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**FROM THE MAIL ROOM TO THE VICE PRESIDENCY:  
THE SOCIALIZATION OF ALBERTA SCHOOL TRUSTEES**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Unlike politicians in many other sectors, school board trustees more often are novices in public affairs than they are seasoned political activists. As a consequence, otherwise normal citizens must quickly acquire political and other policy-related skills, most often after election and while serving. This study is an analysis of the first year of service of newly-elected school trustees in Alberta. Interviews with the trustees allows a discussion of their experiences and the people and events which they encountered and which they say had influence on them while they learned opportunities and obligations attaching to trusteeship.

**RELATED RESEARCH**

A Saskatchewan School Trustees Association study (Gunningham, 1984) of rural trustees found that trustees said that other trustees were the most influential sources of their on the job socialization and that the administration and teaching staff also contributed. The observations of Saskatchewan trustees are consistent with socialization literature on two important counts; socialization to a group occurs in the context of the group, and influentials within the group play important roles in the inculcation of new members. These are complex and dynamic relationships. They are complex enough that Zeigler (1975) has reminded us that studies of individual school board members, as individuals, may miss the point. To understand school trustees as policy makers requires that they be studied in the context of the board.

Forsyth (1983), drawing on the work of Schutz, discussed three basic needs satisfied through group membership; inclusion, control and affection. The newly elected school trustee, struggling to find out just what the business of boardsmanship is all about, faces the matter of inclusion from the first meeting. S/he must learn how decisions are made and who has how much influence over the others. Finally, trustees must come to understand how other trustees view them. All of this is independent of the processes of making policy choices anchored in their own values. As Allison and Messick (1987) have argued,

Groups, as we have shown, can and do produce decisions that fail to correspond to [individual] member preferences. More than that, we have also seen that group decisions may have properties that do not characterize any of the individuals. (p. 138)

But collectivities of trustees are not groups as Bar-Tal (1990) has argued. This argument is that:

The three necessary and sufficient conditions for a collective to a be a group are: (a) Individuals in the collective should define themselves as group members; (b) they should share beliefs, including group beliefs; and (c) there should be some level of coordinated activity. (p. 41)

Thus it is of interest to understand how new school trustees acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary for them to carry out their obligations as trustees in the context of a board as a group. Kerr (1964) argued that the superintendent of schools moved newly elected trustees closer to the role expectations held by the superintendent. Kerr maintained that the lack of clear trustee constituencies made new members more receptive to superintendent influence. Cistone (1977), examining Ontario school boards discovered that new school trustees came to accept the role definitions of more experienced trustees.

Stout (1982) posited a five step model of the socialization of school board members in the United States. Stout interviewed all candidates for school boards in Maricopa County (Phoenix) in 1980. Subsequently she interviewed each of the winners (16) three times during their first year of office. She was interested, as we are in this study, in the forces which newly elected school board members recount as influential in their progress from candidate to "seasoned" school board member.

In her model the first phase of development is what she termed Rites of Passage. At this stage, which takes individuals through the periods of candidacy, the election, and taking the oath of office, school board members described the necessity to practice the arts of politics and to meet people who are already "insiders" in the school policy arena.

In the second stage, which she called Absorption of the Norms, school board members learn the norms of consensual voting, avoidance of public disagreement over agenda items, and the idea of the board as a team. The primary sources of influence in this stage are the pressures brought by other school board members to "fit in" and the new school board member's own reluctance to become isolated from the group.

In the third phase school board members learn the tools of the trade, including technical knowledge. They also begin to reflect on themselves. They learn what information they need to make decisions and how to get it. They begin to see themselves as public figures and to critique their own public behaviors. And they begin to have an understanding of how they influence more senior board members.

In the fourth stage, called Reframing Reality, school board members have been in office for four or five months. They begin to view the school policy world in new, and generally much more sophisticated, ways. They come to understand and to be able to describe the multiple options that attach to many policy decisions, the nature of competing points of view, and the difficulty of reaching decisions which may have multiple consequences.

In the fifth stage, school board members are subject to what Stout calls Forces for Cohesion. They become increasingly subject to intra-board influence, and their decision stimuli become standardized as a result of the agenda-setting processes of public government. They describe feelings of increasing isolation from the general public and increasing comfort with the values of other board members. Especially they feel the pressure inherent in the Arizona requirement that they decide contentious matters in full view of the public and by recorded vote. Stout concluded by arguing that these forces were powerful enough to change the perceptions of even school board members who were elected to the board on agendas in opposition to the status quo.

Exceptions to this almost inexorable standardization of view occurred of course, but infrequently. The most powerful source of continued resistance was a clear, and persistent constituency which held its newly-elected board member to the original agenda, and to which the newly-elected member could turn for support and justification during rancorous debate over policy direction. While the superintendent was deemed by Stout to be an important influence, other board members, and the context of board obligations, were argued to be more powerful. Tallerico (1989), though, argued that Stout's analysis portrayed school board members as more compliant and vulnerable to external influences than they are in fact. She argued that new school board members are much more active than passive, seeking out avenues for developing the knowledge to forward their own agendas. Chief among the needs of new school board members was their desire to gain public trust, to avoid the appearance of ignorance with respect to important issues, and to demonstrate a caring attitude toward teachers and children.

The question of school trustee socialization is not so much one of whether it happens, as it is of the processes which influence the development from citizen to experienced trustee.

**METHOD**

The primary source of data were three sets of semi-structured interviews conducted with ten newly elected Alberta trustees during the period October 1992 to August 1993. In order to choose potential participants school districts within a reasonable driving distance of Edmonton were identified. A second criterion was to ensure that the various types of school districts would be represented in the sample. The superintendents of eight selected school districts were contacted and asked to identify newly elected trustees. Twelve such persons were identified and invited to participate in the study. Two persons were unwilling to do so.

One trustee participant was from an urban public school district, two from a county system, two from a Catholic separate jurisdiction, one from a small Roman Catholic public district, two from a medium sized Catholic separate district, one from a medium sized school division, and one from a small rural division. Thus, the eight sampled school districts represent a cross section of the types of governance structures and jurisdictions found in Canada and Alberta.

The three interviews with each new trustee lasted, on average, about 2 hours each. Each interview was audio tape recorded and transcribed into verbatim transcripts. The interview protocols were semi-structured and relatively open. They were also "progressive" in that the second protocol was designed to test insights gained from analysis of the first interviews, and to allow trustees to reflect on their experiences since the first interview. The third interview built in the same way on the first two.

In the first interview trustees were asked to discuss why they sought trusteeship, their experiences as candidates, what they hoped to accomplish as trustees, what they knew about the system for which they had just become trustee, and what they were anticipating as key issues they would face. In addition, they were asked to reflect on first impressions they might have about other trustees, the superintendent, and the system.

In the second interview they were asked to reflect primarily on the nature of trusteeship as they had experienced it, the kinds of decisions they were being asked to make, the sources of opposition and support they sensed were affecting them, what they were learning about themselves and the system, and how they thought they were getting along in their new roles.

In the third interview they were asked to reflect on the major successes and failures of the prior year, on the way the entire board worked, on any changes they had had in perceptions, and on what changes, if any, they had made in their own tactics and strategies. As well, they were asked to discuss what they anticipated would be key issues for them in the second year. They were also asked to provide a kind of summing up of their experiences. Each interview protocol had 18-25 general questions of this type.

Data analysis followed five inductive steps. First, broad themes across participants in the interviews were identified. Second, all conversation about those themes was color-coded in the transcripts of each trustee. Third, all conversation about a theme from all the trustees was combined and analyzed for internal consistency and general pattern. This process produced, in some cases, sub-themes within the general themes. Finally, all conversation which could not be assigned to one of the themes was analyzed to determine if the "residuals" contained themes not previously identified. While the earlier work of Stout and Tallerico influenced the initial identification of themes, the language of the trustees themselves was allowed to suggest the themes of this paper. This form of analysis was first discussed in detail by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and designated as constant comparative analysis.

**THE PARTICIPANTS**

Ten of the twelve newly-elected trustees in the eight selected districts agreed to be included in the research. Only two had run before for political office and only one had ever served in an elected post, but not as a school trustee. They ranged in age from 37 to 60, with the average at 47 years. Seven men and three women comprised the research group. Seven of them had at least one university degree and two more had post-secondary certificates. This demographic profile parallels that found by Cosh (1994), whose survey of members of the Alberta School Boards Association shows that of all newly elected trustees, about 40% were women and 60% men. A study by Jakes (1984) of trustees in the Ottawa-Carleton area showed that 76% had at least one university degree.

Two were active educators and two were retired educators. All were parents of children attending school in the trustee's school system. Two of the three women worked outside the home, while the third co-owned a farm. One of the men owned his own business, while the others were retired, were teachers, or worked in lower level white collar jobs. All had histories of very active community service, particularly in youth-related matters. Five of the new trustees were Roman Catholic, three were Protestant, one Ukrainian Orthodox, and one would not say. They were of an age and stage in which people turn to good works as a source of personal satisfaction. Appendix A provides basic information about each of the new trustees.

**WHY THEY RAN**

There was no clear pattern of motive, aside from some form of generalized interest in schooling and children and, in part, a positive response to requests from others. A sampling of their language provides some insight to the generalization that a decision to run for school board is not motivated by substantial specific ideology or conviction.

Amanda: Well I'm a mother who has always been very keen on what's going on in school. I like being at the school so I can get to know the staff and the teachers. I like to be involved...I thought what better place to be involved than at the school board level.

Sara: One, I have always been active as a parent with regards to my childrens' education, being very frustrated in that I was never in a position of power to make effective change. ...I have been proactive. So finally, the day before nominations someone approached me and said, "A group of us would like you to run." which was surprising since I've only been here for nine months.

Brian: Actually some friends asked me to run. I was asked six years ago and I declined. I didn't feel I had enough time for my personal business. Some people asked me to run again this time and I agreed to.

Amy: I've been involved with schools for the last 12 years. My specialty was bulletin boards....I was approached actually by a few of the ladies in town who said I should run [and I declined and went on holiday]. ...the last thing that made up my mind was when I saw who else was running and thought yes I can do better.

Cam: I think it was primarily because we need on all boards and committees a business voice.

Dan: ...But more importantly I've got some specific concerns that motivated me as well. One of them is my experience as a parent with my children in [district] and to put it really simply and crudely we've been met in my view with arrogance and insensitivity and I considered that unacceptable.

Except for Dan, who seemed to have an idea about what is wrong with schools, these active people declared themselves as candidates for public office based on generalized notions of their obligations as good citizens. Their motives, or lack thereof, are consistent with the data in Stout's 1982 study.

**GETTING ELECTED**

One of the ten participants was acclaimed, but the other nine had to run election campaigns. Of the nine, one ran no campaign, saying:

I really had no strategy. I basically won it on my past actions, what people felt of me. I didn't campaign. I had been involved as a local volunteer...Actually I was quite in the forefront. I was known in the community.(Brian, a farmer)

The others, though, engaged in the age-old practices of soliciting votes. Most of the campaigns were kitchen table operations that involved family and/or friends. Amanda's constituency was rural and she drove from farm to farm and distributed a brochure that a friend had typed and printed for her. In her words, "I figure I hit 98% of the people, although there was the odd one with a dog I didn't."

Sara focused on families. She participated in two forums and once attempted to pass out some brochures after church, but she felt awkward in doing so and quit after distributing but three. She said that she spent $4.00 on her campaign, and $52.00 after election to run a "thank you" ad in the newspaper.

The trustees employed all of the standard techniques including brochures, campaign signs, paid ads in the print media, door to door canvassing, telephone calling, and attending public forums. Public forums were universally declared to be the least effective. They were poorly attended and generally without sufficient focus to give candidates a sense of good investment of time.

Some of the candidates were assisted by members of the Alberta Teachers Association or by local school staff. Cam discussed how he experienced the influence of the ATA:

We also had loaded guns pointing at us because of the power of the ATA. When you go to file your papers the first person you see is the ATA employee with a form for you to fill out in three days. You can't say no. Those of us running that aren't educators [Cam is a businessman] are not going to be able to sit down and debate ATA people. So I decided to focus on leadership.

Catholics, running in Catholic Separate School Districts, did much of their campaigning and brochure distributions after Mass. As Cam said,

Basically what most people who are campaigning do is get the O.K. from the various churches and they allow you to hand out literature at the end of Mass.

Average campaign costs for the nine were about $900. Two, however, account for the high average. Dave (retired educator) spent quite a bit as he says,

No. I got serious about the election so I spent more. About $1500; maybe $1800. Oh really, $2000. Brochures and signs cost me $1000. Each ad is about $150 and I put in a telephone line.

Dan (a technical college instructor) had a more elaborate plan.

What we did was, we decided on a budget that we thought we could afford and in our case the number we chose was 2500 bucks. And so then we said, given the amount of money, how can we most effectively spend that money? In a nutshell we decided to do two things, with signs and we spent about $700 on signs, and the second item was brochures. The brochures ran around $1200. We printed 15,000 brochures and the 15,000 was largely driven by the budget. I decided to run the night before nominations closed so for example we had to start digging up information, like how many people there were in the ward, and how many voters and all that kind of stuff.

This set of trustee aspirants ran friends and neighbours campaigns, essentially devoid of issues. They presented themselves as friendly, open, family-oriented, concerned citizens. They tried to avoid being dragged into debates or positions on specific issues. Perhaps Amy said it best:

Like we talked about that very honestly at one of our [campaign] meetings and said, "No, don't go make a statement on condoms in the washroom or French Immersion or discipline in the schools or things like that. Because those are the things that people have very definite views about and you're going to make enemies. You really don't want to do that when you are running to get in. If you are faced with it after, fine, but don't bring up issues that are going to finish you before you even get started.

**GETTING READY TO SERVE**

The trustees were asked to reflect on the reasons they had won.

Cam: My name was second on the ballot. That helped. I've lived 25 years in the district and my children went to school and graduated here. I'm a native son, born and raised a Catholic. My father was a well known businessman, a high profile guy.

Dave: Being known. My presence in the electoral district. They know me as a leader; Knights of Columbus, Community League, etc. Neil: As I said we were well known in the schools and in the area through hockey and I think that was what did it.

Their language reflects the genuinely amateur nature of these elections; good-hearted, active people being elected by neighbours and acquaintances who know them in many other contexts. But notwithstanding the issue-neutral nature of the campaigns, the new trustees had views about what they were to undertake.

Sara:I would like to inject a corporate vision.I think in our district it is sadly lacking. An understanding of, I come from [corporation] training that is, marketing skills, effective communication skills, project planning, pay for performance. All these concepts that I grew up with in the culture of the corporate world I find sadly lacking in the educational system. I would like to give that.

Dan: But my view is that in my position within that system, which is as a trustee, that I think that what we can do is to start to undertake some initiatives that will send a clear message to the system that they're going to respect the opinions and the participation of those various stakeholders in the system. Now I think in part that means when we encounter people within that system who are elitist, who are authoritarian, and are unprepared to be more open in their decision making that we have to deal with that and the way that we have to deal with that is either to retrain them so that they're more receptive to those approaches or replace them.

Guy: I think I have a working knowledge of education in general. I consider myself an educator [he is an administrator in a neighboring district] first of all...I understand how education is funded and I'm not pleased with how it is funded.

Amy: From the parent's point of view I know what I want and I think what I want is what the majority of citizens and taxpayers want...I guess by saying how's it going to benefit my kid, I'm in essence saying how's it going to benefit my kid and your kid and the kid next door. I guess basically I'm the parent on the board.

Brian: Actually, I'm not sure what I can contribute. I don't know how difficult it is. I have faith in the bureaucracy in the sense that I know in the end things get done. I know that government moves slowly, probably for a good reason. [He then expressed an interest in seeing a strong vocational/technical curriculum.]

If educational policy is to be driven by clear agendas and clear alternatives among competing points of view, these trustees did not enter the policy arena having given the voters (and themselves) a clear choice of probable directions. They entered the arena prepared to do the best they could with personal experiences as their primary teachers. Having been elected, the new trustees have little time between election and assumption of office. But the fact seemed not to concern them, as almost all expressed a general notion that they wanted to be open-minded when they took office. As Dave said:

No. I had calls from former trustees who wanted to tell me what to do and give their views. I felt it was important to go into this thing open- minded. I tried to say let me look into things and find out.

But they did nose around a bit. Kirk had heard about busing problems during the campaign, so he talked to the busing supervisor. Brian and Guy talked with former trustees. But as Amanda said:

No. I felt I would learn as I went along. I believe in earn as you learn because this is a whole new ball game...I'm doing a lot of listening. What's interesting is that I see it at a different perspective, not just on the side of the parent. I see both sides of the fence and you have to do that, compromise a little.

**ARRIVAL AND EARLY IMPRESSIONS**

With no training and little preparation, the new trustee joins a group that has established administrative leadership and rules, procedures, and norms for doing business. Although Alberta calls for all trustees to be elected or re-elected at the same time every three years, many incumbents are re-elected and are able to pick up where the board had left off prior to elections. These new trustees were thrust into dynamic circumstances. Amy put it most poignantly:

That was very interesting because these people all knew what was going on except [then names the new trustees]. Of course we don't have the history of it and as it turned out it was a very tense, very emotional decision...And the board was split right down the middle. That was very apparent and being the new kid on the block it was almost like choosing teams and we hadn't been around long enough to know which team we were supposed to belong to.

Nonetheless they are expected to act. And they did get some preliminary help.

Dan: That was very through and professional. The day after the election we had a session from 9:00 to 3:00 and went through all the mechanics, like how you're paid, [Alberta trustees can make up to $30,000 a year, depending on the number of meetings they attend] what are the benefits, the parking and the keys. We found out about the staff and the services that are available. We got an orientation manual for the system too. And we all received literature about trusteeship through pamphlets and a book from Alberta School Boards Association...We also found out about some key events like how principals are appointed and how the budgets are developed.

Kirk: Five meetings within a week and a day. It was good, I've got to admit that. It was an information overload but we were introduced to various departments and the county itself. We had two full days on the education sector itself. Reams and reams of stuff they handed to us. Went over their strategic plan. Wrote down a whole bunch of questions and don't know when I'll get answers to them.

Dave: We had three meetings dealing with orientation. We've had lots of stuff dumped on us about demographics, things like enrollment and finance trends. We've also had a number of major reports like the Minister's vision paper.

About ten weeks after elections six of these trustees attended, as well, an orientation session given by the Alberta School Boards Association. The combination of district provided and ASBA provided orientations were generally well received by the new trustees, although they all complained some about the amount of required time.

**EARLY ACTION**

Groups have ways of doing things and the new trustees were expected to discover them. Lutz (1975) generally defined the norms of school boards as consensual voting, avoiding questions in public about the agenda, and learning to work as a team. These are complex tasks and the new trustees experienced some confusion during the early going.

Amanda:I found out they didn't tell us a lot. They sort of assumed that we knew these things. If you didn't know and carry on, you're always going to be stuck because you didn't ask the critical question.

Sara: A couple of times I asked for something and they said "Well, you know we haven't really discussed that. The Board has to decide that and the Board has to decide this." So I'm seeing it as very fluid. For example, on Robert's Rules of Order, in board meetings we don't have to have anyone second a motion. I keep meaning to ask them why don't we do that. [The Alberta School Act provides that a second is not required.]

Kirk: I thought since the board authorized it [a report], we would proceed with it. I didn't realize that it was a question of one group [of trustees] not wanting it.

Amy: I had a substitute teacher call me complaining that she did not have a teacher's guide and I still don't know what I'm going to do about it because I asked the superintendent to check into it. I don't know what the fine lines are here. I don't know whether to mention the lady's name or if that means she's going to get into trouble or exactly what I'm supposed to do. I mentioned it to the superintendent and he looked at me as if I'd just fallen off the turnip truck ...I'm not sure if I should have gone to the superintendent or if it is my jurisdiction to go to the principal and ask if all his teachers have guides.

Dave: Why I don't give myself a higher rating is that I still haven't got a grasp on the mechanics necessary to initiate discussions, effective discussions, on change on some critical issues the board is going to face.

Dan: The difficulty is that the necessary takes precedence over the important. The paper blizzard is part of, not just the necessity, but also strategy in terms of keeping trustees occupied so they don't get involved in some of the broader questions.

New trustees face choices about whether and how to adapt to the on-going ways of the board (if they can learn them) or whether and how to change the board routines. These trustees provide examples of both choices. Amy reported her initial caution:

My father once told me that when you're in a new situation you shut up and listen and I've been following that advice and doing a lot of listening. I find I go into a board meeting with a list of 4 questions on a certain subject and if I keep my mouth shut long enough someone else asks the questions.

Others began to develop strategies for injecting changes into the culture of the board. Dave began to have informal discussions with other trustees:

Secondly is that going to others and informing them of what the issues are and what your thinking is allows the other board members to focus on the issue and think about it...It's a preparation readiness thing which will lead to a better decision.

Amanda had a more direct tactic:

But if that was the case I would want to give them all the information to make them believe the way I did. That's why I'm there. If I'm not doing that, I'm not doing my job.

Neil seemed to have adopted persistence as a tactic:

The board didn't want to deal with it. They said go and do it yourselves. I thought the board should support it and we've moved a little bit but not a lot. I'll bring it up again. It's a continuous thing, something I work on, leave for a while and then work on again. Using a strategy of continuous information will break down some of the concerns they have.

Cam took a direct route to ease his concerns:

I asked the superintendent to FAX me the agenda so there's no 'gotchas'. Sometimes bureaucrats don't give you enough information. That way I'd be ready. Let's get the cards out on the table and be ready. They're not helping us with the management of the information they send us for our meetings. So I'm going to ask them to send it to me more organized.

At this early stage in their terms of office the new trustees were struggling to understand the nuances of board membership, the dynamics of influence, and the limits of authority. They were also making attempts to change board habits and procedures. One can detect a tinge of frustration but most of the new trustees seemed willing to make their gains where they could and bide their time.

**REPRESENTATIVES OF WHOM?**

As was found by Stout, the difference between citizen and trustee can be profound. The U.S. school board members experienced increasing isolation from former acquaintances, and increasing scrutiny of their lives after election. These experiences prompted them to reconsider who it was, after all, they were representing. The sense of rootlessness is exacerbated by the fact that in the U.S., as in this study, candidates ran without clear agendas and with only a diffuse knowledge of who had voted for them.

The newly elected Alberta trustees had similar experiences. As Amy put it:

I find in schools where I used to be all the time before I was elected, people would greet me by my first name and ask how things were going. Now they say good morning and that's all. I think they're afraid they'll slip. After my son's game the parents were going for a drink at the team sponsor's establishment. It's not a classy place. I had two people say, "So this is where our elected officials go down to the bar." It was said jokingly but you have to wonder how much intent is really there. At first I got my bristles up. I drank screwdrivers before I was elected and I'll drink them after. So I ordered a screwdriver but I only had one and I can't guarantee that before the election I wouldn't have had two. Then I changed to coffee and I think I did it because I'm a trustee.

Dave: One trustee wanted to know what could be done in terms of soliciting input from our ratepayers, our parents. That question is still on the shelf. We haven't addressed it. We should so that as individual trustees we don't become square pegs in round holes and be totally out of the picture in terms of how we should be soliciting information. And then we would become subject to pressure from interest groups and become parochial in our view of what is good for education in the district. We must be aware of what is needed in our own wards but we must not lose the district focus.

Neil: We're overly defensive and it gets people upset. We stay away from one of our major partners because of this fear. And that's happened to me. I have this fear that I'll do something wrong by going there...

Amanda: One of the most difficult ones was where a ratepayer wanted me to vote his way and I was really torn. I thought a lot about it the night before and talked to our superintendent about it. He told me it was up to me. I could make a political decision or I could be myself. I told him I had to be honest and be myself and vote the way I felt was right. So I didn't make the political decision. I wanted to please the person but I knew it wasn't the right decision.

Sara: I've become somewhat bitter in that they [voters] clamored and screamed about various issues and I grabbed that and said in the election that we must take this [concerns] from the parking lots and school hallways and Safeway meat counters and address them. I go to meetings and put out hooks and no one seizes the opportunities. And it makes me very angry because their words and their actions are not consistent. That's why the communications package is so critical.

These are hard decisions and lessons for unseasoned citizens, even though they have had practice as community leaders of one sort or another. Now that they are officials their behaviors and decisions are authoritative. That fact adds stress to their lives and helps explain, according to Stout, why they begin to turn more toward other trustees for validation.

**SOME NEW ISSUES**

Complexity

While their perceptions of their constituencies were evolving so were their views about some of the issues. The topics were different, but the message was the same: "Things are more complicated that I imagined."

Cam: Part of that is my roots in the 70s and 80s and because of my business background. You want to cut costs, you cut costs. I'm now saying I'm a believer in things like contracting out...I read an article on the economy and I've changed to the point where I'm saying we must underline the fact that we are all rowing in the same boat and the time is coming when we are going to have the super rich look down on the poor and say too bad we laid you off. Now I think we have to involve the people to solve the problem.

Dave: I'm seeing the board's side of it. Because of my background, I was principal of a school, I thought I knew everything about what a board does, what the issues were, but you get to see the other side. You get to see the side that can have an effect on the district as a whole as opposed to an effect on education in a community. There were avenues as a principal, through the administrator's association, through the ATA, you could influence the direction of education. As trustees you have a much more direct link to influencing education.

Neil: I think I have a better understanding of the complexities we're dealing with in terms of the funding of education and how we can change it. I really believed at the start that we could just change it. We don't want to inflict pain on the children by just changing it. The further you are from the children the more pain you ought to be able to absorb. At first I thought you could make the changes at the school level. Now I think we have to draw back and make the changes at the board and administration levels which will filter down, on a go forward basis, to the classroom.

Amy: That is before I got in and started learning about assessments and M. and E. [Machinery and Equipment] tax and corporate pooling and budgets and negotiating with teachers. All of a sudden whether that kid lives three blocks away and gets picked up by a bus or not is small peanuts. I guess when you get in and see the big picture, I hate to say the big worries, it's a lot bigger and there are a lot of things that seem more important than having one parent angry because of busing or something. That I would have thought was very important las April. So I guess when things get put into perspective there are bigger problems.

Teachers

Although some of the new trustees were former teachers and members of the Alberta Teachers Association, it was of interest that most of the new trustees used the reference "they" when discussing teachers, particularly in the context of collective bargaining. The new trustees were asked to describe their interactions with teachers and any changes in views they might have had. Some of the new trustees had new views.

Brian: When you're in business for yourself you go to the school of hard knocks. If your income is down then your expenses had better go down. Teachers have to learn to work with others and understand their viewpoint. In our district the school board and the teachers have a decent relationship. Some [teachers] are married to farmers and that seems to help.

Amy: I like teachers and sometimes I've been given the impression by other board members that teachers are greedy and you have to watch out for them; they're in it for themselves. I was kind of shocked because from what I've seen of them, there are a few of them who are there to have the summers off and weekends free but most of them are there because they are interested in kids. I still like them.

Sara: I see them more as a disgruntled group than I ever thought they were. Combative, which is interesting because I never considered myself, nor am I now, a teacher basher. I have respect and sympathy for them but I lose it quickly when I am always being pounced upon.

Amanda: Sometimes I was disappointed in what little teachers know about the system. They just do their job and carry on. Others are probably a little keener on knowing the inside. I guess you'll always have that. In our school here we've got some really good teachers. My kids went through the system and we've had some I didn't care for but then I found out too they've been eliminated, either encouraged or coached to leave the system or different things like that. The ATA is extremely strong. It's pretty hard to get rid of teachers.

**UNDERSTANDING HOW THINGS ARE DONE**

As Stout had argued, one of the key tasks of new trustees is to try to understand the school board as a working group and how they fit into the on-going dynamic. One of the questions put to them asked them to talk about how they assessed their own performance in the early stages of their tenures in office. They had no difficulty with the question.

Guy: I'm in the process of developing a good working relationship with fellow board members and the central office staff and others that I work with in an official capacity. As far as performance, I'm not sure how to rate that. I feel comfortable and I have no problems although so far we have not dealt with any controversial issues that have tested my personal principles. To this point it has been very amicable, very official. I haven't done a whole lot. A lot has been routine.

Kirk: I think I'm doing really quite well. That's my own introspection about it. There are a number of people who have said that too. That helps.

Sara: I am satisfied with my performance so far. I have to recognize that change does not occur over night. I've never been a patient person in that regard...have made it a full time commitment, not a hobby. I have done my research and I have brought about completion to all tasks and made a point of not addressing something and then leaving it.

Brian: I asked that question of our superintendent the other day, wondering how I was doing. He just laughed and said all trustees do a good job. So I guess I must be doing a good job.

Amy: I don't feel I've done anything. I'm too timid. I'm too shy...And I don't challenge well. I've watched other people and they have experience. I keep telling myself that. I start to challenge but I'm very easy to get to back off. I'm learning and I have faith in myself that next year I'll be able to challenge and follow it right through. For some reason too I think I'm taking up people's time when I'm speaking and I definitely have to learn that this is my time.

The Board

Although almost all of the new trustees expressed general satisfaction with their own performances, they were less sanguine about the entire board and the way they saw relationships among trustees.

Cam: There are some hidden agendas going on there which nobody has come clean on. There has been no explanation of what this is all about. There is bad blood somewhere and unfortunately when that is going on there is a lot of gotcha being played. You don't know whether you're going to be a victim or part of the accident that occurs.

Amy: No... [the board is not functioning well]. I'm not a member of the group either. I'm a member of a sub-group. It's not a team at the moment. I'd like to think if there was an outside thing happen we could come together. I can't say any of the people don't belong here. None are stupid.

Sara: No, and I don't think it ever will. There is history between individuals. I'd been told some will never vote with someone else and I didn't believe it. It's very true. There are sub- groups but I'm not a member of them. I've been lucky in that I've been able to float around from group to group. That's just the way I like it. I was welcomed to the fold as a new trustee. There's a lot of "me and you" but it's not in that context.

Kirk: The other one I've been trying to counter is the conflict between the urban trustees and the county councilors, who are all trustees, and this is far more difficult because there is a tradition of alienation, a feeling amongst the urban trustees which goes back for a number of years in that they are not as significant players in this whole education scene. The inequity they see is that there is not sufficient attention paid to educational business by county councilors and at the same time they want to control the direction of education, especially in the financial area.

Neil: It's functioning as a group. It's not functioning as a team. I make a very distinct difference in that. It's partly too many individual agendas that have not been formulated into an agenda for the school board. We haven't done that type of planning yet and for three year terms I'm not sure you can. With going to board meetings only once a week for a three year term and with something as diverse as education, I'm not sure you could be functioning as a team. Maybe you should function as a group of individuals with individual agendas.

Dan: It's starting to come together as a group but it's a slow process. In the formation of groups I see two group orientations; namely, the social orientation and the task group...What I see is that we're coming together in a way that is more on the social side. I'll have a better sense of this between now and the fall. If we don't start to tackle some of the major issues by next fall I suspect we will continue as a social group. There are groups within the board that on the political scale range from progressive to small c conservative. The more conservative faction, which with one exception tend to be the older members, are more predisposed to coming together in what I call an old boys type of context. Interestingly enough the newer ones are less concerned about coming together socially than they are in getting on with addressing issues.