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## Extension of Authority to Confer Bachelor of Education Degrees in Alberta

*This retrospective policy study identified how and why authority to confer Bachelor of Education degrees was extended to private colleges in Alberta. Data collection consisted of document review and interviews with key actors who played important roles in the adoption of the policy change. The study had two foci: the process by which the King's University College in Edmonton was able to attain authority to confer BEd degrees, and on postsecondary policy change in Alberta using Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993, 1997) Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). Two sources of the policy change were identified: local political pressures and international pressures for neoliberalization of public policy. The study confirmed the utility of the ACF to represent and explain the case study information on extension of authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta. A significant finding was the intractability of the policy change due to opposition by a consensus of professional educators. Although educator elites anticipated additional extension of authority to confer BEd degrees and increasing privatization of the postsecondary education system, respondents opposing the policy change anticipated continuing resistance from educational stakeholders. This potential conflict has implications for teacher preparation, the practice of school administrators, and for education generally. Differentiation in teacher preparation that may result from a proliferation of BEd programs has quality control implications for the Teacher Certification Branch of the Department of Alberta Education and the Private Colleges Accreditation Board of Alberta.*

*Cette étude d'orientation retrospective a identifié les facteurs qui expliquent comment et pourquoi des collèges privés en Alberta se sont vus autorisés à conférer des diplômes de Baccalauréat en Éducation. La collecte de données s'est effectuée par le biais d'une étude de documents et d'entrevues avec les protagonistes qui ont joué des rôles essentiels dans l'adoption de la réorientation des politiques. L'étude s'est concentrée sur deux processus : l'évolution qui a fait en sorte que King's University College à Edmonton a réussi à obtenir l'autorité de conférer des diplômes de Baccalauréat en Éducation ainsi que le changement d'orientation en éducation post-secondaire en Alberta tel que mesuré par le Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) de Sabatier et Jenkins-Smith (1993, 1997). Il en est sorti deux sources de la réorientation : des pressions politiques locales et des pressions internationales appuyant la néolibéralisation des politiques publiques. L'étude a confirmé l'utilité du ACF dans la représentation et l'explication de l'information découlant de l'étude de cas sur l'extension de l'autorité à conférer des diplômes de Baccalauréat en Éducation en Alberta. La recherche a révélé un élément important : l'aspect intractable du changement d'orientation qui est attribuable à l'opposition maintenue par un ensemble solidaire d'enseignants professionnels. Alors que l'élite enseignante prévoyait que l'autorité à conférer des diplômes de Baccalauréat en Éducation et la privatisation du système éducatif post-secondaire continueraient à s'étendre, les répondants qui s'opposaient au changement d'orientation s'attendaient à ce que les intervenants en éducation maintiennent leur résistance. Ce conflit éventuel aurait des retombées sur la formation des enseignants, le travail des administrateurs scolaires et l'éducation de façon générale. La divergence dans la formation des enseignants qui pourrait découler d'une prolifération de programmes en pédagogie aurait des incidences*

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*quant au contrôle de la qualité par la commission des brevets d'enseignement du ministère de l'éducation en Alberta et par l'organisme d'accréditation des collèges privés de l'Alberta.*

### *Background of the Study*

The year 1995 was a watershed for the extension of teacher preparation programs in Alberta. During that year the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development authorized two private colleges to grant Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees. The stakeholders opposing the new BEd degree-conferring programs in Alberta consisted of the Faculties of Education of Alberta's public universities, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and professional staff at the Alberta Department of Education. In spite of this opposition, the provincial government provided the authority for the new BEd programs. Skolnik (1987) defends governments' prerogative to intervene in higher education and states that the "fundamental instance of government intervention in the university is at the stage of conception" (p. 56). Further, Skolnik (1997) has called postsecondary changes in Alberta and British Columbia "imaginative new designs" (p. 10). However, having the authority to provide for new degree-conferring authority, even if these developments are imaginative, does not in itself explain why the Alberta government would do so in the face of considerable opposition.

The analysis of policy processes is a complex task that, according to Dror (1981), typically includes an examination of a range of interactions and related factors, including underlying values and assumptions, consideration of political variables, treatment of broader complex issues, emphasis on policy alternatives, recognition of ideologies, and institutional self-awareness. Confirming the complexity, Ball (1990) broadly describes the challenge of policy analysis:

One basic task, then, is to plot the changing ideological, economic and political parameters of policy and to relate the ideological, political and economics to the dynamics of policy debate and policy formulation. A major problem will be to establish links, if any, between these elements, and their links, if any, to policy making. (p. 8)

The current study of postsecondary policy change in Alberta considered variables identified by Dror (1981) and by Ball (1990), including the values and assumptions of competing stakeholders in the policy process, contextual political circumstances, recognition of the ideologies at play, and the perspectives of the institutional stakeholders. By exposing these policy variables, this study explains the unfolding policy and outlines the chronology of the policy change that provides for extension of authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta.

The purpose of the study was to understand the rationale of policy-makers and to describe the process of extension of degree-conferring authority in Alberta postsecondary institutions. One recent case, in which the King's University College was able to achieve degree-conferring authority for a BEd program, was used to illustrate the policy process. It should be added, however, that policy studies are seldom able to tackle a single problem, but rather "face a cluster of entangled problems" (Pal, 1997, p. 3) that are complex and interconnected, and whose boundaries are difficult to define. Dobuzinskis (1996) concurs that policy problems are increasingly complex even to the point that there is "blurring of the distinction between domestic and international issues" (p. 93). I was thus aware at the outset that I might find that this

particular problem of change in postsecondary education in Alberta was influenced by international change in teacher preparation and recent global restructuring of universities; and that it was interconnected with changes in public education policy and other public policies in Alberta.

#### *Method*

The general question the study addressed was, "What were the causes of the policy change which extended degree-conferring authority in Alberta?" Components of the study included an explication of the context of teacher education in Alberta, description of the process whereby the King's University College attained authority to confer BEd degrees, identification of the key stakeholders and the sources of pressure for the policy change, and identification of the competing perspectives of stakeholders in the policy debate on extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to private postsecondary institutions in Alberta.

The data collection had two thrusts. The first involved an historical examination of postsecondary education and teacher education in Alberta to understand better the longitudinal context for the currently unfolding policy. Documents pertaining to new degree-conferring programs were also reviewed. The second was a case study of the King's University College and the process whereby this institution obtained the authority to confer BEd degrees. This second phase of the research was informed primarily by interviews with key actors. Examination of the process by which the King's University College was able to obtain authority to confer BEd degrees provides an illustration of decentralization of degree-conferring authority in the Alberta postsecondary context and exposes the perspectives of the key policy actors.

Semistructured interviews in targeted organizations followed. The respondents chosen for the current study were representative of the educational elites who had direct influence on the emerging public policy that extends BEd degree-conferring in Alberta. One dozen respondents provided primary interview data for the study, and another dozen provided less critical accounts. Primary interview respondents included: (a) five former representatives of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB), including four former board members, of which two were former chairs, and one senior administrator of the PCAB; (b) three professors from public universities who were directly involved in the policy development process; (c) two professors of education and one administrator from private colleges who were directly involved in the policy development process; (d) three senior members of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) who were also directly involved in the extension of degree-conferring process as ATA lobbyists; and (e) senior civil service respondents from the departments of Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education, including two former deputy ministers. Although access to two Ministers of Advanced Education and Career Development and one Deputy Minister was denied by departmental staff, government policy direction could be determined by reviewing departmental policy documents and by ascertaining the perspectives of departmental staff.

The objectives of the interviews included identification of respondent perceptions about the causation of extension of authority to confer BEd degrees, identification of key actors and their roles in the policy change, and identifica-

tion of the policy positions of individuals in the focal organizations on the question of extending authority to confer BEd degrees to private postsecondary institutions. Interviews were also intended to ascertain the key assumptions and values of policy actors and thereby aggregate like-minded stakeholders into advocacy coalitions. The interviews were audiorecorded and the recordings transcribed.

Analysis was both inductive and deductive. Initial exploratory data collection on the extension of degree-conferring authority led to the identification of relevant questions and variables for examination. Data were compared for fit with models, and the choice was made to "orient" data analysis to the Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) of policy change. Patton (1990) describes orientational qualitative studies as aimed at confirmation and elucidation, and suggests that the term *orientational* is more neutral than ideological inquiry. Similar to an orientational perspective is Muxlow's (1997) use of the term *soft-deductive* to describe a research approach in which expectations are based on an existing model, in this case the ACF, but also supplemented by inductive observations. Data collection and analysis confirmed the ACF analytical model. Finally, analysis again became inductive as the data were examined for evidence of rival hypotheses and thematic findings that are outlined in discussion below. Member checks were obtained whenever direct quotations of interview data were used and to ascertain respondents' perceptions of the thematic research findings. Although some disagreement was evident on details of the thematic findings, respondents on both sides of the policy debate generally supported the analytical framework and explanation of the policy development process.

The strengths of the ACF model of policy change include addressing the importance of policy communities, the importance of aggregating stakeholders in advocacy coalitions according to policy preferences and belief systems, the importance of substantive policy information, the role of policy brokers and policy elites in policy-oriented learning, and the need for study time frames of at least a decade in duration. The ACF views policy change over time as a function of three sets of factors: interaction of competing advocacy coalitions in the policy subsystem, events external to the policy subsystem such as socio-economic or political change, and the system effects of contextual parameters. Conflict among competing advocacy coalitions is common and mediated by policy brokers who are more concerned with system stability than achieving policy change. Impetus for policy change might originate from interactions in the policy subsystem and external perturbations in the larger political and economic system in which the policy subsystem is embedded.

An important contribution in ACF subsystem analysis is the concept of policy-oriented learning, which suggests that changes in coalition positions result over time from interaction in the policy subsystem. Sabatier (1986) contended that studies incorporating 10-15-year time spans report successful implementation. This suggests a process of policy learning as proponents of policy change find supportive constituencies and develop strategies for responding to program deficiencies. Policy-oriented learning follows change in policy-oriented belief systems. Sabatier suggested that advocacy coalition positions reflect the belief systems of elites in the policy subsystem. These belief systems distinguish between "core" and "secondary" elements. Coalitions

coalesce around common core beliefs such as the proper scope of governmental or market activity. Because these core beliefs are stable over periods of a decade or more, coalitions are also stable. Because of the strength of core beliefs, policy-oriented learning is usually confined to secondary belief systems such as administrative rules or budgetary allocations. The effects of policy-oriented learning confirm Dye's (1992) contention that policy change is generally incremental as elites strive to maintain stability in the system. Sabatier theorized that changes in core beliefs that precipitate significant policy change occur only with the replacement of a dominant coalition by another due to changes external to the subsystem.

#### *Discussion of the Study Findings*

The policy problem was found to be politically charged. Each competing advocacy coalition held different values about the rationale and implications for the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to private institutions. The policy change to extend BEd degree-conferring was vigorously contested by professional educators in the ATA, and support for this position was shared by staff in the public university faculties of education. The political implications of the policy change also presented difficulty for members of staff in the faculties of education. Southern (1987) anticipated this problem:

University men operate on a political basis not usually publicly acknowledged. [Because] political operations have a pejorative connotation, antithetical to the notion of academic objectivity and rationality.... Open inquiry and complete disclosure of information is not part of the political process. (p. 49)

Similarly, civil service respondents were hesitant to disclose information about the policy deliberations, citing their ethic of silence, their official neutrality as implementers of government policy, and their sensitivity to stakeholder opposition to the policy change. Skolnik (1987) recognized government reluctance to divulge information about politically sensitive deliberations:

It is, of course, no easy matter to determine a government's rationale for most policies, as spokespersons for government usually are less explicit about the rationale for their actions than the student of their actions would wish. Also, the formulation of policy is often the outcome of a process of compromise among conflicting interests. As such, no simple statement of rationale can adequately summarize the complex interactions which precede in the observed actions. (p. 79)

Nevertheless, some civil servants provided helpful information. While demanding confidentiality, they provided insight and reviewed pertinent draft passages of the study. Analysis of the interview data and government documents revealed six themes, as explicated below.

*The context of teacher education in Alberta: decentralization and neoliberalization of postsecondary education.* An underlying theme of the historical development of postsecondary education in Alberta is the gradual decentralization of access to and delivery of postsecondary programs. Although historically the official position of the Alberta government was centrist with respect to degree-conferring, as evident by the government's support for degree-conferring remaining exclusively with the University of Alberta for more than half a century,

decentralization pressures for regional delivery of postsecondary education gradually affected government policy. In the 1960s pressures for increased accessibility resulted in the creation of two new universities, two technical schools, and several public colleges.

In addition to a diversified system of public postsecondary education, there existed a long and rich history of private colleges in Alberta (Berghofer & Vladicka, 1980). The deep roots of the private colleges in Alberta are indicative of these colleges' secure acceptance in the political, cultural, and religious fabric of the province. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the extension of degree-conferring authority in Alberta during the last decade has been achieved by the private Christian colleges, of which the King's University College is but one example. The inception of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB) in 1984 provided for decentralization in Alberta's postsecondary education system and enabled private colleges to gain authority to confer degrees.

In the years immediately preceding the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to the King's University College, government documents pointed to continuation of the historical trend of decentralization of access to postsecondary education in Alberta. The complementary goals of accessibility and responsiveness, identified in Alberta government documents *Responding to Existing and Emerging Demands for University Education* (Alberta Advanced Education, 1990) and *New Directions* (Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, 1994) seem a continuation of the decentralization trend that has been evident in Alberta since the 1960s (Andrews, 1995). Improved responsiveness, increased accessibility, and their corollary, decentralization, mean that rural students might not have to move to a major center for their higher education. By virtue of their large faculties and administrative structures, universities are more ponderous in their planning processes and less responsive to change or to community needs (Fowler, 1994). On the other hand, the ability of small colleges to be responsive to their constituencies may partly explain the proliferation of degree-conferring programs that has recently been observed in Alberta.

The decentralization strategies identified in the development scenarios of the former Alberta Department of Advanced Education (1990), including the growth of transfer programs in public colleges, increasing numbers of degree-conferring programs in private colleges, increasing use of university outreach programs at public colleges, and new applied degrees at technical institutes, can all be observed in Alberta, although none of these strategies has been predominant.

The decentralization of degree-conferring programs within a short time frame following the establishment of the PCAB in 1984, and the release of the policy documents *Responding to Existing and Emerging Demands for University Education* (Alberta Advanced Education, 1990) and *New Directions* (Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, 1994), has been in the formative stages for the past two decades. The applied degree programs of the technical institutes were identified as an option in the *Responding* (1990) document, as were increased degree-conferring roles for both the private and public colleges.

Philosophically, the extension of BEd-conferring authority to the King's University College satisfies provincial postsecondary education goals of increased responsiveness to emerging markets and encourages entrepreneurship and public choice, neoliberal values that seem to have been increasingly embraced by the Alberta government in the 1990s. Rae (1996) argued forcefully that the policy options emerging in Alberta after the *New Directions* (1994) document signal increasing "privatization" of the postsecondary education sector. Although this argument may be an overstatement, the shift toward New Right policy preferences evident in these postsecondary descriptors appears to be at the core of the extension of BEd degree-conferring debate and underscores the vigorously contested nature of the policy deliberations.

*The role of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB).* The first tangible indication that the provincial government was in favor of granting colleges the right to offer more than transfer provisions for the first two years of university study was evident in amendments to the Universities Act (1980) that empowered private colleges to offer full degree programs in affiliation with a provincial university. However, this provision did not lead to the extension of undergraduate programs in any of the colleges in Alberta. Failure of colleges to obtain affiliation with a public university in Alberta was examined by Skolnik (1987) who found the affiliation requirement to be a "weighty restriction indeed" (p. 69).

The fundamental change to the Alberta postsecondary environment that made possible achievement of degree-conferring status by private postsecondary institutions was the establishment of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB). In 1983 an amendment to the Universities Act provided for the creation of the PCAB. This board was empowered to set minimum conditions to be met by private colleges proposing to offer programs leading to bachelors' degrees, to evaluate proposed private college baccalaureate programs, and to make recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education on applications for degree-conferring authority.

Creation of the PCAB can be understood in the context of its role in satisfying several needs of the government, including the government's desire to control postsecondary education, concerns about maintaining quality control in postsecondary education and increasing student access, and the government's desire to implement the policy objectives of fiscal restraint and financial accountability. Mandated to evaluate proposals of private colleges for degree-granting authority, the PCAB was directly responsible to the government.

An assumption underlying the ACF is that most administrative agencies such as the PCAB have missions that make them part of a specific coalition (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Similarly, Pressman and Wildavsky (1979) provide the construct "capture theory" (p. 182), which holds that regulatory commissions inevitably become captured by the interests they are supposed to regulate because these are the forces that care most about what the regulatory commission does. Interview data from the current study support this assumption. By the 1990s the PCAB of Alberta identified with the interests of the private college sector for whom it was created to serve.

In Alberta the PCAB has provided the vehicle for government policy to extend degree-conferring, first in arts and science degrees and then, more

recently, in the cases of the King's University College and Concordia University College, professional degrees in education. The direction of the PCAB has been clear. In a memorandum from David Russell, Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education to Nancy Betkowski, Minister of Education, dated March 3, 1988, Russell stated: "Advanced Education does not have any objections to the principle of private colleges seeking approval to grant professional degrees." It is not surprising, therefore, that at least some of the personnel in the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development and its predecessor, the Department of Advanced Education, with the PCAB as an arm of these departments, were members of the advocacy coalition that supported the aspirations of the private colleges to achieve professional degree-conferring status.

*Policy advocacy and stakeholder values.* The stakeholders in the policy debate that extends degree-conferring authority to the private colleges can be aggregated into two opposing advocacy coalitions based on their respective values and belief systems. The advocacy coalition in favor of decentralization of degree-conferring consisted of advocates of private postsecondary institutions, advocates of the public colleges, government MLAs, civil servants in the Alberta Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, and members of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB). The interests of such advocates coincided with emerging government ideology to increase choice and competition in public policy spheres.

The ATA leadership, faculty of education staffs at the public universities, and many Alberta Education (formerly the Department of Education) personnel formed the advocacy coalition that was opposed to private college BEd programs. Because these organizations were staffed predominantly by teachers or former teachers, their members perceived educational issues similarly, were protective of high status for teachers, and were concerned in general about the professional aspirations of teachers. For reasons that relate to common professional training of their staffs, the professional relationships among the ATA, Alberta Education, and the public university faculties of education appear to be symbiotic.

Although the policy debate in this study of decentralization of teacher preparation was conducted at the provincial level and examined the policy struggle between two provincial advocacy coalitions, examination of the policy problem exposed exogenous pressures for international policy convergence. Underpinning the policy debate about the extension of degree-conferring authority is an ideological debate about the role of market forces versus the role of large government in society. The private colleges were found to be advocates of decentralization, broader consumer choice, and privatization. Conversely, ATA officials championed the values of secular humanism in the common school, values that private Christian colleges reject. International pressure from members of the New Right, who support the privatization of postsecondary education, is exemplified by the position of the World Bank that teachers' unions are a major obstacle to implementation of reform in educational finance and educational management (Brown, 1994). This fundamental clash of values between the advocates of extension of degree-conferring authority to the private colleges with ideological support from the New Right and the values of the teaching profession led by the ATA, who opposed such extension, ap-



peared to be at the root of the antagonism between the two opposing advocacy coalitions.

*Incremental policy evolution.* The fourth thematic finding of the study relates to the expectation of respondents that postsecondary education in Alberta will continue to change, albeit hesitantly, and evolve in ways that reflect the government's apparent acceptance of neoliberal values. Two streams of synthesis were identified where there is seeming agreement between the academic literature and respondents' stories of expectation for continued decentralization of degree-conferring authority in the Alberta postsecondary education environment. The first of these streams centers on the ideas of Greer (1986), Pannu (1996), Pannu, Schugurensky, and Plumb (1994), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), and Muxlow (1997), all of whom supported the importance of an external impetus for policy change. The second stream relates to the apparent nexus of elite theory (Dye, 1992) and respondents' stories about policy brokers as defined by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith.

Greer (1986), writing specifically about higher education, argued that significant policy change is more likely to be stimulated by the external socioeconomic environment than by internal factors. In the current study of the extension of degree-conferring authority in Alberta, international neoliberal pressures on postsecondary education seem to have played a significant role in shifting the policy preferences of elites in Alberta (Rae, 1996; Worth, 1995). This study identifies the policy stories of members of the educational elite who actively participated in the policy formulation and implementation of extension of authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta. External pressures on the policy process, which included: government ideological considerations to privatize (West, 1997) and to increase choice, government fiscal imperatives to reduce expenditure (Lisac, 1995), and government perception that public universities lacked accountability. These policy rationales have ideological origins that evidently have motivated policy elites in the local arena.

One explanation for the development of policy, namely, elite theory, states that public policy originates in the preferences and values of elites who include only a small number of powerful persons drawn disproportionately from the upper socioeconomic strata of society. New members may enter the elite governing circles only if they accept the consensus of the elites and maintain system stability. Public policy, therefore, reflects the values of the elites and not necessarily the demands of the masses (Dye, 1992). The stories told by respondents in the current case study supported Dye's observations about the importance of the elites in the determining direction of public policy. The policy change that extended authority to confer BEd degrees specifically and decentralized degree-conferring generally appeared to originate in neoliberal elites. According to this explanation, the values that influence the policy change appear to reflect the values of neoliberal elites and not the consensus of the traditional educational stakeholders, which include personnel at the public universities, Alberta Education, and the Alberta Teachers' Association. These stakeholders sought democratic consultation and opposed what they perceived as ideologically driven policy change. Whereas government spokespersons have claimed that they value dialogue and input, evidence that government policy represents consensus was disputed by respondents and academics (Arnold, 1998; Marino, 1995).

Dye (1992) also suggested that elite-motivated change in public policy would be incremental rather than revolutionary because incrementalism is conservative, contains less risk, and maintains system stability. Similar to the elite theory preference for incremental change, the Alberta government appeared to prefer gradual change and maintenance of system stability. Calgary Conservative MLA Wayne Coo, in discussing proposed policy change stated: "I believe in evolutionary process, not disruptive revolution" (Lisac, 1998). Stephen Murgatroyd concurred that postsecondary policy change in Alberta is incremental:

There is a blurring of distinction between public and private postsecondary institutions and a stronger focus on market driven activity, but you're not going to see a radical change. We don't work radically here. People think the Klein revolution has been quite radical; in fact it hasn't been. I see the government as pursuing an evolving strategy as opposed to a radical one. The power blocks are established. It will take a number of small events over time to make a difference here. (Bischoff, 1999, p. 167)

The Lindblom (1959, 1979) model of incrementalism described the policy process as characterized by bargaining and compromise. Typically, policy decisions represent what is politically feasible rather than what is desirable. Walter Worth, former Chair of the PCAB, a former Deputy Minister of the Alberta Department of Advanced Education and also a former Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta; Reno Bosetti, former Deputy Minister of the Alberta Department of Education; and Myer Horowitz, former Dean of the Faculty of Education and former President of the University of Alberta, who also chaired the PCAB sponsored independent evaluation of the King's University College proposed BEd program, represented the policy brokers in the educational establishment who negotiated the policy compromise that extends authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta. The incremental change represented by the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta resulted in educational stakeholders raising objections, but these did not adversely affect system stability. However, following the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to two private colleges, opposition to this move became sufficiently vociferous that the elites apparently counseled the cessation of any further new program authorization.

*Expectation of conflict and resistance to government policy.* The debate about the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta reflected a conflict of values between the broad consensus of educational stakeholders and the private colleges and the Alberta government. On the one hand, the government appeared committed to the New Right values of choice, responsiveness, and decentralization. Resisters of the policy shift that extended BEd degree-conferring to the private colleges were the established educational stakeholders whose values had been challenged by government actions.

Exacerbating the difficulty in explaining the dynamics of the policy problem was the apparent general decline in influence of the ATA and the public universities in Alberta society. The universities faced government incursions on their autonomy and demands for increased accountability and coordination pressures since the failed Adult Education Act of 1975 (Winchester, 1984). In addition, with the advent of fiscal restraint by the Alberta government in 1994,

the public universities have suffered substantial funding reductions. The assault on public universities by the Right, according to some writers, was not confined to Alberta, but reflects an international trend (Pannu et al., 1994). Chomsky (Rivers, 1998) also reports that the attack on academic freedom is part of the "broader offensive to restrict what went on in universities" (p. 60). The ATA has also been in conflict with the Alberta government over several issues during the last decade, including increased accountability pressures resulting from provincially mandated external student examinations in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12; the 5% province-wide teacher salary rollback of 1994 and subsequent education funding austerity and kindergarten funding cuts; the provision of school "choice" with increased parental control of public schools through parent councils; and increased private school funding. The ATA has responded acrimoniously to each of these government initiatives.

Understanding the policy change that resulted in authority to confer BEd degrees to the private colleges requires recognition of the interconnected policy issues identified above, including education funding austerity, accountability of public education through pressures from external examinations, the development of school councils, and increasing financial support for private education. Dunn (1981) stated that policy problems frequently affect other policy areas and that policy problems are interdependent parts of whole systems of problems that can be described as messes. Understanding these "messes of problems" requires a holistic approach, and resolving them may require solving several interlocking problems. The policy debate on the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees in Alberta involved messes of problems, and this made problem definition difficult.

Seen as a system of interrelated messes of problems, the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to private colleges becomes another of the several assaults on the traditional autonomy and prestige of the advocacy coalition that includes the ATA and the faculties of education of the public universities. Whereas the faculties of education and the public universities in general had less room than earlier to maneuver because of their direct funding relationship with Alberta's Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, the ATA had a great capacity to advocate for its membership. As an organization funded directly by its members, the ATA was prepared to confront the values of neoliberalism and internationalization, which its leadership recognized as threatening collective teacher strength. For example, the ATA leadership recognized the government support for private education, the privatization of teacher preparation, and financial austerity in public education expenditure as manifestations of New Right ideology.

Keohane and Milner (1996) identify three potential responses by domestic institutions that block internationalization of domestic politics: (a) they may block relative price signals from the international economy from entering the domestic one, thus obscuring actors' interests; (b) they may freeze existing coalitions and policies by making the costs of changing these coalitions and policies high; and (c) they may channel leaders' strategies in response to international economic change. The ATA seems to have attempted to limit internationalization pressures on teacher status on all three of these levels. For example, the ATA: (a) blocked international price signals and reduced labor market competition for teachers by supporting provincial teacher certification

and rejecting internationalization of teacher credentialing; (b) froze its faculty of education coalition partners and made high the cost of changing teacher preparation by virtue of the central role played by the ATA in practicum placements for BEd students; and (c) the ATA leadership participated in political lobbying that supported public education and campaigned against New Right policy initiatives in education such as external achievement examinations, publication of school ratings in achievement examinations, the introduction of charter schools to Alberta, and funding for private schools.

ATA resistance to an Alberta government policy shift toward the Right suggests problematic relations between the ATA and government. The ATA leadership can be expected to continue to act as an advocate for the interests of its members even when these interests run counter to government policy initiatives. Study respondents predicted continued resistance by the ATA leadership to government policy that extends authority to confer BEd degrees. An ATA executive member respondent stated

We have lost so far because the power is in the hands of a right wing caucus that seems to take every opportunity to underfund public education, along with deregulation, deskilling, privatization, de-professionalization, and union busting.... And the fight, quite honestly, is not over.

*New degree-conferring authority on the horizon.* A sixth finding of the study had respondents on both sides of the policy debate with common expectations that new degree-conferring programs would extend to other provincial colleges, public and private. Any disagreement among respondents was confined to the questions of how desirable it was to continue to extend degree-conferring authority and to the rate at which these new programs might be approved.

The respondents in this study, including Meyer Horowitz, Heather Montgomerie, Bernard Potvin, Walter Worth, and Stephen Murgatroyd, all stated that the extension of degree-conferring in private and public colleges was a trend that they believed would continue. Even those respondents who were most critical of the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to the private colleges, like Larry Booi and John Paterson, expressed the opinion that further extension of new degree-conferring authority was expected.

In summary, there was strong consensus among the study participants that further expansion of degree programs to private and public postsecondary institutions in the province was highly probable. Differences occurred primarily on matters of expected timing of this move and on how advisable it was substantially to extend degree-conferring authority.

#### *Implications of the Findings*

If the respondents of this study are correct in their assumptions that the extension of BEd and other degree-conferring authority in Alberta will continue, albeit incrementally, and that the advocacy coalition that opposed this policy change, especially members of the ATA, will continue to oppose this policy direction, then these findings have potential implications for the preparation of school administrators, for the Teacher Certification Branch of the new Department of Alberta Learning with respect to quality control of new teachers, and for the Private Colleges Accreditation Board (PCAB).

Although the new BEd programs at the King's University College and Concordia University College have been modeled on the University of Alberta

BEd program, the public university BEd programs are changing and the private college BEd programs should also be expected to change as these colleges develop autonomy and their programs mature. There is likely to be increasing differentiation in teacher preparation as more programs are authorized and as these programs change to compete for market share of available BEd students. Some changes have already occurred.

Differentiation of BEd programs has implications for monitoring the quality of graduates of these diverse programs. School superintendents employing new BEd graduates will need to assess the comparative competence of their new teachers because some BEd programs may prepare teachers better than others. Although monitoring is currently done, it will be more essential with the addition of the new teacher preparation programs. Concern about quality control will necessitate increased monitoring of teacher graduates early in their teaching careers and especially before decisions have to be made on awarding continual professional contracts and permanent certification.

Concern about quality control also has implications for the Teacher Certification Branch of the new super-ministry Alberta Learning, which will probably have a more onerous task of monitoring the qualifications and competences of novice teachers who graduate from increasingly diverse preparation programs. As the first line of defense for quality control of teacher qualifications and competences, the Teacher Certification Branch protects the Alberta public and school boards by assuring the quality of teachers certificated. When most certificated teachers were prepared at the University of Alberta in the mid 1960s, the Teacher Certification Branch understood that their preparation was of generally uniform quality. As graduates of other universities and now of private colleges apply for certification, the Teacher Certification Branch assessment and certification of the credentials of applicants becomes increasingly complex. Also, there is the potential for greater differences in competence among graduates of these diverse programs as the numbers of institutions awarding the BEd degree increase. Thus even with the graduating institution's endorsement of competence, there is increased risk that differences among the applicants for certification will be greater. It is probable that the Teacher Certification Branch will need not only to increase the scope of its evaluation to include the courses completed by students, but also to monitor the program offered by BEd degree-conferring institutions, much as they now do for certification applicants from other provinces and countries.

Although the Teacher Certification Branch may contend that the PCAB has recommended that accredited institutions be permitted to offer teacher preparation programs, the PCAB's primary role is to assess the competence of postsecondary institutions to offer new degree-conferring programs. As new programs are approved by recommendation of the PCAB, these programs and their offering institutions may need to be monitored on a regular basis for "accreditation" to ensure their continued competence to confer degrees in these programs. The trend for increased decentralization of degree-conferring programs identified in this study suggests a need for a monitoring agency that can provide credibility for these new programs. In the United States, and to some extent in Canada, there are national accrediting bodies in the fields such as medicine, dentistry, and education and accreditation systems for libraries and

postsecondary institutions. Postsecondary institutions and professional associations may not be required to apply for accreditation, but most do because accreditation provides credibility (Skolnik, 1990). For example, many teacher preparation institutions in the US apply for accreditation to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). In Canada, in part due to the small numbers of universities of generally similar quality, such accreditation bodies have not been viewed as necessary, but this may change as the public seeks assurance about the quality of programs offered in the various postsecondary institutions. An emerging need for accreditation bodies in Canada may be indicated by the national popularity of the *Maclean's* magazine annual ratings of Canadian universities, which it has provided since 1991.

As the Alberta government has demonstrated its preference for private sector solutions, one would expect that a private accreditation organization might meet the apparent need here as in US jurisdictions. In addition, publicly funded colleges and universities may also eventually be required to have their programs accredited at regular intervals. Alternatively, if the Alberta government chooses to protect the credibility of provincial postsecondary programs with a public accreditation body, the role of the PCAB could grow to assure institutional quality with increased monitoring and evaluation functions. Whether a new private accreditation body is developed or the PCAB's mandate is expanded to encompass increased monitoring functions, as more institutions achieve degree-conferring authority the need for increased monitoring of program quality increases.

As the possibility increases for greater differences in quality among teachers prepared in a growing number of BEd programs, the need for instructional supervision at the school level also increases. One implication of this logic is the need to prepare school administrators who are capable of monitoring teachers' performance. However, carrying out this task may be difficult or impossible in the potentially hostile climate that could result if school administrators were removed from membership in the ATA. In the Alberta Legislative Assembly during debate about Bill 219, Calgary-Currie MLA Jocelyn Burgener argued for an increased supervision role for principals: "Principals need the freedom to be more effective in their evaluation of teachers. They need a new range of accountability to deal with their community" (Svidal, 1998, p. 7). However, even with teachers and school administrators in the same bargaining unit, Ratsoy (1997) concluded that teachers in Alberta had "strongly-held negative opinions about the utility of the present teacher evaluation process" (p. 4). Under current provincial policy, professional development is primarily a responsibility of the teaching profession, and monitoring of instructional performance is expected only when school administrators suspect problems. Routinely scheduled monitoring of teachers' competences is not required, and this policy is strongly supported by ATA staff as a recognition of teachers' professional autonomy. Increased instructional supervision could remind teachers of the dreaded 1995 government trial balloon favoring term certification with mandatory evaluation of teacher competences. The ATA would certainly not concede without a struggle to give up the current policy presumption of teacher competence with lifelong certification. Any mandate for administrators to increase instructional supervision in schools could present potential conflict with the ATA precisely when the competence of new teachers

prepared in differentiated BEd programs presents a problematic monitoring conundrum for administrators.

### *Conclusions*

Two fundamental conclusions are raised by the findings of this study. The first relates to opposition to the government policy that extended authority to confer BEd degrees. The second considers the utility of the ACF for analysis and presentation of policy change data in the current case study, and in particular the finding that factors exogenous to the policy subsystem appear to play a more important role in the policy development than did the interactions by actors in the policy subsystem.

A synthesis of the findings of the current study indicates that the historical trend for decentralization of degree-conferring authority in Alberta that began in the 1960s continues. This trend was accelerated by the creation of the PCAB in 1984 and the increasing neoliberalization of government policy since the election of the Klein government in 1993. Opposition by the ATA to the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to the private colleges has exposed a fundamental clash of values between those of the ATA and those of the Alberta government. ATA respondents reported that they had not conceded acceptance of the neoliberal policy preferences of the provincial government and would continue to oppose the privatization of teacher preparation programs. Although no new teacher preparation programs appear imminent, there remains the potential for political action by the ATA due to their opposition to government initiatives in related "messes" of educational policy issues.

The second conclusion pertains to the utility of the ACF for analysis and presentation of the policy change data in the current study. I concluded that the ACF was an effective model primarily because it allowed incorporation of both the interactions in the policy subsystem and factors such as the effects of ideology that were exogenous to the subsystem. Interaction in the policy subsystem and effects exogenous to the subsystem were hypothesized as the two factors that cause policy change. Also of value was the identification of stakeholder values that assisted in aggregating policy actors into competing advocacy coalitions. A final important contribution of the model was the concept of policy-oriented learning that takes place in advocacy coalitions over periods of at least a decade. This concept provided the conceptual vehicle for speculating about how policy change is considered in organizations and how those organizations might respond in the future.

One additional observation should be noted with respect to use of the ACF model to analyze the current study data. As suggested above, both interactions in the policy subsystem and the effects exogenous to the subsystem are hypothesized as the causes of policy change. In the current study, debate occurred between two opposing advocacy coalitions in the policy subsystem. The apparently dominant coalition opposing the policy change consisted of the educational community of professional educators in the ATA, the faculties of education of the public universities, and the staff of Alberta Education. The advocacy coalition supporting the extension of degree-conferring authority to private colleges consisted of advocates for the private colleges, civil servants in the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development, advocates for regional public colleges, and the government that legislated the extension of

degree-conferring authority. In the end, authority to confer BEd degrees was extended to the private colleges in the face of strong opposition from the traditional educational community. The factor that apparently tipped the scales in favor of the private colleges' applications for authority to confer BEd degrees was effects exogenous to the subsystem, in this case the effects of ideology on the policy debate.

The prominence of factors exogenous to the policy subsystem was anticipated by Wellstead (1996) who used the ACF to analyze forestry policy in Alberta and Ontario. Wellstead hypothesized that in policy communities that are heavily export oriented (like forestry), the effects of factors exogenous to the subsystem will have a greater impact on policy change than interactions in the local policy subsystem. The current study, however, considers professional preparation in a primarily local provincial market and not in an export market. Still, the exogenous effects of ideology appear to have played a prominent role in the provincial postsecondary policy subsystem. The government has implemented the extension of authority to confer BEd degrees to the private colleges and appeared largely unresponsive to the arguments of the professional educator consensus that opposed the policy change. Former Deputy Minister of Education Reno Bosetti (1991) reflected the government's attitude when he argued that consensus is not necessary for policy decisions: "Complex problems would ... never be tackled if consensus were a prerequisite to policy" (p. 218). It would appear that the effects of emerging neoliberal ideology in the Klein government were more persuasive in the policy debate than was the apparent consensus of the educational community.

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