as providing updates on events happening, or about to happen, in the school or the school district. There was little discussion on ways to improve programs or issues related to improving student achievement. Unfortunately, there were few opportunities provided for council members to meet with the staff. The findings show, however, that parents and community members wanted to be more involved in curriculum planning, program development, and school assessment, or in, what they referred to as, the ‘life of the school’.
The concept of representation touches another complex issue. The question of who should and who does represent parents and how they are selected presented mixed realities. While advisory councils in general are promoted on the basis that they promise a more democratic, responsive, and effective manner of addressing public needs and public opinions within education (Malen & Ogawa 1988), the only democratically elected member of the council in this study was Matthew, a recent newcomer. Matthew could claim to be a representative of the parents in the catchment area of the school because he had competed for his position and received the majority of votes from parents of students attending the school. All other members were volunteers selected to their positions by the principal.

Findings show that parents became members for more reasons than to improve the educational environment for all students. Matthew and Lillian became involved for their personal development, they wanted to learn more about the education system in Canada; Joan wanted to respond to the needs of parents in her community by helping to improve the educational environment so that parents would feel comfortable coming into the school; Ann felt a need to help overcome public alienation toward education and said that it was her mission to ensure that educators communicated with the community in a jargon-free language; Ashley, Matthew, Walter, and Charles wanted to maintain program relevance and believed that their participation would ensure that students were prepared for the 'world of work'. Participants admitted that while they might have originally come to the council for personal reasons, through their experience on the council, they were
beginning to look at issues from a more global perspective. From this we can conclude, as did Nicholas Beattie (1985), that participation benefits the individual as well as the institution; that when people become involved the more they want to be involved and the greater are the chances that they will begin to understand and endeavour to promote the goals and objectives of the institution.

8.1.3 Participation: A redefinition

In the case of this study, participation takes on a new meaning. It is the formal organization of parents and community members with expertise in finances who have volunteered to participate with teachers and the school principal for their personal development, to ensure the school system responds to the needs of the community, to overcome public alienation toward education, and to ensure program relevancy.

8.2 Situations and Approaches

8.2.1 What situations do advisers experience and how do they approach them? What commonalities and variations exist between the experiences of advisers and the assumptions of leaders and members of constituencies?

Participation of parents and community members with teachers as advisers to the principal begs the question, participation in what? Davies (1975) has stated that the entire community should be involved in and should be responsible for the education of each child. Epstein (1992, 1995) identified six types of parent involvement and how these benefited teachers, students, and parents. Neither Davies nor Epstein have outlined the specifics of situations which determine what parents and community members do
when they volunteer to participate. The work of Goldhamer (1978) and Curle (1968) help elaborate the content of the advisory role within the political context. They found that advisers served as executors, friends, educators, informants, critics, and advisers. The analysis of findings in this study confirmed that advisers in an educational context serve the same roles. Question Two, however, suggests a more in-depth look at each role.

8.2.2 The Experiences of Advisers

Table 8.1 presents statements from members of the advisory group in this study to illustrate situations they encountered and the approaches they used. The table serves two purposes: it presents a visual image of findings and serves as a starting point to identify commonalities and variations across groups. The items in each cell are organized according to context or according to sequence. For example, situations that involved the advisers in school and community matters are presented before those that involved them in school board or provincial issues. Situations are also presented according to the natural sequence of events. The first item in the first cell of Table 8.1 is: ‘Defines the mandate of the council’ and the last is ‘Sets agendas’. This arrangement follows the sequence of events as they occurred as noted in participant interviews. Entries in Table 8.1 are illustrative and do not exhaust the potential of situations that may occur in other contexts. They serve as a starting point for further research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXECUTOR</th>
<th>FRIEND</th>
<th>EDUCATOR</th>
<th>INFORMANT</th>
<th>CRITIC</th>
<th>ADVISER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defines the mandate of</td>
<td>Supports the leader by</td>
<td>Instructs educators on the use of a clear</td>
<td>Brings information from the school</td>
<td>Provides a critical review of issues</td>
<td>Listens to different points of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the council.</td>
<td>responding to questions</td>
<td>language to communicate with the public.</td>
<td>and the council to the community.</td>
<td>brought before councilespecially those</td>
<td>Expresses opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines rules governing</td>
<td>and providing information</td>
<td>Instructs educators on how to make the school</td>
<td>Brings information from the school</td>
<td>that place the school in a conflict of</td>
<td>Advises the principal on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>governing membership.</td>
<td>on issues to shelter him</td>
<td>more efficient.</td>
<td>to the council.</td>
<td>interest with the business community.</td>
<td>-the efficient use of school resources;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps devise a</td>
<td>from potential negative</td>
<td>Instructs board members when financial</td>
<td>Brings information from the</td>
<td>Determines the desired, ethical</td>
<td>-employability skills required by students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfactory assessment</td>
<td>criticism.</td>
<td>decisions negatively impact the educational</td>
<td>community to the school and the</td>
<td>response of the school to issues brought</td>
<td>-program relevancy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the council and</td>
<td></td>
<td>program.</td>
<td>council.</td>
<td>before the council.</td>
<td>-expectations of parents and community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>for students and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets agendas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings show that advisers in this context confront situations that are not entirely different from advisers to kings or to heads of state. Executors, for example, set the standard operating procedures for the council, attend meetings, and work to establish procedures to assess the operations of both the council and the school; educators instruct staff members and members of the school board on issues related to communication,
efficient management of the institution, staffing, programs, and finances; informants relay information throughout various spheres of the education system such as the school, the community, the province, and the school board; critics keep a watchful eye to prevent the principal from making needless errors of choice when decisions are made; and advisers give advice to the principal on the efficient use of school resources, employability skills required of students, program relevancy, and expectations for staff and students.

It should be noted that advisers were not entirely satisfied with the content of their roles. Members, especially parents and community members, voiced a keen interest in wanting to work more closely with teachers to understand educational programs, but they had not developed a satisfactory strategy to operationalize this objective. They expressed a concern that they were spending too much time on 'systems issues' such as dates for upcoming events, and that there was little opportunity to discuss matters related to curriculum, staff responsibilities, and other issues of direct concern to staff and students.

Also, assessment of the school and of the council was an issue uppermost on the list of priorities for advisers when this research was taking place. While members had surveyed the school’s community on two occasions seeking public attitude toward the kind of service offered by the school and the advisory council, the number of responses was unsatisfactorily low. Council members were occupied with exploring other strategies to access a more satisfactory response from the community.
8.2.3 How do school leaders and members of constituent groups discuss the role of advisers?

The principal and the superintendent were queried concerning their perceptions of the role of members of the advisory group. Tables 8.2 presents statements from the leaders. Organization of the items follow criteria for Table 8.1, with one exception. Within the cell of the adviser as executor, items are placed in order of importance or frequency. For example, determining rules governing student behavior precedes setting agendas while preparing articles for the school newsletter occurred more frequently than preparing briefs to send to the school board and, therefore, this item occurs earlier.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXECUTOR</th>
<th>FRIEND</th>
<th>EDUCATOR</th>
<th>INFORMANT</th>
<th>CRITIC</th>
<th>ADVISER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps determine rules governing student behaviour and protection of school property.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructs educators on employability skills for graduates.</td>
<td>Informs the community by: - sending information through newsletters - using ‘voice-mail’ - establishing ‘focus groups’ at the school.</td>
<td>Provides a critical review of school programs.</td>
<td>Advises the principal on: - student behaviour; - staffing; - program relevancy; - resources; - expectations of students and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps assess the effectiveness of the school and the council.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructs the community on the rationale for changes in the school’s operating procedures such as shortened lunch periods.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends regular semi-monthly meetings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informs the school about events in the community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends formal occasions such as the official opening, orientation night for parents of incoming students and public meetings hosted by the school board.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepares articles for the school newsletter.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends invitations to parents and community members to attend meetings hosted by the council.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes presentations to other schools.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to requests for input into policy from the school board.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discusses the content of briefs sent to the School Board.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statements from the principal and the superintendent support the view that advisers assume the roles of executor, educator, informant, critic, and adviser. However, there was no statement from the leaders to support the view that the adviser plays the role of friend. Leaders described a busy agenda for the executor role: they felt they help establish the rules of conduct for students and for the protection of school property, they help assess the effectiveness of the school and the council, they attend public functions, they schedule and attend meetings, they prepare briefs, and they provide input into School Board policies. As educators, they instruct educators on employability skills for students and they instruct members of the community on the rationale for changes in the school’s operating procedures. As informants, they keep information flowing between the school and the community. As critics, they critically review school programs and policies to prevent the school from making wrong decisions. As advisers, they advise the principal on such issues as student behaviour, staffing, program relevancy, use of school resources, and community expectations for staff and students. When leaders referred to the role of council members, they primarily referred to parents and community members. No reference was made to teachers and students.

From the perspective of parents and teachers who are not council members, what is the role of the adviser?

Members of constituencies, such as parents and teachers, provided statements to support the six roles. As with the leaders, the constituents identified a busy executive role for advisers: they help determine the mission of the school, help assess educational
programs, discuss policy issues, help in staff selection, attend meetings, and keep minutes of the organization. As friend, they advocate on behalf of the school and relay positive messages from parents to staff. As educator, they instruct the principal on efficient management of the school and they instruct the school board on the effectiveness of school programs. As critic, they provide a critical review of decisions made by the principal. As adviser, they advise the principal on program relevancy as well as academic and philosophic issues such as the reduction of inequalities between schools.

Table 8.3 presents the specifics of each role from the perspective of constituent members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXECUTOR</th>
<th>FRIEND</th>
<th>EDUCATOR</th>
<th>INFORMANT</th>
<th>CRITIC</th>
<th>ADVISER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps determine the school's mission and goals.</td>
<td>Informs staff of any positive responses from parents.</td>
<td>Instructs the principal on efficient management practices.</td>
<td>Brings information from the council to the staff and to the community.</td>
<td>Provides a critical review of decisions made by the principal.</td>
<td>Advises the principal on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps assess relevancy of school programs.</td>
<td>Acts as advocate within the community on behalf of educators, students, and the education system.</td>
<td>Instructs the school board about effective programs offered by the school.</td>
<td>Brings information from the community to the school.</td>
<td>-program relevancy;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps determine graduate outcomes.</td>
<td>Discusses policy initiatives.</td>
<td>Helps with staff selection.</td>
<td>Attends council meetings semi-monthly.</td>
<td></td>
<td>-academic and philosophic issues;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents 'minutes'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-ways to reduce inequalities between schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses of members of constituent groups indicate a certain naiveté related to situations involving advisers. As an example, one constituent reported that advisers educated school board members about the effectiveness of school programs. In reality, advisers complained that they had little opportunity to evaluate school programs or to observe how teachers were delivering the curriculum. They voiced a desire to have more
extensive influence in such areas. Advisers also reported there was little communication between the members of the advisory group and officials at school board. Council members further believed that, rather than receiving information from the board with respect to the operation of the council, the board was taking leads from them in setting policy for the district with respect to the establishment of councils in other schools.

Such discrepancies in perspective point out gaps that can exist between desired outcomes and actual practice (Willower 1994). The constituents may have wanted advisers to assess the educational environment of the school and to report their findings to the board, but this did not happen in practice.

8.2.4 Comparison Across the Realities

What commonalities exist across the three groups?

With respect to tasks identified within the executor role, each of the three groups identified an assessment role for advisers; notwithstanding, there were two different assessment responsibilities presented. Both the leaders and the constituents suggested that advisers helped assess the school and the council. The advisers, however, were more specific, they suggested that advisers helped assess the relevancy of school programs but that this aspect of the advisory role provided the most frustration. Parents and community members on the council wanted to know more about the community's response to the effectiveness of the school and the council, but they were struggling to identify a way to access this information. All groups recognized the protective role of the
adviser to ensure the school offered relevant programs. This suggests that there was a general attitude in the community that schools were offering programs that were considered irrelevant.

All three groups recognized the overlapping spheres of influence on the school’s educational environment such as the school board, the community, and the school council. They also recognized the need for communication between all three spheres. This conclusion supports the research of Epstein (1992, 1995) and the findings of Goldhamer (1978) and Beattie (1985) who discussed the necessity for decision makers to keep the community well-informed - presumably, a populace informed is a populace that can be counted on for support in times of adversity.

Variations existed across the three groups. The first relates to the adviser as executor. While advisers identified only four tasks associated with this role, leaders listed nine and constituents listed seven. It can be concluded that leaders viewed parent and community member participation as an active ‘make work’ role as opposed to one which provided an opportunity for parents and community members to come together with educators as equal partners to share ideas and opinions. Further research is required to verify this.

The second variation related to the adviser as friend. While statements from teachers, the trustee, and a parent supported the view that advisers, especially professional educators, serve as friends to the leader - leaders did not give any statement to support this view. It is possible that the male leaders in this study did not recognize that members of the
advisory group could provide support and friendship. This issue has been explored by those studying gender issues in administration (Irwin 1995): male leaders hold lonely positions at the top of the hierarchical pyramid while female leaders have demonstrated a more collaborative, open, and friendly style.

Variation also existed within the frame of the adviser as critic. From each of the three tables it can be concluded that advisers, leaders, and constituents had different concerns when they discussed the roles of the adviser as critic. For example, while advisers expressed concern about the potential of wrong decisions that could affect policy and procedures at the school and the school board, the principal and the superintendent were concerned about the entire education system including the school, the school board, and the province but members of constituency groups focused their comments on the role of advisers to keep the principal honest. This latter group was less conscious of the potential influence of the advisory council on the entire education system. This finding could support the criticism of those who feel that school councils have a narrow view of educational issues. For this reason, some parents (Galt 1995) do not trust or want their neighbours to control decision making in schools.
8.3 Consequences of Participation

8.3.1 Question Three: What are some negative consequences of the advisory experience as identified by the advisers? What commonalities and variations exist across the three groups?

Findings support the experiences of both Goldhamer (1978) and Curle (1968), that advisers experience problems resulting from issues of access, number, selection, adjustment, inaction, and rivalry. Question Three requires an in-depth look or an elaboration of the exact nature of each consequence. Table 8.4 presents summary statements from the experiences of advisers to illustrate problems related to each of the above constructs.
### TABLE 8.4 NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF PARTICIPATION (ADVISERS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>SELECTION</th>
<th>ADJUSTMENT</th>
<th>INACTION</th>
<th>RIVALRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisers who do not work in the school may not have the same access to events occurring in the school as do members of staff. Information from the School Board may be blocked to advisers by educators when it could result in negative results to the latter group.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer advisers may not represent ethnic minorities. Educators may control the selection of members to the advisory group.</td>
<td>Advisers must discuss educational issues without background knowledge of educational policies and practices. Advisers must now learn to view educational reform from the perspective of educators and students and not only from their child’s perspective. Advisers must contend with ambiguity of role definition. Advisers should be briefed by the school or the school board but not the Ministry. Educators realize the principal now receives advice from outside groups.</td>
<td>Advisers want to become active in the ‘life of the school’. Advisers unable to find ways to communicate with the school’s community. Advisers want to become active with curriculum development and assessment of the school’s effectiveness.</td>
<td>Advisers become impatient with fellow advisers who use unacceptable amounts of time discussing issues unrelated to topics under discussion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.3.2 Experienced Realities

Statements of advisers offered support for five of the six issues. *Number* was not recognized as an area of concern. Problems of access centered on gaining access to information from the school and the school board; selection involved problems of control and exclusion, too much control by educators and the potential for exclusion from membership of representatives from ethnic, minority groups; problems of adjustment centered on the difficulties of parents and community members to adjust to the requirements of their position and the difficulties associated with their lack of background information related to educational policies and practices. Inaction focused our attention on problems related to the desire of members to be more actively involved in the life of the school and in such matters as curriculum design; problems of inaction also highlighted the keen desire of advisers to identify strategies to communicate with members of the school’s community; and finally, rivalry reflected the impatience that members experience when certain members talk incessantly about personal issues during council meetings.

It can be concluded that most problems encountered by advisers centered around the issues of *adjustment* and *inaction*. With respect to adjustment, role ambiguity, lack of information related to educational policy and practice, and inability to identify a group responsible for briefing were significant problems identified by advisers. Inaction was
also an area of extreme concern. Advisers stated they were happy with the level of action and involvement when they first became involved as members of council, but, as time went on, this changed. This supports the research of Radnofsky (1994): council members in Chicago, where councils were mandated and given governance authority, reported satisfaction with their level of performance in the early stages of council operations, but as time went on there was no action, the principal made all decisions, and members felt their role was insignificant.

8.3.3 Directed and Observed Realities

To identify commonalties and variations across groups, Tables 8.5 and 8.6 present statements by leaders and constituents.
TABLE 8.5 NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF PARTICIPATION (LEADERS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>SELECTION</th>
<th>ADJUSTMENT</th>
<th>INACTION</th>
<th>RIVALRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thirty or forty members are an ineffective number of advisers for a decision-making group.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advisers with conflicting demands from family and work may be unavailable to give advice when it is requested by the principal or the School Board. Members from business may encourage the school to adopt a business-management orientation which could cause competition between schools.</td>
<td>Principals must now adjust their schedules to accommodate to the demands of another group operating within the school. Principals must prepare information for advisers who lack background on educational issues and policies.</td>
<td>One person's agenda could control discussion in the group. Rules of operation may not be well defined. Rules of operation are set by one person, usually by the principal without discussion with members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 8.5, it can be concluded that leaders did not identify problems related to access or inaction and yet inaction was a significant problem identified by advisers.

Statements within the selection frame reflected the difficulties experienced by leaders when they selected advisers who were not always available. This supports Goldhamer's (1978) research, that leaders in Medieval times selected churchmen to their service because such men were available to attend to the monarch at any time with regularity and continuity. Problems associated with selection also supported the observation that leaders
could receive advice from advisers who brought forward solutions that were more serious than the problem (Curle 1968) and that strong or persuasive advisers could persuade the leader to operate according to a certain agenda which could be in conflict with the values and goals established by the school.

In this study, the principal selected parent and community member advisers with expertise in business and financial matters. It should be noted that current research shows that advice from such a group could cause the school to assume a business management orientation that could place it in competition with other schools for scarce resources. One situation occurred during the period of this research which supports the view that such an eventuality was about to occur. The council had voted to support the action of the school to enter into a contract with a sporting distribution firm. Such a contract could expand the school’s budget by $30 thousand. According to Whitty (1997), as schools become more involved in financial issues, they adopt a quasi-market mentality which neither benefits student achievement nor teacher performance but serves to heighten a school’s competitive edge. Such research may foreshadow future eventualities for the Shieldside community.

The issue of adjustment reflects problems related to the leader’s overloaded schedule while trying to adjust to the demands of consulting with, preparing information for, and attending meetings with yet another group. According to the statements of the leaders, rivalry focused on the potential of a strong leader to control the agenda and set the rules
of the organization without consultation. It should be noted that the leaders did not provide statements to suggest problems that may result when a strong advisory group controls the actions and decisions of a weak leader. Table 8.6 presents summary statements related to the negative consequences of the advisory experience taken from the interviews with parents and teachers who were not members of the advisory group.

**TABLE 8.6 NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES (CONSTITUENTS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>SELECTION</th>
<th>ADJUSTMENT</th>
<th>INACTION</th>
<th>RIVALRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff members do not have access to the issues discussed in council. Advisers who do not work in the school do not know about school events.</td>
<td>Memberships may not give 'voice' to all constituents in a school's community.</td>
<td>Parents and community members uninformed about educational policies and practices. Staff members unaccustomed to the presence of outsiders in their workplace. Staff members find the new role adds to an already over-extended schedule.</td>
<td>Advisers tire of endless discussion and passive participation. Councils in urban areas may be less active than those attached to schools in rural areas.</td>
<td>A weak leader can become controlled by a strong council. A weak council can be under the control of a strong leader. When one person's agenda takes precedence over the aims and objectives of the group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Constituents, like the advisers, did not identify number as a problem. This could mean that they had not experienced or considered difficulties of decision making within large groups. Selection was recognized as a potential problem if certain groups within the community were excluded from participation. One participant suggested that exclusion of certain ethnic groups resulted because some groups have traditionally never participated in education. Statements which supported adjustment as an issue included recognition of problems associated with new members assuming decision-making roles in education without prior background information, staff members trying to adjust to the presence of another group within the school, and the increased responsibilities for teachers who struggle with being members of the advisory group while working with an already overloaded schedule.

Inaction reflected problems of endless discussion and minimum activity. One constituent suggested inactivity could be more prevalent with parent groups in larger urban areas where citizens are less willing to commit themselves to assuming active roles in improving community conditions. This same parent gave statements indicating that she felt that members of the advisory council at Shieldside could not operate as an independent group because she felt they were expected to do the principal’s “bidding”. She also stated she preferred not to be involved in such a group.

Statements under rivalry also foreshadowed problems that could result from the controlling tactics of, for example, strong leaders and weak groups or vice versa, strong
groups and weak leaders. It must be repeated that the statements from this group, for the most part, represented assumptions and not direct experiences.

8.3.4 Comparison Across Realities

A look at all three tables enables an identification of commonalties. There was recognition by all three groups that parents and community members who become advisers lack background information related to educational policies and practices. This is possibly one of the greatest concerns of policy makers and of parents as they embark on the establishment of advisory councils in Ontario. There is lack of consensus, however, on who should be responsible for preparing and disseminating the information or how the information should be delivered. Some reported that it was the responsibility of the Department of Education and Training while others suggested that government did not have the resources to do the job well and, therefore, this task should be left to the school board and the school.

A second common thread was recognition by the advisers and the leaders of the potential for a member of the advisory group to create unsettled conditions. There was only one solution suggested for such an eventuality. The superintendent indicated that to discourage attempts by some members to control or to move their personal agenda ahead of the agenda of the group, it was essential to establish the rules of the organization. His statements indicated that by establishing rules to address situations before they occurred,
such problems could be eliminated. This idea seemed both idealistic and unrealistic. Can leaders anticipate all negative consequences before they occur?

Finally, no participant suggested any negative consequences accruing to students, even though two students were members of the council. It was reported that students were very active when the council was first established, but as time went on, their interest waned and they no longer attended meetings. This finding also supports the research of Radnofsky (1994): students in her study were eager to become involved when councils were first established in Chicago but, in time, they felt their voice was not heard, there was little or no action on their suggestions, and they had no way of providing information to other students. They, therefore, discontinued attendance at meetings.

One of the most significant variations across the realities of consequences paints a vivid picture of what I consider to be some of the counter forces operating to curb the continued participation of parents and community members as advisers. Neither the principal nor the superintendent identified problems related to access or inaction. It is interesting that Goldhamer (1978) discussed both access and inaction as problems resulting from inadequacies in the leader. It is possible that the leaders in this study were not aware of or refused to admit that there are times when leaders (a) do not act on the advice of their advisers, (b) often prevent advisers from becoming actively involved in potentially controversial issues, or (c) that because of situations within or outside of their
control, leaders make themselves, as well as information coming from their office, inaccessible to members of their advisory councils.

The second force working against the effective participation of parents and community members related to the issue of adjustment. Leaders discussed adjustment in terms of problems for principals but did not identify problems for council members. The superintendent discussed ways the board was helping principals adjust to difficulties related to the establishment of their councils. However, there were no programs in place to assist parents and community members to adjust to their new role. Alternatively, advisers and constituents did not recognize problems of adjustment for leaders and instead related concerns to parents, community members, and teachers. Such discrepancies indicate a need for continued communication to extend the understanding of the needs of all participants who are involved in educational reform and change.

Finally, leaders identified more difficulties related to ‘selection’ than any other group. This could reflect one of the major concerns of those formulating policies to address the needs of those establishing advisory groups. Should members receive their position by invitation, election, or open membership? The actions of the present Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chrétien, to appoint females to government positions in order to encourage participation in government by women leads one to question whether the democratic process serves the needs of all citizens with respect to representation.
8.4 Benefits of Participation

8.4.1 Question Four: What are the benefits of the advisory experience from the perspective of the advisers? What conclusions can be reached from a comparison of the positive benefits of participation from the experienced and the documented realities?

Question Four forces an elaboration of why participation is important. Beattie (1985) concluded that the positive outcomes of participation included responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and securing legitimacy. Findings from this study show that not all participants offered statements in support of each outcome. While most advisers supported personal development as a positive outcome, only parents supported responsiveness. This finding could mean that all members had experienced some personal growth as a result of their experience on the advisory council, but parents were the only members who expressed a firm commitment to continue to respond to the opportunity to remain involved. The trustee was the only member to offer statements in support of the council's role to maintain legitimacy. She may have been the only member concerned with the potential negativism that could result from severe cuts to education spending when the Halloway Board of Education released its budget for the coming year. She may also have realized the potential of participation as a strategy to maintain support for the system in times of tough economic decisions.
8.4.2 Experienced Realities

Question Four, like Question Two and Three, suggests a more in-depth look at benefits of participation. Table 8.7 presents the outcomes experienced by the advisers and provides examples of statements in support of responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation and securing legitimacy. The table serves two purposes. It presents a visual image of the experienced realities and also serves as a starting point to identify commonalties and variations across the directed, observed, and documented realities. Again, it is important to understand that these are examples drawn from the members of one advisory council. They serve only as a starting point to formulate theories of participation for further research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>OVERCOMING ALIENATION</th>
<th>LEGITIMACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents understand the goals of education.</td>
<td>Parents learn how to function in a group setting.</td>
<td>Parents feel comfortable coming into the school.</td>
<td>Parents learn how the education system is managed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents help their sons and daughters formulate educational goals.</td>
<td>Parents learn about consensus building.</td>
<td>Parents feel comfortable discussing educational issues with teachers.</td>
<td>Parents learn what financial resources are needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents respond to opportunities to participate.</td>
<td>Parents learn the rules of debate.</td>
<td>Parents learn that teachers care about the educational needs of all students.</td>
<td>Parents learn how resources are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents support the participation of other council members.</td>
<td>Parents learn how to express an opinion in a non-confrontational manner.</td>
<td>Parents become defenders of the education system.</td>
<td>Parents provide solutions for financial management problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents assist in formulating the graduate outcomes for high school students.</td>
<td>Parents learn about the work of educators.</td>
<td>Teachers form positive attitudes toward parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 8.7, it can be concluded that parents benefited most from participation. Of the twenty statements outlining the positive outcomes of participation, only one statement elaborated a positive outcome for teachers and one statement for business representatives. There were no statements indicating benefits for students or to the system.
Through participation parents receive information about the education system, they learn how to respond to issues in a group context, and they become more comfortable discussing educational issues with educators. Teachers benefit because they learn more about students from parents and they form more positive attitudes toward parents. Business members, according to the trustee, had opportunities to observe students in a more positive atmosphere, away from the downtown core.

8.4.3 Directed and Observed Realities

As a starting point to identify commonalities and variations across the realities, Table 8.8 presents the realities of the leaders and Table 8.9 presents those of the constituents. Each table is followed by a summary.

**TABLE 8.8 DESIRED OUTCOMES (LEADERS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>OVERCOMING ALIENATION</th>
<th>MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents participate when they have opportunities for participation. Parents discuss issues and concerns in a collaborative environment.</td>
<td>Parents learn how programs are designed. Educators learn from parents about the needs of students.</td>
<td>Parents clarify values concerning student dress codes, attendance, time tables and student behaviour.</td>
<td>Teachers, parents, and community members support decisions to reduce programs and resources in times of fiscal restraint.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the principal and the superintendent parents participate when given opportunities to participate, they learn about school programs, and they come to understand the rationale for rules governing student behaviour. The superintendent,
however, also assumed that participation offered the promise that parents, community members, and teachers would support board decisions to do more with less when they are consulted.

**TABLE 8.9 POSITIVE OUTCOMES (CONSTITUENTS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>OVERCOMING ALIENATION</th>
<th>MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved information flow from the school to the community.</td>
<td>Educators, through contact with representatives from the business community, identify personal skills that are relevant to the business community.</td>
<td>Parents form positive attitudes toward schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved information flow from the community to the school.</td>
<td>Parents and teachers exchange ideas and opinions about the needs of students.</td>
<td>Parents learn the rationale for educational reform before the reform is implemented.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents gain access to the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students link with the business community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business community responds to the needs of students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from the constituent groups represent the observed realities of those in the external environment of the council. Constituents assumed participation meant improved information flow from the school to the community and, alternatively, from the community to the school. This group also assumed that participation meant opportunities to link both educators and students with the business community. Constituents supported
the theory that, through participation, parents formed more positive attitudes toward education.

Commonalties were observed across the realities. There was support from the advisers and the leaders that parents benefited most from participation, that parents availed themselves of opportunities to participate, and that parents learned about the work of educators. Teacher constituents and teacher advisers assumed that participation resulted in parents forming positive attitudes toward the work of educators. Leaders and constituents agreed that, through participation, parents and teachers exchanged ideas and opinions about the needs of students.

The most obvious variation across the realities is that constituents did not offer statements to support legitimacy. This could mean that constituents did not perceive participation as a strategy designed by policy makers to involve the public or to garner acceptance for decisions that would ultimately force those affected by, or who worked in the system, to do more with less.

8.4.4 Comparisons Across the Experienced and the Documented Realities:
Identifying Gaps Between Theory and Practice

The challenge becomes to compare the practical experiences of those who have participated as members of an advisory council with the desired outcomes of participation as identified within documents circulated by the province, the district, and the school. The outcomes, as stated in public documents, form the basis of the theoretical outcomes
of participation as presented by those who formulate policy at all three levels. The purpose of this activity is to identify gaps that may exist between theory and practice. To repeat Willower (1994), such an exercise forms the basis of responsible inquiry.

In Chapter Four, it was concluded that the aims of participation put forth by Nicholas Beattie (1985) were supported by statements in public documents issued by the Ministry of Education and Training in the province of Ontario, as well as in documents formulated and circulated by the Halloway Board of Education and Shieldside Secondary School.

The findings from documents circulated by the Ministry of Education and Training in the province of Ontario are presented in Table 8.10.

**TABLE 8.10 DESIRED OUTCOMES (PROVINCE OF ONTARIO)**

| RESPONSIVENESS                  | PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT                                                                 | OVERCOMING ALIENATION                          | MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY                        |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Principals work with community agencies. | Parents understand the educational needs of children.          | Principals develop alliances with the community. | The Ministry consults with all sectors of the community before decisions are made to reduce funding to education. |
| School boards keep communities informed about school programs. | Communities rediscover their strengths. |                                                 |                                           |
| School boards respond to community needs. | Students receive a better coordinated education program. |                                                 |                                           |
| School boards establish links with business and community agencies. |                                                                 |                                                 |                                           |
From Table 8.10 it can be concluded that the Ministry discussed participation in terms of benefits to principals, parents, students, communities, and school boards. Participation was one way to assist principals to move out and to form alliances with the school's community. Table 8.11 presents the desired outcomes of participation identified in documents circulated by the Halloway Board of Education.

**TABLE 8.11 DESIRED OUTCOMES (HALLOWAY BOARD OF EDUCATION)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>OVERCOMING ALIENATION</th>
<th>MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All spheres of the education system work together in partnership. Teachers consult with parents, community members and students.</td>
<td>Enhanced student achievement. Enhanced educational opportunities for students.</td>
<td>Promotion of positive attitudes toward public education through encouraging interaction among all spheres of the school's community.</td>
<td>Achieve long-term budget savings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 8.11, I conclude that the Halloway Board of education, as well as the Ministry of Education and Training, emphasized the benefits of participation to all spheres of the education system. However, the board did not depend solely on the efforts of principals to foster alliances with the community as did the Ministry of Education and Training. The Halloway Board assumed that the school board, working through the school’s community, could accomplish this objective. Table 8.12 presents the desired outcomes identified in documents circulated in Shieldside Secondary school.
TABLE 8.12 DESIRED OUTCOMES (SHIELDSIDE SECONDARY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>OVERCOMING ALIENATION</th>
<th>MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous flow of information from the school to the community.</td>
<td>School reinforces the family’s role in education. School responds to student needs through education.</td>
<td>School open to the community. Maintenance of program relevancy.</td>
<td>The community alerted to the need that schools must practice fiscal responsibility when designing and implementing programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 8.12, it can be concluded that the school supported participation because of the benefits to all members of the school’s community. The school envisioned that through participation, the school could respond to the community’s educational needs.

The obvious distinction between the desired outcomes is in the section ‘Overcoming Alienation’. The province and the district referred to the benefits of participation from a more generalist perspective stating that participation had the potential to enable the education system to cultivate positive attitudes among community members. Statements from the school’s documents, however, reflected a more proactive stance - it would keep its doors open to the community so that the community would see that what the school was doing was good. From each table, it can be concluded that there is widespread concern of a potential loss of community trust in the capacity of the public education system to educate. It was hoped that, through participation, the system would regain public confidence.
Finally, a look at all four tables indicates that differences prevailed as to who would reap the benefits of participation, the individual or the organization. Advisers were more parochial, they focused primarily on the direct benefits to parents. Statements in documents from the province related benefits to the principal and to school boards. Statements in documents from the district were more global and focused on benefits to all sectors of the system. Statements in the school's documents focused on benefits to students and to parents and not on benefits of participation to teachers or to the principal.

It can be concluded that statements from the advisory group and from documents circulated by the school related the benefits of participation to the individual. Statements in documents from the province and the school board related benefits to both the individual and to the organization. It would seem that the perspective from the home and the school provided a more narrow focus; whereas, the perspective from the school board and the Ministry was more extensive and more comprehensive.

In Chapter Nine, I elaborate upon some implications of the findings from this study and make recommendations for administrative practice and for further study.
CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Introduction

The findings of this study raise several issues not addressed by the research questions. In this chapter, I elaborate upon these and focus on the implications of: (a) the conceptual framework, (b) the qualitative research design, (c) the role of the principal within the advisory relationship, (d) the future roles of parents and community members in education, and (e) research contributions and implications for practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further study.

9.1.1 Conceptual Framework

Since this appears to be the first study of its kind so far in Canada, the initial task was to examine previous research to devise a theoretical framework in which to discuss the findings. The template resulted from a review of the following: (a) literature on participation; (b) previous research in education on parent participation; and, (c) the literature on the advisory relationship as experienced and described by those who studied the advisory experience in political contexts.

According to Ogawa (1994:544), the development and use of a conceptual template may have been problematic in that it could have prevented me from seeing everything that the
findings revealed and, therefore, may have reduced the findings to a “product of conceptual foreshadowing” in that I saw only what the template directed me to see. In defense, the template was developed following the data-gathering procedure. I entered into the research site without any preconceived notions of the advisory experience or the advisory relationship and while there may be other more valid interpretation of the data, this will be left for another paper.

Use of the template permits a description and interpretation of following: the historical and contextual background of the organization; background and experiences of members with respect to their status, expertise, and selection; the preparation of council members and the content of various roles advisers assumed including situations and approaches; technical and psychological issues which were the basis of problems identified by participants; and positive outcomes of participation to individuals and to the organization. Table 9.1 presents the template.
### Table 9.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical and Contextual</th>
<th>Contextual Concerns:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of Participation in:</td>
<td>-demographics of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-province</td>
<td>-early history of the council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-community</td>
<td>-policies governing the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-school council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-socio-economic background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-status in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-family, education, work, and community experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-reasons for participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-selection procedure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles and Responsibilities of Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-executor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-critic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-adviser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive and Negative Consequences of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-overcoming alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-maintaining legitimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.1.2 Qualitative Research Design

The qualitative nature of this case study was most suitable to the intent. It enabled me to examine an innovation in its real-life context and to gather information from multiple sources (Yin 1993) including: previous research related to participation and the role of advisers; pertinent documents circulated by the province, the district, and the school; interviews with members of the advisory group, the principal, and a superintendent at the district level; interviews with members of constituent groups such as teachers and parents; and, fieldnotes taken during attendance at meetings of advisory groups at the school and the school board and during conferences devoted to discussions of the establishment of advisory councils in all schools in Ontario.

More specifically, the document analysis provided a means to identify desired outcomes of participation as outlined by the government of Ontario, the Halloway Board of Education, and Shieldside Secondary School. A review of related literature on participation enabled me to create a context in which to determine a definition for participation and to discuss issues related to parent participation within the frame of specific socio-economic realities. Also, the review of literature on the advisory process and the relationship between advisers and leaders in the political arena contributed extensive information to enable the formulation of a framework to discuss specific roles of advisers as they approached various situations.
Finally, the qualitative nature of the study enabled me to enter into the context of the advisory council, to speak to members, to observe them in their real life setting, and to accompany them to meetings and to conferences within the district in order to understand some of the issues and the manner in which they approached each new situation. Another approach could not have provided the explicit and detailed information from specific actors nor could it have provided the rich detail with respect to context and environment.

9.1.3 Role of the School Principal

A review of the findings for this study leads me to conclude that the principal displayed characteristics of the transformational leader. Collaboration and teamwork were central to his administrative style. The transformational leader, however, does not escape negative consequences. Rob was no exception. I feel there are two significant issues that reflected negatively on his leadership style. The issues relate to issues of number and adjustment.

While Rob was among the first to establish an advisory council in a secondary school in this district, I concluded that very little precedent had been established within the Halloway Board of Education with respect to operating a school under the watchful eye of an advisory group. The success or failure of Rob’s attempt to establish an effective advisory group was, therefore, left to the skills and efforts of the school administrator. Rob, therefore, followed a personally developed plan.
Before establishing the council, he reviewed pertinent literature, particularly literature on school councils from the United States; this helped him, he said, to determine the appropriate composition and size of successful organizations. He concluded that the number of members could determine the success or failure of the council and that a group of twelve or fourteen could operate effectively while a group of twenty or more could potentially be ineffective.

The number of members on the council at Shieldside, however, raises a serious concern. One of the stated goals for the establishment of advisory councils is to increase parent and community member participation in education (Government of Ontario 1995). But twelve or fourteen participants, two of whom are teachers and two are students, do not constitute a large representation from the Shieldside Secondary School community which has a registration of approximately 900 to 1000 students.

Rob’s decision to limit the group’s size was not faulty, but he failed to look for further strategies to increase the number of participants such as encouraging members to chair committees composed primarily of external, non-council members. Such committees could be responsible for recommending solutions to issues as they occurred and could report to the larger assembly. Such a strategy would have served to extend the aims of participation such as responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining legitimacy, to a larger number of participants and could, indirectly, have empowered a larger number to assume leadership responsibilities (Maeroff 1988).
Also, the findings show that Rob’s actions, during the earlier stages of the council’s formation, demonstrated a keen understanding of procedures to help members to make a smooth adjustment to the newness of the educational environment. For example, most members reported that, during the initial stages, many meetings were devoted exclusively to establishing the rules of the organization, determining everyone’s personal philosophy of education, and outlining responsibilities that members would assume.

Rob, however, neglected to establish a process to continue the socialization process for incoming members. Herein lies another issue of concern. The transmission of cultural artifacts such as values, norms, beliefs, modes of accepted activity, and the ethics of the established group should, according to research, follow an acceptable and continuous plan that is directed by the members of an organization or by the leader (Sarason 1984). Rob gave no indication that he understood the importance of continuing to pass along the culture of the organization to new members; this conclusion is supported by statements from interviews with the incoming parent representative, Matthew, and the business representative, William. These members expressed deep concern because they had not been briefed with respect to ongoing projects or past accomplishments of the group; most importantly, they did not know how the group fitted into the total scheme of the educational organization.

One member of the constituent group, a teacher, also complained that there were no informal occasions to help ease the transition of new members into the council or to introduce members to the staff; she added that you could not realistically expect
administrators, such as the principal, to plan such activities. She gave the impression that she felt that Rob was unaware of the importance of such events. It should also be noted that, in the interviews, parent and community member advisers expressed a desire to develop a relationship with staff members, but the opportunities had not been provided to do so.

Based on the work of Sarason (1984), an omission, either by the administration or by the advisers, to pass on the culture of the organization or to provide opportunities to enable new members to develop relationships with experienced members of the organization, could spell disaster for the continuation of the advisory group. Increased attention to the issues of selection and adjustment could potentially strengthen Rob’s leadership role and ensure the continued participation of parents and community members within the school advisory council.

9.1.4 Parents and Community Members in Education

Joyce Epstein (1992, 1995) has outlined six types of parent involvement activities including parenting, volunteering, tutoring, assisting at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. She outlined benefits to parents, teachers, and students of all six types. Epstein suggested that, as leaders, parents help other parents, they organize workshops, and they contribute to decision making in the school. Epstein failed to outline some of the potential negative consequences to parents resulting from participation. This study brings to the surface some of the negative consequences of
participation to members of an organized school group. These have been discussed.

There are, however, other concerns which have not been addressed but which have implications for the continued participation of parents and community members.

Based on the work of Davies (1976), Bennett (1992), and Deem, Brehoney, and Heath (1994), as governments continue to decrease financial contributions to education, participation may be perceived as a scheme to recruit parents into situations whereby they are forced to solve the financial woes of schools. As the Minister of Education and Training for the province of Ontario continues to ‘cut back’, this outcome looms as a strong reality for participation in Ontario schools.

While parents, in this study, reported they were prepared to assume more active participation in educational issues, they were possibly unaware of some of the negative consequences of such participation. As Bennett (1994) observed in the United States, school principals in Ontario may use participation as an avenue to blame the failure of schools to advance the academic achievement of students on the inability of parents to access additional funds. This has serious implications for the continued participation of parents as advisers.

In the future, parents and community members within school councils may find that they are expected to assume greater responsibilities for hiring and firing of staff and for resourcing educational programs. With the potential decrease in the number of school boards recently announced in the province of Ontario, issues of staffing as key
responsibilities of councils may loom as real priorities. Concerns centre around whether parents are prepared to become embroiled in battles with powerful teachers’ unions in Ontario such as the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation. How does the Ministry of Ontario plan to prepare newly-formed volunteer groups to confront well-established teacher unions? Is there a potential that parent councils will align themselves with teacher unions to challenge the Ministry? According to participants, the Ministry has done little, thus far, to assist this council.

This finding is consistent with those of Wylie (1995), that “(s)ince site-based management was introduced in New Zealand, its schools have become stand-alone units. No districts, education boards, or county bodies tell them what to do or how to do it - or give them support to do it” (p. 54). While the advisory group in this study does not have the extent of jurisdiction given school councils in New Zealand such as the appointment and dismissal of school staff, managing and allocating school budgets other than teacher salaries, maintenance of buildings and grounds, and staff development programs, members admitted that they operated in isolation. For example, when the advisory council at Shieldside tried to determine strategies to assess school and staff effectiveness and to find solutions related to diminishing resources coming from the province and the district, there was no recognition or expectation by teachers, parents, or community members on the advisory council at Shieldside Secondary of a need for support or direction from such external groups as the Halloway Board of Education or the Ministry
of Education and Training. This could indicate that such support was unavailable or that the group was not familiar with communicating with these external agencies.

School autonomy has been flaunted as the panacea by those who are critical of the past efforts of educators in Canada (Nikiforuk 1993). Some advisers, such as Joan and Lillian, looked forward to playing a more extensive role in school affairs and indicated that the principal had previously discussed this eventuality. Since governments in the United States, Britain, and New Zealand have already established reforms to give schools more control of their affairs, is it possible that the reform to establish councils in schools in Ontario is an attempt by government to increase the pace toward school autonomy? Is the reform just another temporary fad? My greatest concern revolves around the issue of preparation of parents and community members prior to their assuming these new roles.

9.2 Research Contributions and Implications for Practice

The high school in this study was situated in an affluent community in southern Ontario. Participation was high, parents volunteered to positions within school groups, and the principal welcomed this participation. Through community meetings, however, I observed that there were schools in this area in less affluent catchments where parents represented a lower socioeconomic status and also where principals were not so eager to encourage such participation. What are the implications for practice to parents and to the advisory experience of these schools?
This question leads us to ask: Does Policy/Program Memorandum No 122 (Government of Ontario 1995) signal the beginning of a reform to establish more autonomous schools in Ontario? Are parents and community members, in all or some schools, prepared to assume greater responsibility for matters related to budgets, programs, and staffing? Are principals prepared to take advice on these issues from parents and community members?

Some studies of autonomous schools (Whitty 1997; Radnofsky 1994) have concluded that giving schools responsibility over their own destiny does not necessarily improve the academic achievement of students nor does it improve the participation of parents and teachers in the decision-making process. Radnofsky (1994), for example, reported that the rhetoric surrounding the devolution of power to schools as actually increasing the decision-making power of parents and teachers was just that, rhetoric. Teachers, in particular, reported that principals continued to make all the decisions and that participation was just a waste of everyone's time.

Whitty (1997) reported that with added financial responsibilities, schools assumed an entrepreneurial quasi-market approach in order to increase funding to support underfunded programs. In disadvantaged schools, such an approach failed to improve achievement and actually increased the inequity between the have and have-not schools. Such research raises serious concerns related to participation.

Based on the work of Whitty (1997) it seems appropriate to ask what implications there are for schools where school councils feel that they must place greater emphasis on
business management approaches aimed at survival, rather than remain focused on strategies to enhance student learning? A deliberate emphasis must be placed on briefing practices to prepare council members for the content of the advisory role. Such briefing, in my opinion, should place a greater emphasis on the purposes of education rather than on the financing of education.

While there is growing criticism that parents neither have the time, the interest, or the required expertise to participate in decision making at the local school (Caplan 1995), there is need to continue to research the participation of parents in organized groups, such as school councils, to determine if the optimism of the group in this study was merely a phenomenon not widely shared by all communities or by all schools in Ontario. Continued research may also reveal how the roles of members of advisory councils evolve, whether the consequences become more severe, and whether participation does indeed enable the establishment of partnerships between the school and the community. Such research may also show whether there is continued support for the positive outcomes of participation such as responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and maintaining or increasing the legitimacy of those who control the educational system. The findings from this study show that the development of partnerships between the school and the community, from the point of view of the advisers, was the most challenging aspect of their role. They had yet to develop a satisfactory strategy to keep the community informed of issues discussed within the council or a strategy to access input and feedback from members of the community.
This study responds to Epstein’s (1995) challenge to researchers and to policy makers to work collaboratively with educators and parents to understand and to develop school, family, and community partnerships. The findings result from an extensive, actual encounter between research and practice. The approach has yielded rich description and interpretation intended to assist policy makers and practitioners to begin the development of programs to assist parents and community members to join with educators as advisers to principals on issues related to educational reform.

Additionally, this study is consistent with Evers’s (1990 in Duignan and Macpherson 1992) recommendation that priority must be placed on securing feedback from those most reliably placed to experience the effects of reform. Evers maintains that this approach forms a crucial first step toward enhancing the growth of knowledge and the quality of organizational leadership, decision making, and problem solving. In this study, feedback was obtained from three groups: advisers, leaders, and constituents or those parents and educators who presumably are affected by the agency of the advisory group. As educational policy makers continue to emphasize the importance of parent and community participation, there is an increasing need to secure feedback from all groups to understand the weaknesses and the strengths of approaches to involve them, as well as situations, consequences, and outcomes of this form of participation in various contexts.

Following the work of Ellen Goldring (1990) who studied the principal-parent relationship in mixed social settings, this study exposes the exact nature of the social status and the expertise of a small group of parents, community members, and educators
who have volunteered to participate as advisers to a principal in a secondary school advisory council. Goldring’s findings were based on the results of a more generalizable survey research format. However, the qualitative design of this study provides a rich elaboration of the specifics of the nature of the status and expertise that participants bring with them; it also presents the attitudes of those who direct or who could benefit from the expertise of the advisory group.

While the generalizability of findings is limited to one specific site, nevertheless, the findings support those of previous research: (1) that parents from mid to high socio-economic settings contribute significant resources to education in the form of background experience and expertise (Goldring 1990; Epstein 1992, 1995), (2) that parents want to be involved in decisions related to improving the educational attainment of their sons and daughters (Dehli 1995; Epstein 1992; Davies 1976), and (3) that involved parents are more supportive of the work of educators (Chapman 1990; Beattie 1985). This study, however, extends on previous work: descriptions and interpretation of specific situations and approaches illuminate the exact nature of the contribution made by parents and community members from the perspective of those within and outside of the school context. The findings show, for example, that the executor role was the most demanding role in that there were reports of setting agendas, advertising meetings, seeking strategies to assess the work of the school and of the council, and reviewing policy statements from the school and the school board.
As a result of the interviews and the on-site observations, the findings of this study reveal substantial negative forces that could threaten to undermine or diminish the vitality of those who have come forward from the community to participate in the advisory process. Such forces include: (1) failure to develop a satisfactory strategy to ensure adequate representation by all members of the school’s community, (2) failure to attend to the information needs of new participants, (3) failure to ensure that participation is useful and supported by all spheres of the educational community, and (4) failure to ensure that all participants have equality of access to both the leader and to information coming from the school board and from teacher unions.

9.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While there is considerable data to support the conclusion that participation has positive benefits for both the individual and the organization, the nature of participation is a complex issue. There remains much to be learned. While I have endeavoured to formulate a research design that is simple to implement and which has the potential to derive rich data, there are many other aspects of the issue of parent participation that this study could not address. It is in recognition of this, that I make the following recommendations for future research.

Recommendation 1. Since this study was conducted in one school, the generalizability of findings beyond this study is limited. In order to increase the body of knowledge related to the role of parents and community members within the advisory relation, the study
should be replicated in other settings where contextual and organizational issues are different or the same. Findings could be then contrasted and compared.

**Recommendation 2.** The conceptual framework which developed from the findings of this study could serve as the basis for the development of a survey instrument to study the advisory experience in educational contexts in other provinces and in other countries. The findings from such studies could also increase generalizability beyond the limited scope of the present study.

**Recommendation 3.** This study focused predominantly on the advisory experience and the attitude of other groups toward this experience. The question of how advisory councils affect the educational attainment of students remains unanswered. From my observations, the advisory council operated in isolation from the daily activities of the school, the school board, and the students. Since members were anxious to determine strategies to become more involved in the life of the school, further studies of the attitudes of teachers, students, parents, and community members could identify ways that an advisory group can realistically and effectively be linked with the school and yet operate separate from it for the purposes of assessment and accountability.

**Recommendation 4.** Most studies of parent and teacher involvement with decision making in education have addressed the reluctance on the part of school administrators to power-share and to empower others to become active in decision making at the local school level. This study has identified some of the positive benefits to advisers and to the
institution of parent and community participation in some aspects of the decision-making process. These included responsiveness, personal development, overcoming alienation, and increased legitimacy. A study to identify the positive benefits to school administrators and to school board officials may encourage more administrators and more educators to respond positively to the call to involve the external community in education.

**Recommendation 5:** Briefing remains a challenge. Parents and community members who become advisers need information related to the technical and political aspects of organizational effectiveness. They also need to be briefed with respect to educational policies and programs. The Ministry of Education and Training, in collaboration with individual school boards, needs to pursue research to determine the approach and the content of programs for those interested in participating on school advisory councils.

**9.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has revealed aspects of parent, community member, and teacher participation within a school advisory council which illustrate ways in which this council has operated effectively. For example, members have worked together in relative harmony, they have developed a working relation with the principal, they have demonstrated effective use of time during council meetings, they have acquired extensive knowledge about the school and its operations, they are becoming more comfortable with their role expectations, and they are beginning to form a relationship with the staff.
However, if this school advisory council is to continue, as well, if it is to be effective, school leaders, such as the principal and the superintendent, must not ignore the strength of forces at work with the potential to curb the zeal of these advisers. From the findings of this study, such forces include: lack of briefing to facilitate the adjustment of new members, ambiguity of role definition, lack of action to involve participants in meaningful educational issues, and lack of community support for the reform. These forces have the strength to both decrease and to diminish the effectiveness and the longevity of this council and, therefore, to decrease and to diminish parent participation. School leaders cannot continue to ignore the realities.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Ontario Ministry of Education and Training
Policy/Program Memorandum
No. 122

Date of Issue: April 12, 1995 Effective: Until revoked or modified

Subject: SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES ON SCHOOL COUNCILS

Application: Chairpersons of School Boards and
Minority-Language Sections
Directors of Education
Principals of Schools

BACKGROUND

The government recognizes that the education of Ontario's young people is a shared responsibility involving schools, students and their families, and members of the community. Parents and guardians have the right, as well as the responsibility, to participate in the education of their children, and can contribute to their children's development in a wide variety of ways. Other members of the community, including members of health, social service, and recreational agencies, also offer a wealth of experience and expertise that may be of benefit to students. Students themselves may have some excellent suggestions pertaining to their education. Members of all of these groups should, therefore, have the opportunity to advise in educational matters.

The Ministry of Education and Training is committed to encouraging partnerships that will enhance the education of the province's young people and foster increased sharing of information about the programs being offered by schools. In Ontario, many schools already have an association or committee that enables parents and other community members to provide input on topics pertaining to the school's educational program. Feedback from these committees and associations and from the schools has been positive and encouraging, and indicates that community participation has been very valuable.

The recent reports of the Royal Commission on Learning and the Ontario Parent Council have recommended that all schools be required to establish advisory committees to increase communication between schools and their communities and, in the words of the commission's report, to enable parents and students to assume "a more responsible and active role" in education programs and services within their local community. These reports support similar recommendations made over the years by provincial parent associations.
DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES ON SCHOOL COUNCILS

The provincial policy on school councils will require school boards and minority-language sections to develop policies that direct schools in their jurisdictions to begin the establishment of school councils in September 1995, and to ensure that a school council is in place in all schools by June 1996. This memorandum outlines the minimum requirements for the composition and functioning of school councils that must be included in each school board's or section's policy.1

School board policies should enable school communities either to establish entirely new organizations as the school councils or to set up the school councils by adapting existing parent/community associations or committees so that they conform to the requirements set out in this memorandum. It is important to note, however, that school communities may have parent/community organizations in addition to the school councils. The school councils are not intended to replace such organizations, which continue to make valuable contributions within the education community.

School boards are encouraged to involve parents in the development of board policies on school councils.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COMPOSITION AND OPERATION OF SCHOOL COUNCILS

School boards must ensure that the following requirements are included in their policies on school councils.

1. Membership and Term of Office

Members of a school council shall include, but not be limited to:

- parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school;
- community representatives;
- a student (mandatory in secondary schools; in elementary schools, at the discretion of the principal);
- the school principal;
- a teacher;
- a non-teaching staff member.

Parents and guardians shall form the majority of the council, except in adult day schools, where parent positions shall be held by students. It is expected that the membership of the council will reflect the diversity of the school community.

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1. Henceforth in this document, the term "school board" includes minority-language sections.
Membership in the school council shall be determined in the following ways:
- Parents shall be elected by parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school.
- The chair of the council shall be a member who is also a parent and shall be elected by the council.
- Community representatives shall be appointed by the council.
- The student representative shall be elected by students.
- The school principal shall be a designated member.
- The teacher representative shall be elected by members of the teaching staff.
- The non-teaching staff member shall be elected by members of the non-teaching staff.

The term of office for elected and appointed positions shall be one or two years, as determined by board policy. Elected and appointed members may seek additional terms of office.

There will be no honorarium paid to members of the school council.

2. **Roles and Responsibilities of the School Councils**

School councils are advisory bodies. A school council will provide advice to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board on any of the matters listed below that the council has identified as priorities:
- local school-year calendar
- school code of student behaviour
- curriculum and program goals and priorities
- the responses of the school or school board to achievement in provincial and board assessment programs
- preparation of the school profile
- selection of principals
- school budget priorities, including local capital-improvement plans
- school-community communication strategies
- methods of reporting to parents and the community
- extracurricular activities in the school
- school-based services and community partnerships related to social, health, recreational, and nutrition programs
- community use of school facilities
- local co-ordination of services for children and youth
- development, implementation, and review of board policies at the local level

The provincial policy will require that a school board's policy direct the school principal and, where relevant, senior staff and trustees of the board to seek advice from the school council as part of the process of making decisions with regard to the matters listed above.
In addition to its advisory responsibilities, the school council shall:
- establish its goals, priorities, and procedures;
- organize information and training sessions to enable members of the council to develop their skills as council members;
- hold a minimum of four meetings per year (all meetings shall be open to members of the school community);
- communicate regularly with parents and other members of the community to seek their views and preferences with regard to matters being addressed by the council, and to report on the activities of the council to the school community;
- promote the best interests of the school community.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members

a) Chair

The chair of the school council shall:
- call school council meetings;
- prepare the agenda for school council meetings;
- chair school council meetings;
- ensure that the minutes of school council meetings are recorded and maintained;
- participate in information and training programs;
- communicate with the school principal;
- ensure that there is regular communication with the school community;
- consult with senior board staff and trustees, as required.

b) Council Members

The members of the school council shall:
- participate in council meetings;
- participate in information and training programs;
- act as a link between the school council and the community;
- encourage the participation of parents from all groups and of other people within the school community.

c) The Principal

The principal of the school shall:
- facilitate the establishment of the school council and assist in its operation;
- support and promote the council's activities;
- seek input from the council in areas for which it has been assigned advisory responsibility;
- act as a resource on laws, regulations, board policies, and collective agreements;
- obtain and provide information required by the council to enable it to make informed decisions;
- communicate with the chair of the council, as required;
- ensure that copies of the minutes of the council’s meetings are kept at the school;
- assist the council in communicating with the school community;
- encourage the participation of parents from all groups and of other people within the school community.

4. The School Board and the School Councils

Some school boards already include parents and other members of the community in an advisory role at the board level. School boards are encouraged to continue, or to initiate, this practice. Boards are also encouraged to facilitate communication among the school councils within their jurisdiction.

School boards shall review and revise their policies on the selection of principals to ensure that the school councils participate in principal selection. Boards shall also involve representatives of their school councils in the revision of these policies.

5. Evaluation and Reporting

School boards shall develop procedures for evaluating the implementation of their policies on the establishment and operation of school councils.

A report on the establishment and operation of the school councils shall be included in the annual report of the director of education of each school board.

ASSISTANCE FROM THE MINISTRY

School Council Handbook

The ministry will collaborate with stakeholders to produce a school council handbook to assist school boards, schools, and school councils. The handbook will contain materials and information to help boards establish school councils and to assist the members of school councils in carrying out their responsibilities. It will be available in September 1995.

Professional Development

The ministry will work with school boards and other organizations and stakeholders to ensure that such programs as the Supervisory Officer’s Qualification Program and the Principal’s Qualification Program prepare school board members and principals for their work with school councils. The ministry will also collaborate with boards and other stakeholders to develop in-service programs and materials for school council members.
School Council Forum

The ministry and stakeholder groups will organize a School Council Forum in the spring of 1996. This forum is intended to provide opportunities for representatives of school councils and school boards throughout the province to discuss their experiences in setting up and maintaining their councils. It will also enable members of school councils across the province to establish a basis for networking. Further details about the forum will be provided later this year.
Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Design for Parents Who are Council Members

The first interview will be a 45 min. (approx.) session with individual parents with two purposes. It will serve as an introductory ‘get-acquainted’ session whereby through two-way communication I will begin to establish a relationship with the participant. This initial interview will provide a source of demographic information for the study. Subsequent interviews will be based on specific issues discussed at council meetings.

I. Introductory Information
   - Number of children, their ages, grades, any special information
   - Parent’s educational background, work experience, employment status
   - Prior volunteer experiences with school and community related activities

II. School Council Involvement
   - How long have you been involved as a council member?
   - How did you receive your position?
   - Have you been happy with the experience so far? Why or why not?
   - What influenced your decision to become involved in school council activities?
   - Do you feel that you are making a contribution to your child’s education as a councilor? In what way?
     - Are you happy with the number of parents on the council?
     - Are you happy with teacher representation on the council?

III. Socialization of Members
   - What information have you received to prepare you for your role?
   - What other background information/training would be helpful?

IV. Perceptions, Sentiments and Relationships
   - What is your role on the council?
   - What are the roles of other council members?
   - What is the role of the trustee on the council?
   - What do you enjoy most about being a councilor?
   - What do you feel is most difficult about being a councilor?
   - Who is most helpful to you when there are problems?
   - Who or what is the greatest hindrance preventing you from doing what you feel is important?
     - Who or what is the greatest assistance helping you to achieve what you feel is important?
- How do teachers respond to the presence of the council in this school? Why do you feel they respond this way?

V. Identification of Key Issues
- What are some of the issues you have discussed since becoming involved?
- What are some of the decisions made?
- What changes resulted from these decisions?
- Are you happy with the consequences of those decisions so far?
- What are some issues you anticipate discussing in the future?
- Why are these important issues for council members to discuss?
- Do you feel comfortable expressing your ideas, experiences, and opinions?
- Do council members feel comfortable about expressing their ideas, experiences and opinions? Why or why not?
- Have there been conflicts? How have these been resolved?
- What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment as a council member?
- What do you feel is the greatest accomplishment of this council to this school since its formation?
- Are there some areas of the school program you feel uncomfortable discussing?

VI. Communication and the Role of Information
- Do you receive adequate information prior to discussing certain issues?
- What kind of information do you receive?
- Do you feel it is important to communicate with other parents in the school about issues related to council activities both prior to and subsequent to discussions?
- How do you communicate with other parents outside of council meetings?
- Do you communicate with other council members in other schools?
- Do you receive information from other agencies i.e., the Ontario Parent Council?
- Do council members meet informally/socially?
- What information/training programs would be helpful for council members?
- What is the relationship between School Council and the District or Provincial Council?
- Considering the advisory nature of the council how can council members ensure that voices are heard?
- As a non-teaching member of the council how do you feel you can contribute to Curriculum Development?

VII. Other
Semi-structured Interview Design for Teachers who are Council Members

The first interview with teachers will be a 45 min. (approx.) session to become acquainted and to establish a relationship. I will be interested in gathering data related to teachers' background experiences both at this school and at other schools, their attitude toward being involved in school-based decision-making and their observations.

I. Introductory Information
    - Teaching experience
    - Educational background, work experience
    - Professional and community involvement

II. School Council Involvement
    - What influenced your decision to become involved in school council activities?
    - How long have you been involved as a council member?
    - How did you receive your position?
    - Have you been happy with your experience so far? Why or why not?
    - How do you feel you are making a contribution to the learning environment of this school by being a member?
    - Do you feel it is important for teachers to be involved in the decision-making process at the school level?
    - Are you happy with teacher representation? Why/why not?
    - What are some fears you have concerning council involvement in school matters?
    - Are you happy with parent representation on the council?

III. Socialization of Members
    - What information have you received to prepare you for this role?
    - What other background information/training would be helpful?
    - Has your association or union provided assistance/information to teachers who are council members? Explain.
    - How much time do you feel council involvement will take?

IV. Perceptions, Sentiments and Relationships
    - What is your role on the council?
    - What are the roles of other council members?
    - What is the most satisfactory aspect of being a council member?
    - Who is most helpful when there are problems?
    - What is the greatest hindrance preventing you from doing your what you want to do as a councilor?
- Who or what is the greatest source of assistance to you in achieving what you consider to be your role on the council?

V. Identification of key Issues
- What are some of the key issues discussed during council meetings since you became involved?
  - What are some decision that have been made?
  - What changes resulted from these decisions?
  - Are you happy with the consequences of those decisions?
  - Have there been conflict situations? How have these been resolved?
  - What are some issues you anticipate discussing in the future?
  - Why are these important issues for council members to discuss?
  - Do you feel comfortable expressing your ideas, experiences and opinions?
  - Do other council members feel comfortable about expressing their ideas, experiences and opinions? Why or why not?
  - What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment as a council member?

VI. Communication and the Role of Information
- Do you receive adequate information prior to discussing certain issues?
  - What kind of information do you receive?
  - Do you feel it is important to communicate with other teachers in the school about issues related to council activities both prior to and subsequent to discussions?
  - How do you communicate with teachers in the school?
  - Do you communicate with other teacher councilors in other schools?
  - Do you receive information from other agencies i.e., the Ontario Teacher's Federation?
  - Do council members meet informally/socially?

VII. Other

I will be asking other questions based on situations which I observe during council meetings and as a result of pertinent events which occur throughout the data gathering process.
Appendix D

Semi-Structured interview Design for the Principal

The first interview was a ‘get acquainted’ interview in which I repeated some of the information which I gave the school principal prior to my gaining access to this school. I attempt to find out from the principal how the establishment of the council had changed the manner in which decisions were made in the school and how the process could be improved.

I. Introductory Information

- How long have you been principal of this school?
- What is the enrollment, number of teachers, special programs?
- What other organizations operate in this school?

II. School Council Involvement

- How long has there been a school council operating in this school?
- Have you been happy with the interest shown by parents and teachers in the operation of the School Council? Why/ why not?
- What contribution has the council made to the operations of your school?
- Who sets the agenda for council meetings?
- How often do meetings take place?
- How many councilors are there? How did they receive their position?
- How have you filled all council positions?

III. Socialization of Members

- How do council members learn about their responsibilities?
- What background information/ training is made available to them?
- Are you happy with this arrangement? Do you see room for improvement?

IV. Perceptions, Sentiments and Relationships

- What is your role on the council?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of other council members?
- How do other council members perceive their roles?
- What do you feel are the advantages of the principal receiving advice from teachers and parents?
- What are some of the disadvantages?
- Who or what is the greatest hindrance preventing you from accomplishing what you set out to do through the council?
- Who or what is the greatest assistance helping you to achieve what you feel can be achieved through the council?
V. Identification of Key Issues

- What are some of the issues you have discussed during council meetings?
- What decisions were made?
- What changes resulted from the decisions?
- Are you happy with the consequences of those decisions?
- What are some issues you anticipate discussing in the future?
- Are these important issues for council members to discuss? Why?
- Do council members feel comfortable expressing their ideas, experiences and opinions? Why or why not?
- Have you learned more about the school’s community as a result of having a school council in your school?
- Do you feel the quality of school life has improved generally for students and teachers since the formation of the council? Explain.
- Do you find yourself in a conflict of interest when discussing certain issues? Explain.

VI. Communication and the Role of Information

- How much information do council members receive prior to discussing issues?
- How and how frequently do council members communicate with their constituents?
- Are you happy with the process? How can it be improved?
- Do you or your council members receive support/information from outside agencies such as district office, the Ministry of the operation of the council? Do you feel such support is adequate? How could it be improved?
- Have conflicts arisen? How have these been resolved?
- Do council members meet informally as well as formally?

VII. Other

I asked questions based on situations which I observed during council meetings, as a result of reading pertinent documents, and as a result of events which arose in the school throughout the data gathering process.