

**A HABERMASIAN PERSPECTIVE ON
MORALLY VALID DECISION MAKING
IN SCHOOL-DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION:
A NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR CASE STUDY**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research works toward the systematic development of a Habermasian perspective on moral validity within the context of educational administration. Its central aims are to promote Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality as a suitable moral epistemology for the field and to provide an initial examination of current attitudes toward adopting district-wide educational initiatives in Newfoundland and Labrador from a moral point of view. Habermas's clear specification of conditions necessary for the justifiability of morally valid policy- and decision-making offers a promising avenue for empirical research. This facet of his moral epistemology is an ideal point for researchers to grasp the philosophical framework and apply it to real cases. The current study focuses on how senior administrators at one school-board office interpret the four necessary conditions of practical discourse in relation to their work in adopting district-wide initiatives. The method of investigation is semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviewing. The attitudes and perspectives of the district's Director of Education and three Assistant Directors are explored. These interviews are supplemented with the reflections of a former Director of Education and a former Assistant Director of Human Resources from two additional school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador. Each participant was asked to provide a personal example of the process of adopting educational initiatives and to comment on how they saw each of the four conditions of practical discourse operating within such processes. Key aspects of their responses are presented and implications of their responses for the moral validity of educational initiatives are discussed along with prospects for further research and the education of future administrators.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Jürgen Habermas argues that moral validity within pluralist societies can be established only through engagement in public deliberation or “practical discourse” defined by the following four necessary conditions: all who might make a relevant contribution must be included; all participants must be granted an equal opportunity to contribute; all participants must mean what they say; and all participants must be free from coercion (Habermas, 2003; 1998). These idealizing conditions of practical discourse orient participants toward cooperative attainment of mutual understanding and joint agreement in accord with the discourse principle (D): “Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse” (Habermas, 1990, p.66). As such, the moral validity or “rightness” of social norms and policies is grounded in dialogical norms of communication. These norms are the unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation wherein interlocutors incorporate the insights and perspectives of an ever-widening sphere of contributors in a search for mutual understanding and agreement on substantive moral issues. This rational reconstruction of communicative interaction forms the basis of Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality, more commonly translated as “Discourse Ethics”.

Habermas’s (D) and his identification of necessary conditions of practical discourse are central to the theoretical and practical aims of the current study. As a metaethical principle that is consistent with universal egalitarianism, (D) obligates social cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution through sincerity and reciprocal perspective-

taking. The principle also maintains a purely epistemic ground of moral judgement that, nonetheless, reflects collective moral intuitions about right and wrong. The four conditions of practical discourse, moreover, frame an impartial moral point of view that is supportive of growing concern for equality in educational governance. The conditions, as such, offer an exceptional means of guiding and assessing how decisions are made, conflicts resolved, and norms validated in public education. On this basis, Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality appears as a highly promising moral epistemology for the contemporary field of educational administration.

In light of this promise, the following research undertakes an initial foray into understanding and applying Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality within the formal education system of Newfoundland and Labrador. It opens with provision of converging reasons that support the timeliness of this study. Here, in the introductory chapter, the value and relevance of a Discourse Theory of Morality to the field of educational administration is initially appraised. The second chapter maps the conceptual framework of this study by explaining Habermas's intersubjectivist interpretation of Kant's moral point of view. Specific attention is given to the place and significance of reciprocity and sincerity in Habermas's conception of moral judgement (2.1). The second chapter concludes with an identification and discussion of the four necessary conditions of "practical discourse" (the communicative practice at the core of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality). Habermas views these conditions, in concert with (D), as providing the criteria of a cogent moral epistemology for posttraditional societies (2.2).

In Chapter Three, a review is made of the historical progression of thought that has brought growing concern for incorporating a viable moral epistemology in the theory and practice of educational administration (3.1). In support of the current interest, Peter Senge's influential work on dialogue and discussion is introduced as a prime example of the theorizing of communication practices for the field (3.2). The conditions of practical discourse are then compared and contrasted with these well-accepted views of organizational communication. This allows a case to be made for the value of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality as a moral epistemology that would allow educational organizations to engage in communicative rationality, thereby stepping beyond the instrumental reasoning that characterizes much of the administration literature grounded in systems theory (3.3).

Attention subsequently turns to specifics of the current study as Chapter Four provides a straightforward account of various matter-of-fact aspects of the research. These include ethical considerations (4.1), participant recruitment (4.2), limitations of the study (4.3), method of data collection (4.4), the suitability of in-depth qualitative interviews to the current study (4.5), and a description of how the data were sorted and analysed (4.6). In keeping with specifics of the current study, Chapter Five presents a short series of sketches detailing the professional profile of each of the six research participants. This chapter highlights the wealth of administrative experience represented in the interviews that form the empirical backbone of this study.

In Chapter Six, each of the four conditions of practical discourse is explored within the context of the educational setting. This is where the bulk of the empirical

research and analysis is presented. Each condition is afforded its own sub-chapter, and each sub-chapter works to characterize the general view and attitude of the respondents concerning inclusion (6.1), participation (6.2), truthfulness (6.3), and non-coercion (6.4) in their practice of school-district administration. This contextual characterization of the conditions offers insight into the similarities and differences of understanding the conditions as strategically important to the success of, or epistemically necessary to, the moral validity of policy- and decision-making.

The interviews also provide direction for further considerations in applying a Discourse Theory of Morality to the practice of educational administration and the work of addressing these concerns is taken up in Chapter Seven. The first consideration pertains to doubt regarding the plausibility of Habermas's rational reconstruction of the necessary conditions of practical discourse as universally valid (7.1). The main aim of this sub-chapter is to allay charges that Habermas's project is an inherently Eurocentric view of morality that rests too heavily on a Western understanding of the need for impartiality in moral deliberation. The subsequent section of Chapter Seven (7.2) argues that Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality can provide sufficient space in its application to attend to the context sensitivity of particular cases of moral judgement. Here, the challenge is to demonstrate that Habermas has provided sufficient philosophical resources to satisfy the clear need for mutual recognition and reflexivity in practical discourse, that the symmetry and reciprocity sought in discourse can accommodate a non-leveling intersubjectivity. That such sensitivity is possible within the provisions of Habermas's project is further supported by the introduction of "application discourses"

which are intended to augment the context sensitivity of justificatory discourses in the application of norms to concrete situations. The final section of Chapter Seven considers the practicality of applying counterfactual conditions of communication to the real-world demands of educational organizations (7.3). A conception of “rational trust” is considered and developed in an attempt to bridge the gap between the role of the conditions as regulative ideals and the pressures and constraints of institutional policy- and decision-making. This marks an effort to make feasible applications of Habermasian discourse theory to formal education. It recognizes inherent organizational limits while maintaining the epistemic value of the conditions for securing moral validity.

In Chapter Eight, the final chapter, directions are suggested for further research extending from the current study and recommendations are made for cultivating the moral point of view of educational administrators. Directions for future work are divided into empirical investigation aimed at checking the veracity of decision makers and the barriers to practical discourse that constituents may face (8.1), and critical analysis of purported educational imperatives and supposed understandings as well as the impact these assumptions have on education policy (8.2). The chapter ends with recommendations to enhance the administrative awareness and orientation to the moral point of view through the explicit instruction of moral theory in educational leadership programmes, and by fostering, in prospective administrators, the dispositions appropriate to practical discourse (8.3).

In an era marked by calls for deepening equity and democracy in policy development worldwide (UNDP, 2002), the case for Habermas’s Discourse Theory of

Morality as a theoretical framework for guiding and assessing policy is advancing internationally in many areas of administrative studies, including medicine (Greenhalgh, Robb, & Scambler, 2006) and business (Meisenbach, 2006; Rasche & Esser, 2006). While Habermasian critical social theory has received some attention in the educational literature (Ewert, 1991; Murphy & Fleming, 2009; Okshevsky, 2004), there has been little systematic study of the contribution his Discourse Theory of Morality can make toward securing the moral validity of educational policy- and decision-making (for exceptions see: Foster, 1980; 1986; Johnson & Pajares, 1996; and in a Canadian context see: Harris, 2002; Martin, 2012; Milley, 2002). As his work on communicative rationality forms the core of Habermas's critical social theory, this research seeks to promote and encourage further interest in the potential value of Habermasian discourse theory to critical perspectives on education. Through an investigation of its specific contributions to the context of educational governance, the potential of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality to support critical stances on schooling should appear more evident. An intended aim, as such, is to provide a groundwork for making more equitable and democratic policy decisions in education.

Across Canada, the current trend in public schooling is decidedly in favour of administration and regulation by fewer and larger districts (Wotherspoon, 2009) and recent reforms to the Newfoundland and Labrador school system are consistent with this trend. The resulting centralization of educational authority increases the overall range and impact of district-wide initiatives, making school districts key sites of investigation for any study of decision-making in formal education. This general trend toward

consolidation and centralization of decision-making authority in Canadian schooling gives the current study not only provincial but national relevance as well. Moreover, because consolidation increases the impact of district-level decisions, studies aimed at better understanding the opinions and practices of district administrators are essential in moving the public school system toward more democratic and equitable decision-making practices (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009). In short, school districts matter and will continue to matter with increasing importance as the trend toward consolidation in educational governance continues.

In addition to the widening interest in democratization and the general trend toward consolidation in schooling, researchers in educational administration have also come to recognise the need for greater representation of diversity in, and more equitable procedures governing, normative deliberation and decision-making. Current appreciation of this need has motivated a substantial increase in calls for investigation of fair and inclusive decision-making frameworks in the field. Yet, there are few empirical studies of equitable practices to date and progress in addressing the need for equitable decision making both in the provision of theory and in the reform of practices has been slow to materialize. What is apparent in this as yet unaddressed surge of moral consciousness is that the study of educational administration has reached a tipping point where it can no longer justify or recommend practices solely on the bases of their strategic validity. While this shift can be characterized in various ways and under various headings as a move toward “democracy”, “equity”, and/or “social justice”, it is fundamentally a philosophical reorientation of the study of educational administration – a philosophical

reorientation of the field towards taking “a moral point of view” in a very specific, constructivist sense of the phrase.

The growing interest in the value of Habermasian discourse theory to administrative studies and public governance, the trend across Canada toward consolidation of educational decision-making authority into fewer and larger school districts, and the general progression of thought in educational administration toward consideration of moral decision making offer converging rationales for undertaking the current study. Of these converging rationales, the one most relevant to the present study is the progression of thought that concerns itself with the moral dimension of administrative decisions in education. This is because the field of educational administration, which has long sought a knowledge base to support its practices, now finds itself in a defining moment as substantively moral values of democratic representation and equity in decision making are increasingly driving research into and critique of current practices.

While many in the field are viewing this moral orientation in terms of “democracy”, “equity”, and “social justice”, the current research attempts to support and promote the shift by providing a more direct link between district administration and critical social theory, and specifically by linking the process of creating justifiable district policy initiatives to Habermas’s work on a Discourse Theory of Morality. This approach is not inconsistent with recent interest in communicative rationality in administrative research and the present trend of consolidation in school-district administration. Most importantly, however, the current research offers support for and promotion of the

progression of thought in educational administration in orientating the field toward a well-articulated and philosophically robust moral point of view. That is, this work contributes to the articulation and justification of a moral epistemology suitable to educational administration and research by examining the opinions and practices of school-district administrators in relation to the necessary epistemic conditions of practical discourse as delineated by Habermas.

Chapter Two

Framing Habermas's Moral Point of View

This study attempts to focus some of the critical interest in administrative research on social justice, equity, and democracy to an explicitly moral point of view within educational administration. The specific moral point of view petitioning to join the progression of thought in educational administration, in this case, is that of Jürgen Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality. Notwithstanding his central role in developing critical social theory, the study and application of Habermas's ideas and their impact remains minimal within educational administration literature. As noted earlier, important but rare exceptions include Foster (1980; 1986) and, through his influence, Johnson & Pajares (1996) as well as Harris (2002) and, through her influence, Milley (2002). In the main, these works refer to Habermas's "ideal speech situation" (a term dating back to an early formulation of his discourse theory) as presenting a sound philosophical foundation for educational administration practices concerned with democratic reform and giving voice to people traditionally marginalized in public education. In keeping with the promise of such earlier work, the application of Habermas's discourse-theoretical approach to the problem of establishing the moral validity of educational initiatives offers important guidance and resources for supporting the moral turn presently taking place in educational governance and for revising influential ideas in the current literature, such as Senge's conceptualizations of dialogue and decision making.

Key to the success of this research is, first, the provision and explanation of a suitable moral epistemology and, second, the cogent application of that conceptual

framework to the setting of educational governance. In general, a Kantian moral epistemology gives an account of the nature and criteria of justifiable claims to moral rightness. It outlines what it means to take a moral (and ethical) point of view on a substantive issue in accordance with a perspective of universal egalitarianism. In doing so, it identifies characteristics and competencies claimed as universally necessary and culturally appropriate to making practical decisions. Other familiar examples of moral epistemology include Aristotle's virtue based ethics, Rawls' concept of an overlapping consensus, and MacIntyre's weighing of cultural traditions. Different moral epistemologies offer distinct conceptual schemes, frames of reference, and possibilities for constructing supporting sets of deliberative abilities and dispositions, but they all seek to identify specific criteria for what makes a judgement morally justifiable or right.

From a Kantian perspective, the moral point of view sets formal conditions on practical reasoning with the aim of forming judgements that are impartial and universalizable (Wagner & Simpson, 2009). This approach to practical reason and judgement seeks a moral point of view that is not grounded in morally substantive values but one that can provide the formal resources for assessing the impartial and universal rightness of a norm or policy. In this specific sense, the work of the moral philosopher is in theorizing and reconstructing a necessary or indispensable procedural principle for making moral judgements while recognizing that "The content that is tested by a moral principle is generated not by the philosopher but by real life" (Habermas, 1990, p. 204). A moral epistemology intending impartiality and universality is inherently formal and procedural and this proceduralism is found in the work of all Kantian theorists, including

Habermas's Kantian proceduralism, moreover, is constructivist in that it delineates a procedural practice for moral deliberation but does not supply the deliberative content. This means that moral maxims, norms, and principles are rationally produced or constructed within the formal epistemic procedure (Habermas, 1994). As the central aims of this study are to develop Habermas's epistemological interpretation of practical reason and judgement as a moral framework for educational administration, and to apply his conditions of practical discourse to the current attitudes and practices of select school-district administrators, an explanation of his theoretical position is essential.

Habermas's central contribution to moral epistemology is his insightful reframing of Kant's conception of the moral point of view. At its most general, this reframing may be viewed as moving from an individualist to an intersubjectivist understanding of moral deliberation (i.e., from the philosophy of consciousness to a formal pragmatics of communication) and, as further moving, from a grounding of moral validity in "monological" acts of thought and imagination to a grounding of moral validity in dialogical acts of communicative interaction: "I think that the task of philosophy is to clarify the conditions under which moral and ethical questions alike can be decided rationally by the participants themselves" (Habermas, 1994, p. 175). Habermas makes clear that both these moves are made while attempting to preserve the fundamental insight of Kant's moral theory through a form of communication that "makes possible a justification of moral norms convincing to all participants because of its impartiality" (Habermas, 1998, p. 41). From this vantage point, all moral norms and policies must pass

a test of their impartiality and universalizability by attaining the uncoerced, mutual agreement of all participants under conditions of symmetry, reciprocity, and sincerity.

Habermas credits Kant with “the explication of the moral point of view, that is, a point of view that permits the impartial treatment of questions of justice” across particular perspectives of any single ethical community (1994, p. 24). Kant frames this impartial viewpoint within a single rationally reconstructed principle, the Categorical Imperative. In its formulation as Universal Law it reads: “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law” (Kant, 1993, p. 30). Habermas also argues, differing from Kant, that the competence of an individual testing norms and policies under the Categorical Imperative cannot on its own satisfy the impartial and universal requirement of the moral point of view. As Habermas (1998) insists, “[Kant] tacitly assumes that in making moral judgments each individual can project himself sufficiently into the situation of everyone else through his own imagination” (p. 33). The main problem Habermas sees in testing maxims against the Categorical Imperative in concrete situations is the insufficiency of one’s individual powers of reason, imagination, and insight. The origin of this problem, according to Habermas (1999a), is Kant’s understanding of moral epistemology as “ahistorical” (i.e., failing to recognize the historical situatedness of standards of rationality) and “mentalist” (i.e., drawing upon a false division between an inner mind and an outer world). That is, Kant’s epistemological assumptions about the universal and generally uniform capacity for moral reasoning lead him to argue for the possibility of personal moral objectivity –

an objectivity on the part of the individual that is grounded in what Kant took to comprise transcendental conditions of human reason.

Habermas regards these assumptions as problematic. He attributes part of his analysis of Kant to the original work of Hegel: “The thrust of Hegel’s arguments [against Kant] is that abstract morality demands too taxing a motivational and cognitive effort on the part of individuals” (1999a, p. 150). In terms of cognitive capacities, in societies with homogeneous traditions and values, attempts at impartial and universal imagining about the moral validity of a maxim go largely unchallenged because the day-to-day moral reasoning of individuals can sufficiently meet social expectations. In this sense, the very ethnocentricity of individuals’ moral reasoning can blind them to a full testing of a maxim’s moral validity – as shall be seen below – while simultaneously assuring them that they have made a justifiable moral judgement. In pluralistic societies where a multiplicity of interests and value-orientations often compete, however, individualistic deliberations on right and wrong via self-projection often prove “inadequate” (Habermas, 1998, p. 57). Such deliberations may provide individuals with a greater sense of acting authentically (i.e., staying true to their beliefs) but they cannot assure satisfaction of the impartial and universal requirement of the moral point of view.

To address this inadequacy, Habermas offers an intersubjectively oriented reconstruction of Kant’s moral epistemology: “The good that is relevant from the moral point of view shows itself in each particular case from the enlarged first person plural perspective of a community that does not exclude anybody” (1998, p. 30). Habermas’s work on his Discourse Theory of Morality refocuses the problem of validating moral (and

more generally, normative) claims through the exercise of cooperative reason that is not grounded in a metaphysical or religious foundation, nor in assumptions about “transcendental” human reason in Kant’s sense. For Habermas, “practical discourse” answers the epistemic question of how the justification of moral judgments is possible. “In raising claims to validity, speakers and hearers transcend the provincial standards of a merely particular community of interpreters and their spatiotemporally localized communicative practice” (1994, p. 52). This trans-cultural orientation displays a genealogical link to Kant’s Categorical Imperative. Kant’s Universal Law, however, is reformulated by Habermas into a “dialogical” principle that does not assume people’s private “monological” moral reasoning will lead them to the right decision or provide them with assurance of the rightness (i.e., impartiality and universalizability) of their decisions. Habermas, instead, offers an intersubjective framework for moral reasoning that considers practical discourse as an epistemic requirement for justifying moral decisions. Practical discourse, as such, provides the only available and hence necessary means and assurance that a norm has been assessed from the moral point of view and deemed to be justifiable. McCarthy (as Habermas notes; 1990, p. 67) renders this difference succinctly:

From this point of view Habermas’s discourse model represents a procedural reinterpretation of Kant’s categorical imperative: rather than ascribing as valid to all others any maxim that I can will to be a universal law [as Kant would have us do], I must submit my maxim to all others for purposes of discursively testing its claim to universality. The emphasis shifts from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm. (1978, p. 326)

For Habermas, the reinterpreted principle for testing the moral validity of norms now reads: “A norm is valid when the foreseeable consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientations of *each individual* could be *jointly* accepted by *all* concerned without coercion” (1998, p. 42; 1994, p. 32; 1990, p. 65). Habermas uses this “principle of universalization” (U) to integrate the underlying criteria of a Kantian moral point of view with the practical necessity of discursively testing the impartiality and universality of individual moral reasoning. The communicative aspect of intersubjective testing of norms requires that interlocutors enter into an actual exchange of reasons in support of their moral validity claims. Again, this is because the cognitive content of internal monologues employed in individualist procedures for testing maxims against the (CI) is no longer considered sufficient for determining the universal acceptability of a norm.

Habermas further argues that the moral validity of judgments may be excised from charges of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism even while maintaining a constructivist understanding of how moral norms are constituted. The basis of this argument (which is elaborated in Chapter Seven) rests in a philosophical reconstruction of the conditions that are necessary to reaching mutual understanding and joint agreement through the cooperative use of language. In this way, the unavoidable features of practical discourse provide an impartial orientation in the co-construction and assessment of moral norms. This further line of argument informs Habermas’s response to what may be understood as the posttraditional challenge to morality: moral judgments are valid (i.e., justifiable) insofar as they are mutually and jointly understood and accepted by all

affected from an intersubjective point of view under conditions of practical discourse. Criticisms of his response are considered in Chapter Seven.

Habermas believes, moreover, that beyond articulating (U) as the epistemic criterion for *what* should be considered a morally valid norm, he also needs to argue for criteria identifying *how* the validation of a moral claim is to be achieved (Edgar, 2005). Consideration of the means of validation leads to a serious problem, however. The practical validation of (U) requires a far more refined epistemic principle in order to ground the clause: “*jointly* accepted by *all* concerned without coercion.” That is, insofar as (U) might be misinterpreted as appealing implicitly to substantive moral values of inclusion and non-coercion (on the grounds of “natural equality” or “self-evident rights”, for example), it cannot be presupposed and applied as a justified epistemic principle aimed at establishing moral validity in its required universal sense. The problem Habermas is compelled to address is that in arguing for a means of validating moral norms he cannot presuppose any substantive “self-evident” moral rights without creating a circular, implicitly moral argument. Instead, Habermas must provide a means of validating moral claims that is itself free of moral assumptions or values if his theory is to make good on its claim to universality. That is, to the degree that (U) could be misinterpreted as a moral (i.e., not exclusively epistemic) principle, Habermas is compelled to refine the epistemic principle of his Discourse Theory of Morality more convincingly.

This epistemic refinement is a serious philosophical challenge for any moral epistemology and especially for a putative impartial and universalist moral epistemology

grounded solely in the cooperative use of human reason under communicative conditions of sincerity and reciprocity. It leads Habermas to make a complex yet crucial distinction between two specific modes of communication. This distinction draws attention to the respective aims and purposes of “strategic communication” and those of “practical discourse”. In this sense, Habermasian discourse theory takes a pragmatic turn towards understanding and reconstructing what a moral epistemology should do: it should identify communicative criteria necessary for impartial judgement in “settling questions concerning the normative regulation of our everyday coexistence” (Habermas, 1994, p. 151). For Habermas, the grounds of this explanation are that there are unavoidable epistemic presuppositions for the possibility of establishing acceptable (i.e., morally valid) norms and that these presuppositions are necessary to avoid performative self-contradiction during the justificatory procedure of practical discourse (Habermas, 1999b). This means communication aimed at the normative regulation of everyday coexistence and the construction of a generalizable norm or interest cannot descend into a strategic engagement wherein, for example, the true objective of one or more of the participants is predetermined and hidden from the others or where the interests of a particular group are privileged. Only those acts of communication that support mutual understanding and agreement in the coordination of social activity are considered by Habermas to be genuinely “communicative” and epistemically constitutive of moral validity:

I count as communicative action those linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary aims [i.e. mutual understanding and agreement on harmonizing their individual plans of action arising within practical discourse], and *only* illocutionary aims, with their speech acts... I regard as linguistically mediated strategic action those interactions in which at least one of

the participants wants to produce perlocutionary effects [i.e. preconceived aims and objectives] on his opposite number with his speech acts. (1999b, p. 129)

Most apparent in this basic premise of Habermas's moral epistemology is the need to keep practical discourse free of deception and illegitimate privileging of particular substantive interests over other substantive interests. This is because deception and privileging of one's own interests denies the participants (including the deceiver) any possibility of impartially understanding the merits of others' proposed courses of action. Without this ability to sincerely and collectively assess claims regarding generalizable interests, the participants cannot mutually agree on a norm or policy able to coordinate their actions. This idea is key to Habermas's conception of communicative rationality. Moreover, recognizing that deception in communicating one's ends is usually combined with a strong desire for personal strategic success, the prospects for understanding (and subsequent agreement) are further reduced. Habermas writes, "The teleological actor orientation toward success is not constitutive for the successful accomplishment of processes of reaching understanding, particularly not when these are incorporated into strategic interactions" (1999b, p. 126).

This move of placing the moral point of view squarely within a reconstruction of communicative and discursive rationality allows Habermas to address the challenge of defending his claimed impartial and universal moral epistemology by grounding it solely in the cooperative use of human reason – a use that entails specific conditions for discursive agreement. Habermas can now make a case for practical discourse as a non-morally grounded means of justifying moral-validity claims. In order to secure this case, he makes a specific abduction from (in the sense of formulating a purely epistemic

principle that leaves behind any vestige of substantively moral presuppositions) his moral “principle of universalization” (U) to an epistemic “principle of discourse” (D): “Only those norms can claim validity that could meet with the acceptance of all concerned in practical discourse” (1998, p. 41; 196, p. 107, 459; 1990, p. 66). Habermas’s formalist and proceduralist account demonstrates the prioritization of *how* norms are to be procedurally validated over *what* specific substantive norms come to be validated. Habermas even suggests that (U) is precisely the sort of “moral” principle – in the sense of appearing to retain “a residual normative substance” – that can and should be tested under the principle of discourse (1998, p. 45). This adds credibility to his assertion that mutual understanding and agreement achieved under (D) and the conditions of practical discourse comprise the source and ground of moral validity (as well as legal justice and political legitimacy within democratic societies) (1998).

In the epistemological sense of justifying decisions from a moral point of view, Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality has relevance for educational governance in that (D) offers two important directions for thinking about administering public education in multiculturally pluralist democracies. First, it articulates a universally valid, non-relativistic moral point of view from which educational policy and decisions can be justifiably constructed, rationally criticized, and revised. Second, it offers a practical principle for policy- and decision-making that supports, without being dependent upon, the moral predispositions to inclusion and non-coercion at the core of equitable conceptions of public education. For a field in search of a well-justified and impartial

moral epistemology, (D) and its supporting epistemic conditions present an exceptional opportunity.

2.1 Clarifying the Core of Collective Moral Intuitions: Reciprocity and Sincerity

Of utmost importance to the current research is how a pragmatic differentiation of the basic aims of strategic communication and communication for moral judgement bears upon Habermas's conceptualization of the moral point of view. It is clear that such a point of view must, at a minimum, be inclusive and free of coercion as these conditions are embedded within (U). Why, however, are these conditions identified in the principle of universalization? This question connects the moral point of view directly back to the essential aim of language: reaching understanding. Habermas (1990) explains: "The sought-after moral point of view that precedes all controversies originates in a fundamental reciprocity that is built into action oriented toward reaching understanding" (p. 163). If a fundamental intuition about reciprocity is at the core of the moral point of view, then reciprocal perspective taking must be preserved in the conditions of practical discourse if such discourse is to facilitate mutual understanding. This, Habermas argues, is because reciprocity is part of a "substantive background consensus" on what it means to engage in unbiased moral deliberation (1998, p. 42). Collectively, there exists an intuitive appreciation that reciprocity in the sharing of perspectives is a requirement for impartial and universalist deliberations and judgements. This requirement takes on epistemic meaning when recognized as a necessary presupposition of individuals engaged in the cooperative construction of a generalizable interest. Habermas writes, "a universalistic conception [of morality] that wants to avoid false abstractions must draw

on insights from the theory of communication” (1998, p. 40). From such insights, Habermas concludes that reciprocity is an indispensable communicative condition because it upholds inclusion as a fundamental aspect of the moral point of view: a reciprocal exchange of reasons orientated toward reaching joint agreement cannot take place without the inclusion of all other relevant perspectives.

The condition of non-coercion as it appears in (U) appeals to a somewhat different but equally fundamental aspect of the moral point of view: sincerity. Like inclusion, non-coercion supports a moral intuition at the core of an impartial and universalistic viewpoint and provides an essential condition for reaching mutual understanding and joint agreement. In this sense, non-coercion is both a commonly accepted moral norm and a communicative epistemic norm for which there is no functionally equivalent alternative. On either moral or communicative grounds, therefore, non-coercion is a condition ruling out repression (in the negative) and opening space for a sincere exchange of reasons (in the positive). As a communicative norm, Rehg (1997) summarizes the importance of non-coercion as follows: “Insofar as some participants were kept from expressing their interests, either through internal or external coercion, the other participants could not be assured that their consensus rested on the better argument” (p. 64). Coercion, as such, interferes with the free and undominated mutual understanding of participants, blocking the insight made available only through a sincere exchange of perspectives. From the moral point of view, coercion similarly impedes the fundamental reciprocity needed for impartial judgements. The condition of non-coercion allows for the possibility that an agreement really is based on a cooperative search for an impartial

policy, a policy that is generalizable or universalizable because it is equally in the interest of all. Consequently, the condition of non-coercion is embedded in (U) to promote the sincerity of all participants' self-understanding and self-expression in practical discourse.

Through his restoration of the moral point of view, Habermas identifies shared moral intuitions about reciprocity and sincerity and then makes them epistemically meaningful to the search for joint understanding and justifiable agreement. He has a further objective, however, to provide the criteria of a cogent moral epistemology for posttraditional societies. Toward this objective, Habermas undertakes a rational (philosophical) reconstruction of the necessary presuppositions of argumentation (or discourse) as the indispensable conditions for establishing an impartial and universalist viewpoint. This viewpoint is now framed by the communicative action of jointly searching for understanding and agreement, and its reconstruction is now solely concerned with identifying the necessary epistemic conditions of communicative actions (actions oriented to mutual understanding). Habermas justifies the conditions of practical discourse on epistemic reasons alone by grounding them in argumentation and without reliance on reciprocity and sincerity as substantive moral norms. On the "right" of inclusion and "duty" to be truthful, for example, he asserts:

The content of the universal presuppositions of argumentation is by no means "normative" in the moral sense [because this would lead to a circular justification of practical discourse]. For inclusivity only signifies that access to discourse is unrestricted; it does not imply the universality of binding norms of action. The equal distribution of communicative freedoms and the requirement of truthfulness *in* discourse have the status of *argumentative* duties and rights, not of *moral* duties and rights. (1998, p. 44)

While Habermas's epistemic commitment to "inclusivity" is hereby retained in the practice of practical discourse, his commitment is not kept by presupposing a moral right of inclusion. The same epistemic commitment is kept for "the equal distribution of communicative freedoms" for "truthfulness", and elsewhere, for "non-coercion" (Habermas, 1998, p. 44). For Habermas, these are the epistemic rights and duties that protect all interlocutors from the hidden, strategic, or simply mistaken understandings and intentions of others. This is an important strength of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality: the provision of epistemic "duties and rights" that align with but remain independent from moral intuitions. This is often overlooked by those advancing "critical" perspectives on policy- and decision-making in educational administration in an effort to promote greater equity, democracy, and social justice.

In pluralistic societies, the impartiality and universalizability test required by the moral point of view can no longer be assumed individually from within a community of homogeneous value-orientations. Habermas states this point clearly: "the moral point of view can only be realized under conditions of communication that ensure that everyone tests the acceptability of a norm" (Habermas, 1998, p. 33). This requirement to actually test norms and policies intersubjectively supports the validity of moral judgment through cooperative deliberations on the impartiality and universalizability of contested norms and policies.

By contrast, his formal-pragmatic study of strategic communication reveals an inherent orientation of participants towards "*success*, i.e., the *consequences* or *outcomes* of their actions" (1990, p. 133). Strategic communications, as such, need not be oriented

by reciprocity or sincerity because the underlying telos is fundamentally different. The participants in such deliberations treat each other strategically whereby the coordination of their actions “depends on the extent to which their egocentric utility calculations mesh” (p. 133). The degree of cooperation in coming to accept a proposed action is left up to each individual’s instrumental reasoning. Moreover, collective moral intuitions about reciprocity and sincerity are no longer relevant to the structure of strategic action. In turn, the norms and expectations associated with an egalitarian viewpoint are not binding on strategic communication. Each discussant is free to influence the decision of the others by any means available.

Along with the loss of collective moral intuitions, the epistemically relevant conditions of inclusion and non-coercion can also be set aside or limited. This is because strategic reasoning needs no intersubjective support if the decision maker(s) see(s) no success value in the input of others. As a result, the understanding of those affected by a decision may be limited and the resulting agreement to act may be piecemeal so long as the preconceived end is obtained. Ironically, the strategic use of communication denies all participants – even those whose supposed interests are being promoted – the opportunity to collectively assess initiatives and to make informed choices about what actions are generalizable – i.e., equally in the interest of all. In this sense, the only meaningful presupposition of strategic communication is the eventual compliance of participants with the coordination of successful interactions – satisfying a presupposition that forebears the loss of moral insight and validity.

2.2 The Four Necessary Conditions of Practical Discourse

Thus far, Habermas's clarification of the core of collective moral intuitions and his differentiation between communication oriented toward success and that oriented toward understanding have clearly revealed two conditions necessary to taking a moral point of view: inclusion and non-coercion. It is now possible to extend his formal-pragmatic analysis to identify the full set of specific conditions that must be in effect in order to constitute an impartial moral perspective and justifiable moral judgement. To identify the epistemic conditions necessary to the moral point of view, Habermas uses a philosophical argument to reconstruct the circumstances that must be functioning if participants in discourse are to avoid performative self-contradiction in the pursuit of mutual understanding and agreement.

In order for participants to sufficiently test the moral validity of a norm and, thereby, come to a mutual understanding and agreement on its rightness, they must avoid communicating in a manner that is self-deluding, consciously deceptive, manipulative, or insincere. Moreover, the structure of the discourse must be such that communication is not contrary to the symmetrical and reciprocal orientation of communicating for the purpose of mutual understanding and agreement. In this sense, "the search for performative contradictions provides a guide" to the identification of inescapable presuppositions of argumentation (Habermas, 1990, p. 97). Through this "transcendental" argument, Habermas identifies and reconstructs the formal features of discourse that are universal and unavoidable if interlocutors are to perform in a way that is consistent with practical reasoning. In turn, this search tests the necessity of the "rules" or specific epistemic conditions within discursive validation of substantive moral norms. Habermas

outlines these four necessary conditions of discourse that must be satisfactorily fulfilled in the actual communicative practice of moral deliberation as stated by (D):

(i) that nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded; (ii) that all participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions; (iii) that the participants must mean what they say; and (iv) that communication must be freed from external and internal coercion so that the “yes” or “no” stances that participants adopt on criticizable validity claims are motivated solely by the rational force of the better reasons. (1998, p. 44; 1990, p. 89; Rehg, 2009, p. 135)

Note that, in the first condition of inclusion, Habermas allows that all competent actors affected by a validity claim are in an epistemic position (in principle) to make a relevant contribution and, additionally, that persons relatively unaffected by resulting decisions could, nevertheless, still make a relevant contribution to the discourse. As stated above, each of the four essential features of practical discourse entails specific argumentative duties and rights required to avoid strategic communication in the coordination of social activity and search for a generalizable interest. Moreover, each condition provides assurance against deception, self-delusion, and performative contradiction in the justification of moral norms.

To expect that participants in justificatory discourses “mean what they say”, for example, is an important mark of the “truthfulness” that is necessary when seeking mutual understanding and agreement. Interlocutors cannot identify jointly acceptable moral norms if their exchange of reasons is not made sincerely, under the condition of truthfulness. As an epistemic necessity, there must be an absence of deception in communication if participants are to openly assess their own views and interests and the views and interests of others in the process of constructing a generalizable norm or interest. This need for sincerity in the pursuit of mutual understanding and agreement has

already been recognized in stipulating the condition of non-coercion in (U). At this point in his rational reconstruction, however, Habermas is making an explicit appeal to non-coercion and truthfulness on epistemic grounds, as conditions of sincerity supporting (D). Again, the underlying intuition concerns the need for sincerity in moral deliberations, but here the emphasis is on the epistemic function of conditions that are supposed to guarantee “openness”, “uncoerciveness”, and “transparency” (2003, p. 270). Sincerity in practical discourse, therefore, demands a self-critical attitude in which one is honest “with oneself” and an empathetic exchange of perspectives that is unbiased “toward one another” (p. 269). Hence, truthfulness and non-coercion are the necessary conditions of a discourse aiming at agreement on a course of action that is motivated only by collectively understood and jointly accepted reasons.

Habermas claims the same pragmatic and performative necessity for each of the two additional communicative norms: inclusion and participation. In this sense, the conception of practical discourse may be construed as a justifiably universal reconstruction of the moral point of view in that there exists no equivalent alternative to establishing impartial and objective understanding and agreement on the validity of substantively moral norms (Habermas, 1990). This is because inclusion and participation ensure that the epistemic meaning of reciprocity is respected in that each person affected by a decision understands and is willing to accept the foreseeable consequences for all concerned. As Okshevsky (in press) remarks on inclusiveness, “The giving and evaluation of pragmatic and ethical reasons prevents the marginalization of cultural self-understandings and worldviews held by particular individuals and groups” (p. 25). The

epistemic meaning of reciprocal perspective taking is also captured in the condition of participation. Participation as such, offers non-levelling but symmetrical access to the exchange whereby “everyone possesses the opportunity to address matters under consideration” from the perspective of all involved thereby securing the equal distribution of communicative freedoms (p.25). Again, any act of communication that did not take place under conditions of inclusion and participation would necessarily contradict the aim of reciprocal perspective-taking.

Only cases of discourse satisfying all four specific conditions of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion can produce agreements that carry the force of moral validity as grounded in a collective understanding of what is equally good for everyone. With the identification of these epistemic conditions, Habermas structures his rational reconstruction of the moral point of view on the basis of a formal-pragmatic analysis of practical discourse. His analysis is of “the formal conditions under which speakers can make and understand meaningful utterances” (Baynes, 1992, p. 102). The result is a form of moral deliberation and judgement that is freed from any substantive moral moorings by procedural impartiality but still retains the traditional intuitions about what makes something the right thing to do:

This convergence draws our attention to the fact that the project of a moral world that is equally inclusive of everyone’s claims is not an arbitrarily chosen point of reference; it is due, rather, to the *projection* of the universal communicative presuppositions of argumentation *tout court* [period]. (Habermas, 2003, p.261)

While Habermas argues that inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion are necessary features of practical discourses, or “unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation” (Habermas, 1994, p. 56), he also acknowledges that these features will

be present as counterfactual idealizations in all actual cases of discourse. As a means of critiquing moral judgements, the conditions of communicative interaction operate in a fashion similar to the regulative ideals used in geometry and science. While a rational (philosophical) reconstruction of the moral point of view cannot be derived or verified empirically through the study of concrete language use, the conditions remain necessary features of justificatory discourse that are operational in any specific instance of communicative action. As Thomas McCarthy (1991) observes: “Though never fully actual, regulative ideals are nonetheless actually effective in structuring our practices – in guiding our efforts to fashion just laws and institutions, in shaping our perceptions and criticisms of injustice” (p. 122). The value of the conditions of practical discourse, therefore, is greatest in the guiding and assessment of decision-making practices where the generalizability (i.e., the moral validity or justice) of an outcome is a concern. As such, it is the degree of their presence or absence that impacts directly on the moral validity that can be claimed of or ascribed to a norm or policy.

The idealizing conditions of discourse are always counterfactual but open to improvement and fuller satisfaction in practice. A discourse-theoretical approach to testing norms and policies must actually place the necessary constraints on intersubjective deliberation. Participants must proceed under the presuppositions of practical discourse as necessary conditions for the non-instrumental use of language because the moral validity of contested norms can only be redeemed under such specific features of cooperative constraint. As such, the four necessary conditions of practical discourse operate as signifiers that the moral point of view is unobscured. Satisfactory

fulfilment of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion frame the moral point of view, assuring that the norm in question has been sufficiently tested for its impartiality and universal acceptability.

As the intent of this study is to promote the installation and vitalization of this moral point of view within educational administration, recording the current understanding of the specific features of discourse by senior decision-makers and the role these conditions play in adopting initiatives is an essential first step. This initial research is further necessitated by a near absence of empirical studies of Habermasian Discourse Theory in the context of educational administration. This lack of empirical research seems to underscore the difficulty of conceptualizing just how one is to go about gauging the descriptors often associated with Habermasian discourse. These descriptors include “power imbalance” and “distorted communication” or “unfettered debate” and “unconstrained dialogue” but tend to obscure the sense of communicating within specific conditions essential to establishing the moral point of view. What is an unfettered debate or unconstrained dialogue, for example, and how do these ideas relate to practical discourse?

Given the conditions of reciprocity and sincerity, practical discourse may well be conceived as a mode of communication that is inherently “constrained” and “fettered” for good reasons. This suggests that studying a given decision-making process should take into account the constraints that align with reciprocity and sincerity as-well-as those that do not. In general, however, extant examination of Habermasian discourse in the educational literature does not offer specific direction for answering essential questions

posed from the standpoint of empirical research. Questions such as “What aspects of decision-making should researchers investigate from a moral point of view?” or “How, specifically, should critical research distinguish and affirm morally valid initiatives in educational administration?” are difficult to approach without first identifying the formal features that will need to be considered. While empirical correlates to the epistemic conditions of practical discourse may appear in the literature, their identification and significance as such is rarely made clear.

In approaching such questions, and thereby setting the epistemic criteria of a moral point of view firmly within administration research, Habermas’s clear specification of conditions necessary for the justifiability of morally valid policy- and decision-making offers a promising avenue for empirical research. This facet of Habermas’s attempt at providing a universalist and cognitivist approach to moral epistemology is an ideal point for researchers to grasp the philosophical framework and apply it to real cases. Habermas’s identification of such conditions also marks moral judgement as a rational, public form of communication whereby specific conditions of argumentation must be met in order that agreement on a norm may claim moral validity. In this case, the provision of specific conditions of moral validity presents an opportunity to advance educational decision-making beyond the strategic rationality of systems thinkers, such as Senge, and toward empirical studies of the contribution communicative rationality can make to morally valid decision making. This latter point is due to the fact that provision of specific features of discourse can guide development of constructs that shed light on

deliberative practices. Such studies will begin to operationalize (D) for the particular subject matter of morality in the context of educational administration.

In an effort to move empirical studies in this direction, the current research focuses on the conditions of practical discourse as the most empirically accessible aspect of moral validity (Kelly, 2009b). “Practical discourse is an exacting form of argumentative decision making... it is a warrant of the rightness (or fairness) of any conceivable normative agreement that is reached under these conditions” (Habermas, 1990, p. 198). As such, a claim to the moral validity of an educational initiative can only be constructed under the necessary conditions of practical discourse. The extent of presence or absence of these conditions, therefore, presents a point of access to gauging the rightness (or fairness) of policy decisions. While this newly opened point of enquiry presents many opportunities for a long-term research programme on the role played by conditions of practical discourse in formal education, the current study centers on district-wide initiatives and the opinions of administrators who champion these wide-ranging prescriptions. This is because adopting such initiatives can reasonably be claimed to have the greatest formal impact on normative expectations for students, parents, teachers, and principals – as the constituents most likely to be affected by comprehensive changes to school-district policy.

Chapter Three

Towards a Moral Epistemology in Educational Administration

Current literature on educational administration and leadership is thick with demands for approaches to governance that promote certain substantive moral values. This increasing call for administrators to engage moral values and take a moral stance on policy- and decision-making often involves actively advocating for equity, social justice, and democracy. In keeping with the mounting conceptual interest in morally oriented perspectives, the empirical research is now regularly shaped by normative views and values, and offers a wide array of possible factors that inhibit morally right (i.e., equitable, just, socially just, democratic, and/or impartial) educational governance. These barriers include: inadequate time, ambivalence toward democratic reform, constituents unaccustomed to debating issues in an open forum (“public sphere”), school-community distrust of district administrators, school-board politics, shortage of finances, insensitivity of tenured civil servants, the inordinate number of tasks performed by district leaders, and uncritical interpretations of district policy (Goddard & Hart, 2007; Holdaway & Genge, 1995; Johnson & Pajares, 1996; Kelly, 2009a; Mintrom, 2001; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009; Sheppard & Brown, 2006, 2007; Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009).

The historical progression of thought in educational administration leading to this burgeoning concern for moral approaches to practice is rooted in the field’s deep and continuing quest for an appropriate knowledge base (Culbertson, 1988). From an organization theory perspective, this quest began by following general schools of thought within the social sciences in an attempt to explain, predict, and shape the behaviour of educational organizations. As such, the progression of ideas in educational administration

started with the goal of improving the organizational success of schooling. The current calls for equity, social justice, and democracy in educational governance, however, are now prompting the field to reconsider the success-oriented aspects of organization theory as a model for educational administrators. In turn, the proliferation of equitable, just, and democratic perspectives in the field indicates a need to reassess the progress made towards an appropriate knowledge base and suggests supplementing the current understanding of successful and/or effective educational governance with a suitable interpretation of the moral point of view.

In order to better appreciate how directions taken in educational administration arrived at this point, what follows is a brief background description of the selected work of influential theoreticians from each organizational school and a discussion of the impact of that individual's work on educational administration. From this charting of administrative thought, it will be possible to see how the field of educational administration is now pressed to secure a cogent moral epistemology as an important component of its knowledge base. The work of Shafritz and Ott (1991) is used to initially organize this chapter in that it provides excellent examples of how various schools of thought influenced organization theory and because it suggests how this influence may be read as a chronological progression of educational administration towards adopting a moral epistemology.

After this chronological review, the next section of the chapter introduces Peter Senge's influential conceptualization and presentation of "dialogue" and "skillful discussion". The work of Senge and his colleagues is a prime example of present research

on the forms of communication that operate within organizations. The popularity and influence of Senge's work in educational settings make it especially relevant to the current study. In addition, his provision of essential protocols of practice for these communication types invites a ready comparison with Habermas's practical discourse as a suitable moral epistemology for educational administration.

Such a comparison creates an excellent opportunity, taken up in the final section of this chapter, to explore the worth and implications of Senge's prominent ideas for bringing a moral point of view to school-district policy development. Despite the incredible influence of Senge and his colleagues, and the deep commitment they demonstrate to improving organizational communications, systems thinking and the learning organization model are shown to hold no necessary moral or epistemic commitments. Instead, a contingent view of the conditions of communication emerges that fails to recognize either members of organizations as persons who deserve the unconditional respect of their administrators or the indispensable epistemic conditions of morally valid decision-making discursively understood.

3.1 The Historical Progression of Thought in Educational Administration

Frederick Winslow Taylor's 1916 work on scientific management and management principles are highly characteristic of classical organization theory (Shafritz & Ott, 1991). The focus of the classical period was on maximization of production in order to achieve the economic goals of the organization. Key theories from this period incorporated a systemic and scientific view of organizational research, a belief in the importance of specialization and division of labour, and the necessity of acting in accord

with rational economic principles (Taylor, 1916/1991). A significant effect of Taylorism on educational administration can be found in the still relatively unquestioned top-down hierarchical relationship between school-district administrators, school administrators, and teachers. In formally differentiating the roles and responsibilities of managers and workers, Taylor established a structural order for organizations that resists collaboration and open dialogue. Another influence of Taylorism and scientific management on educational administration is a preoccupation with efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of standardized curricula (Wotherspoon, 2009). By concentrating on efficient and effective management, administrators tend to prioritize the on-task performance of teachers and students while minimizing the interpersonal aspects of schooling (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009).

The neoclassical period of organization theory offers extensions of, and reactions to, the oversimplistic mechanistic views of the classical tradition. Neoclassicalists raised complicated issues concerning personal relations, power and politics, and organizational culture that foreshadowed many future schools of organization theory. Herbert Simon, for example, argued in 1946 that much of the organizational literature of the time did little but proclaim a series of contradictory and anecdotal proverbs of administration. In an increased effort to maximise the efficiency of organizations, Simon identified two constraints that impeded the ability of an individual member of an organization to operate effectively: “(a) limits on his ability to perform and (b) limits on his ability to make correct decisions” (Simon, 1946/1991, p. 110). With these observations, Simon compelled organization theory into research concerning human physiology, learning, and

cognition. Within educational administration, the greatest impact of Simon was felt in the area of decision making, through his exploration of the effective limits of individual rationality (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009) and the coining of the term “satisficing” to describe when “no best solution exists to any given problem, but some solutions are more satisfactory than others” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 19). Simon asserted that, due to the cognitive limits individuals bring to decision making, the locus of a decision must be carefully considered and aligned with the knowledge and experience of the decision maker. However, direct transfer of Simon’s work on appropriate location of decision making within organizations to the hierarchical structure of formal education often results in the further isolation of administrators in their assumed role as executive decision makers (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009). That is, the accountability structure suggests an autocratic style of leadership wherein followers may be consulted for their knowledge and expertise, but the authority to make decisions is held securely by the administrator.

It is arguable that Abraham Maslow’s *A Theory of Human Motivation*, first published in 1943, is the most influential of all works produced by the organizational behaviour school. In particular, his construction of a hierarchy of basic needs is still taken to be essential material for students of educational administration (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The hierarchy assumes that “man is a perpetually wanting animal” and in constant pursuit of fulfilling five basic needs; these are, in consecutive order: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943/1991, p. 171). Applications of Maslow’s hierarchy in approaches to educational administration involve seeing needs in relation to

motivation. Unfulfilled needs can lead individuals to neglect the duties and responsibilities of their position and resist change and innovation. As such, administrators should be aware of potential gaps in the need fulfillment of students, teachers, and staff and adjust their behaviour so as not to exacerbate deficiencies or frustrate fulfillment of need satisfaction (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). For example, a teacher who displays a high need for safety may resist new teaching practices or curriculum unless reassured of her or his job security. Maslow's interest in motivating the desired behaviour of organization members is a prototype of the psychological perspective taken by the organizational behaviour school. This school also inspired Chris Argyris (1993) whose work on action science led him to observe ineffective learning in organizations that he analysed using his concept of "defensive routines" (p. 15). This concept refers to any policy or action that insulates members of an organization from perceived threat. Argyris's work has penetrated educational administration, both directly through his own studies (Argyris, 1993), and indirectly through the writings of influential educational authorities including Senge (2006), Fullan (2001), and Leithwood & Steinbach (1995).

Modern structural organization theory, which follows the organizational behaviour school according to Shafritz and Ott's (1991) near-chronological historical account of organization theory, is concerned with the vertical and horizontal structure of organizations and the interrelation of well-defined units in the production process. Modern structuralists operate on four basic assumptions: organizations are rational undertakings that achieve their best results through systems of defined rules and formal authority; every organization has an optimal structure for achieving its ends; specialized

divisions of labour increase quality and quantity of production; and structural flaws cause most of the problems in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 1984). Very much in keeping with these assumptions is Blau and Scott's (1962/1991) conception of formal organizations, but with the added caveat that "In every formal organization there arise informal organizations... [wherein] unofficial norms are apt to develop that regulate performance and productivity" (p. 214). In educational administration, it is widely accepted that the unofficial norms inherent in the informal organization of schooling can seriously impact policy implementation or other initiatives (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). For example, the hierarchical blueprint on which most educational organizations still operate gives rise to norms of communication that discourage open dialogue between district administrators, principals, and teachers (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009).

Katz and Kahn's theorizing of "open systems" from 1966 typifies the influx of new ideas that entered organization theory after modern structuralism. For Katz and Kahn, "The general principle, which characterizes all open systems, is that there does not have to be a single method for achieving an objective" (Katz & Kahn, 1966/1991, p. 278). The open systems perspective transposed ideas from biology and the physical sciences to the study of organizations as complex, dynamic, and adaptive systems (Senge, 2006). In particular, open system theory emphasizes the interdependence of the organization on the wider environment. This view is in vivid contrast to earlier organization theory, especially modern structuralism, which understood organizations to be self-sustaining, fixed, and closed arrangements. The profound influence of the open system concept and other organic conceptions of organizations can be found in a wide

range of current educational administration literature, including Woods' (2004) conception of "organic governance", Spillane's (2005) use of "three types of interdependencies identified by Thompson" (p. 146), and Hoy and Miskel's (2008) affirmation that: "Open-systems theory is our general framework for exploring the conceptual foundations of educational administration" (p. 20).

At this juncture in the historical development of organization theory, Shafritz and Ott (1991) mark a sharp turn of attention toward what they describe as a "multiple constituencies" perspective (p. 343). To this point, theorists and researchers of organizations have assumed that their work should seek to identify the nature of various cause-and-effect relationships within organizations as well as between organizations and their environment. On this assumption, organizations are generally taken to be unified, stable, and purposeful in working toward definable goals. For the most part, this approach to the study of organizations has itself assumed a position of value neutrality in relation to establishing empirical facts about the function of organizations, measuring structural performance, and applying a knowledge base to create effective and sustained change. With the arrival of a multiple constituencies perspective comes the proposal of alternative arguments positing that the operation of organizations, as well as the various theoretical perspectives used to understand them, is not value free, unified, or neatly parsed.

Every organization may, instead, be viewed and shaped from a multiplicity of perspectives. Greenfield (1973) writes, "organizations are ideas held in the human mind, sets of beliefs – not always compatible – that people hold about the ways they should relate to one another" (p. 560). On this account, an organization is as diverse as the array

of interests and objectives held by its constituents and the study of organizations, as such, resists simplistic rationalization of spurious functions and structures. This view of the organization further voices an innovative proposal that meaningful theory and research should acknowledge, document, and address the role of specifically moral values in organizational life. Keeley (1983/1991) states this idea well: “theories imply not only how a puzzling phenomena *can* be explained – an empirical matter – but what *needs* to be explained – a normative matter” (p. 362); and laments that “the analysis of moral rights and obligations has not attracted much serious attention in organizational theory” (p. 367).

This new research focus on understanding the complex interests and meaningful interactions of various organizational stakeholders soon takes to investigating constituent uses of power. In his 1981 analysis of the key role of power in decision making, Pfeffer recognizes power as the ability to bring about a desired outcome in a specific social relationship and, by natural extension, political activity “is focused around the acquisition and use of power” (Pfeffer, 1981/1991, p. 408). This insight frames the view from a power and politics perspective on organization theory. For Pfeffer, power and its political pursuit are largely unacknowledged in the study of organizations, nor do organizational actors give much consideration to who holds power and how it is used within the organization. Because of the veiled nature of power, dominant organizational ideals such as efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness are rarely examined or challenged.

The mantle of power in organizations also functions to give decisions an appearance of rationality when, in essence, many decisions result from what is described

as *A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice* (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972). This model understands organizational decision making to be an activity that can be undertaken only by those available and that generates solutions determined in large part by ambiguous information and random streams of events. According to Pfeffer's (1981/1991) reading of Cohen, March, and Olsen's (1972) garbage-can theory, it is only in retrospect that many organizational decisions appear to be the result of well-understood processes that involve planning, rational consideration, and regulative procedures. This appearance, moreover, is further legitimized when powerful actors in the organization condone the process, and support and abide a decision. It is difficult to know the degree to which the garbage can model is representative of educational decision making or the influence it has had as a topic of educational administration research. Undoubtedly, this garbage can contains remnants of truth and the model is consistent with the way in which at least some decisions are made in education. Perhaps, the most noteworthy example of its upshot is Hoy and Miskel's (2008) warning that "The garbage can metaphor is a description of how decisions sometimes occur; it is not a suggestion for action" (p. 345).

A late but influential arrival to the progression of ideas in educational administration is that of organizational culture. Shafritz and Ott (1991) describe organizational culture as "the unseen and unobservable force" that is always behind the activities that can be seen and observed in an organization (p. 481). Schein (1985) provides a more comprehensive, formal definition of this force which includes the collective values, conceptions, and behavioural norms held by members of an

organization. The key aspects of organizational culture, for Schein, are the basic assumptions and beliefs that are adopted and shared by each member of the organization, but that operate unconsciously and without critical examination. In this sense, the organization's culture is a learned and complex product of group experience that can be modified or unlearned only under the right conditions. Over time, however, an organizational culture can become so ingrained in its members that, even when change is necessary to save the organization, that crucial change may inadvertently be blocked. From an organizational culture perspective, such situations require a transformational leader (Bass & Riggio, 2005; Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Duke, 1999) capable of re-envisioning the organization and transforming the culture at its deepest level (Schein, 1985). Though it is perhaps the most controversial perspective on organization theory (Shafritz & Ott, 1991), organizational culture is a conceptual instrument that has clearly resonated in the field of educational administration (Fullan, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Hall & Hord, 2006; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Sarason, 1996; Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009; Young, Levin, & Wallin, 2007).

Since the late 1970's, innovative and alternative directions sought in organization research have clearly impacted the theory and practice of educational administration. In particular, considerable and crucial reframing of educational policy and decision-making has taken place around accounting for the diverse interests of all constituents, recognizing the influence of power and politics in schooling, and understanding the organizational culture of various educational sites. It is still an open question, however, whether the progression of thought in educational administration will complete a full moral turn made

available through these new directions in research. A commitment to this turn would bring formal recognition of an impartial point of view squarely to the center of leadership and governance practices in education.

What is clear is that educational administration literature, compelled mainly by a prescriptive concern to promote what is normatively “right” and critique what is “wrong”, now takes a visible and enduring interest in the role of values, power and politics, and organizational culture (Foster, 1986; Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1990). These new approaches to the study of educational governance have, moreover, been key in advancing implicitly moral issues of equality, social justice, and democracy in the field (Beane, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Hope, 2012; Lees, 1995; Martin, 2013; Milley, 2002; Pinto, Portelli, Rottmann, Pashby, Barrett, & Mujuwamariya, 2012; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009; Stevenson, 2007). In this sense, the current work is consistent with the increasing concern for establishing a moral epistemology that gives an account of the nature and criteria of justifiable claims to moral rightness in the practice of educational governance. By articulating and examining what it means to take a moral point of view in Habermas’s sense on substantive issues, the present research takes its place in the progression of thought in educational administration towards identifying and adopting a suitable moral epistemology.

3.2 Senge’s Influential Conceptualizations of “Dialogue” and “Skillful Discussion”

With more than one million copies in print, Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*, first published in 1990 and revised in 2006, remains highly influential in educational administration. This work, as well as

Senge et al.'s *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, published in 1994, provides an excellent theoretical backdrop to a more focused discussion of ideas influencing educational administrators as they seek a means of addressing the progression of thought and moral turn their field has taken. The extent of *The Fifth Discipline's* influence can be gauged by its direct adaptation in *Schools that Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares about Education* (Senge et al., published 2000, revised 2012). As Senge's main contribution to educational administration, "learning organizations" are defined as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire" (Senge, 2006, p. 3). Administrative interest in building educational learning organizations is often supported by statements such as Fullan's identification of school development as "changes in schools as institutions that increase their capacity and performance for continuous improvements" (Fullan, 1992, p. 103).

One way to interpret the popularity of adapting Senge's work to educational administration is to suggest it exemplifies the field's present quest for organizational frameworks that recognize and value the orientations and interests of all constituents (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009). In the current study, for example, respondents cited the work of both Senge and Fullan and used the terms "learning organization" and "organizational learning" in describing the most advantageous models of school district development as seen from the perspective of multiple constituencies. Senior administrators in this study acknowledge the value of the learning organization model to increasing the involvement of members of the school system in achieving initiatives,

furthering evidence that Senge is routinely granted the status of “guru” by teachers and practitioners of educational administration and ensuring his sway on current and future generations of administrators. It is important, therefore, to see if Senge’s ideas offer meaningful resources for addressing the progression of thought and moral turn taken in the field of educational administration; to see if Senge and his colleagues’ thoughts can support giving serious attention to the analysis of moral rights and obligations in educational organizations (Keeley, 1983/1991).

Senge and his co-authors’ presentation and development of the learning organization is vast. At issue for the current study is Senge’s narrower explanation and promotion of particular modes of linguistic communication within the context of public education. For Senge, the specific types of communication that are essential to forming and shaping learning organizations, and therefore indispensable to educational learning organizations, are “dialogue” and “skillful discussion”. Moreover, Senge’s influential conceptualization and presentation of dialogue and skillful discussion, in addition to his provision of essential protocols of practice for these communicative venues, invite a ready comparison with Habermas’s practical discourse as a suitable moral epistemology for educational administration. Such a comparison creates an excellent opportunity to explore the worth and implications of Senge’s prominent ideas for bringing a moral point of view to school-district policy development.

In his presentation of the learning organization, Senge draws attention to the kinds of communicative practices that commonly occur within organizations by focusing on various forms of discourse. For Senge, the general parsing and analysis of discourse is

integral to developing a wider understanding of, and an improved capacity to build, learning organizations. Senge's analysis draws a clear distinction between "dialogue" and "discussion" and, based on the work of David Bohm with significant input from Isaacs (1999), begins by marking each as a distinct but mutually important aspect of discourse.

Senge explains:

...discussion is the necessary counterpart of dialogue. In a discussion, different views are presented and defended, and as explained earlier this may provide a useful analysis of the whole situation. In dialogue, different views are presented as a means toward discovering a new view. In a discussion decisions are made. (Senge, 2006, p. 230)

The difference between dialogue and discussion is primarily a matter of the function each can perform within the learning organization. Dialogue is a means of exploration and discovery – it provides members of the learning organization with a process for openly exploring their own and others' values, beliefs, and assumptions. The communication that takes place during dialogue should be a free exploration that brings out "the full depth of people's experience and thought, and yet can move beyond their individual views" (p. 224).

With this aim, Senge provides the following three essential protocols for dialogue: "1. all participants must 'suspend' their assumptions, literally to hold them 'as if suspended before us'; 2. all participants must regard one another as colleagues; 3. there must be a 'facilitator' who 'holds the context' of dialogue" (p. 226). When a dialogue meets these three criteria, the participants are reasonably assured that their values, beliefs, and assumptions may be freely expressed without judgment by others. In this way, defensive and protective attitudes can be diminished, facilitating non-coerced and truthful

exchanges with the possibility of discovering deeper insights into the workings of the organization (Senge et al., 1994). Moreover, gaining such insight into people's views of the organization through dialogue is essential to participation in team learning: "The most effective practice we know for team learning emerges from the conversational form known as dialogue" (Senge et al., 2012, p. 116). In turn, the capacity for engagement in team learning is crucial to developing learning organizations. As such, it is difficult to overstate the importance of dialogue in Senge's collaborative model of the learning organization.

Discussion or more specifically "skillful discussion", by comparison, is a means of team decision-making – it provides members of an organization with a process for presenting, explaining, and defending their positions on particular issues so they can reach agreement (Senge et al., 1994, p. 385). This form of discourse is the way in which learning organizations converge on a conclusion or course of action; it is the means of reaching decisions and formulating plans. Senge and co-author Rick Ross are clear on this point, and provide an extended articulation of possible decision-making procedures and protocols that fit with the learning organization model. Their analysis of decision making as "skillful discussion" outlines an analogy between traditional discussion and game playing: "the purpose of a game is normally 'to win' and in this case winning means to have one's views accepted by the group" (Senge, 2006, p. 223). This analogy provides meaningful insight into the individually oriented consensus that characterizes much decision making within organizations and resonates well with the experiences of many teachers and administrators. Senge and Ross's point is that this traditional approach

to organizational decision-making is unproductive as it does not allow for reasoned evaluation of different positions because competing interests reduce communication to a game of strategy. Although this aspect of discourse “can be useful”, Senge is quick to emphasize that learning organizations need “a different mode of communication” (p. 223). This, again, is because the patterns of communication that characterize traditional discussion are focused on winning, and trying to win discussions through debate-style communication is incompatible with the open exchange of ideas and collaboration essential to learning organizations. Senge further argues this point by noting that when members of an organization approach communication with the attitude that there must be winners and losers, important norms of discovery and effective decision-making such as coherence, truth, and freedom of expression are often sacrificed.

It is clear from this analysis that, for Senge and his colleagues, although both are essential components of learning organizations, the ground rules and goals of dialogue and skillful discussion differ; dialogue is the preferred mode of communication for exploration, discovery, and insight, while skillful discussion is a more intentional form of communication wherein members of learning organizations seek closure on an issue. What is clearer still is that Senge views the need for establishing shared meaning and understanding as essential to both forms of communication. In this sense, the protocols for dialogue and skillful discussion both specify the importance of truthfulness and non-coercion as key features of communication within the learning organization (Senge et al., 1994). There is a sense as well that the forms of communication appropriate for learning organizations are inherently reciprocal – requiring a balance of perspectives and a feeling

of security so that all participants “can speak freely” (Senge et al., 1994, p.390). As such, Senge and his colleagues offer a new “dialogic” direction for organizational communication that can stand over and against conventional modes of communication, such as debate or traditional discussion, that do not encourage genuine discovery, understanding, or agreement (Isaacs, 1999, p. 339).

On the above reading, the intrinsically dialogic formulation of communication for learning organizations appears consistent with Habermas’s clarification of the core of collective moral intuitions. This suggests that the reciprocity and sincerity of dialogue and skillful discussion as presented by Senge and his supporters have much to offer a moral view of public education grounded in communicative practices. If the intention of Senge’s dialogue is to reveal what members of an organization really believe and value, then this form of communicative practice comprises an important step toward morally valid decisions. Dialogue may act as the initial or informal means of finding the varying and common interests of members of an organization. This is because Senge’s conceptualization of dialogue exemplifies a participatory, truthful, and non-coercive approach to communication within organizations. Its potential for the administration of public education is, therefore, important to explore and its influence is arguably positive from a moral point of view consistent with communicative rationality.

Moreover, as dialogues progress or coalesce into communication aimed at formal decision-making, the potential moral relevance of skillful discussion becomes evident. Decisions about policy and an educational organization’s courses of action need to be made and it is at this point, when initiatives and governing prescriptions are formed, that

the differing beliefs and values held by individual members of the school system – especially its formal leaders and administrators – are most likely to exert their influence. If such initiatives are to align with shared moral intuitions, then the dialogic conditions outlined by Senge will need to be maintained beyond the discovery process and into the actual decision making. In short, and in terms of moral validity, Senge’s dialogic protocols must extend past their role in facilitating understanding and into the arena of formal agreements and this, in turn, requires an ongoing orientation of all members of educational learning organizations towards reciprocity and sincerity.

In its most general form, “dialogue... is a conversation with a center, not sides... in which people think together in [a reciprocal and sincere] relationship” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 19). It involves acts of reciprocal perspective-taking where judgements follow not from the monological viewpoint of a single agent but from seeking to jointly establish a universalizable norm or policy in the equal interest of all. On these grounds, it should not be surprising to find a certain amount of overlap in the work of Senge and Habermas. Recall that Habermas interprets Kant’s approach to moral reasoning from a dialogical perspective, he argues for an additional requirement of intersubjective dialogicality that goes beyond individual moral reasoning. For Habermas, moral reasoning and judgement must be submitted for public examination in practical discourses where each participant gives their perspectives on an issue freely and without coercion. This further requirement of actually engaging with the other is viewed by Habermas as epistemically necessary. It acknowledges an irreversible move towards the “detranscendentalization” of reason (Habermas, 1999b) that emphasises the fallibility of subjective understanding and

presupposes that “no one can speak for another through recourse to a realm of a priori reason” (Rehg, 1997, p. 194).

Habermas asserts that moral reasoning requires an intersubjective cross-testing of norms from within an impartial and universally oriented point of view. A full test of the rightness of a norm is possible only through a cooperative dialogue between real interlocutors. Rehg summarizes these aspects of Habermas’s discourse theory of morality as follows: “Although Habermas (like Kant) conceives reason as an elevated source of unity among persons that goes beyond desire and interest, the individual has access to moral reason in its full sense only through dialogue” (Rehg, 2003, p. 85) and “[For Habermas] individuals ‘take’ the moral point of view precisely insofar as they give themselves over to such a process of dialogical interchange, to the give-and-take of opinions striving toward consensus” (Rehg, 1997, p. 76). Rehg concludes that Habermas’s project rests on a “dialogical conception of moral reason” (Rehg, 2003, p. 85). In his own work from the same period, Habermas posits the finer point of “mutual understanding” as the central aim of reciprocal perspective-taking undertaken in actual instances of dialogical interchange: “In dialogue, interlocutors want to *understand* each other and, at the same time, to reach a mutual understanding about something, that is, to come to an agreement” (Habermas, 2003, p. 56) and “‘Dialogue’ is seen as the model for an exchange between interlocutors reaching mutual understanding about something in the world” (p. 71).

In this regard, Habermas views sincere attempts at mutual understanding and joint agreement as a critical link between the impartial reasoning central to a discourse theory

of morality and the reciprocity and intersubjectivity of communication generated by dialogue. Hence, a fundamental agreement with Senge rests on Habermas's reading and reconceptualization of Kant that provides a wholly dialogical conception of reason whereby the conditions governing practical discourse are rationally reconstructed from the unavoidable presuppositions interlocutors have to make when engaging in a search for mutual understanding and agreement. As such, Habermas provides an intersubject-oriented and cooperative analysis of full moral reasoning that is similar in its initial appearance to Senge's dialogic modes of communication in which people think together.

3.3 The Conditions of Practical Discourse and Senge's Point of View

Clearly, Senge's ideas on how best to operate an organization have progressed a long way from Taylorism and notions of scientific management, and his conception of learning organizations is strongly aligned with a view of school districts as open systems that perform better through the collaborative engagement of all constituents (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009). Whether, however, Senge's explanation of the role of dialogic communication in learning organizations offers sufficient resources for constructing a moral epistemology for public education remains an open question. The epistemic conditions (or protocols) of dialogue and skillful discussion do appear consistent with the progression of thought in educational administration and with collective moral intuitions as articulated by Habermas. Moreover, there are examples in the literature that suggest the merit of viewing Senge's conception of "dialogue", in particular, as a moral means of decision making because it "demonstrates respect" for the "fundamental values", "equality", and "perspectives" of all members of the school system across all levels of the

administrative hierarchy (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009, p. 49). On this interpretation, Senge's dialogue makes individuals feel that the "equality of all participants is universally understood [and] they are valued and respected for their views" (p. 19). Nevertheless, such interpretations tend to preconceive dialogue as a substantively moral means of making decisions. As such, Senge's decision-making process is supplemented with a set of moral convictions that are, in turn, meant to secure the moral validity of the outcomes.

In all fairness, however, it should be said that Senge's dialogic theory is not proposed in order to be adopted as a moral epistemology for learning organizations. While it may lend itself to moral intuitions, the aim for Senge and his colleagues is to make educational leaders aware of the increased effectiveness and success made possible through dialogue and skillful discussion in the context of the learning organization model (Green & Etheridge, 2001; Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009). This aim, however, leaves the learning organization theorists' analysis of dialogic communication underdeveloped from a moral point of view specifically because the impartiality of moral policy decisions is not sufficiently addressed. This point and its implications are clarified in the following section by making a close comparison of the dialogic protocols presented by Senge and his colleagues with the necessary conditions of practical discourse. In this way, Senge's highly influential ideas can be shown to support practical discourse as an important mode of communication for learning organizations while, at the same time, the suitability of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality as an impartial (i.e., moral) epistemology for educational organizations can be further advanced.

Initial comparison of Habermas's practical discourse with Senge's analysis of dialogue as a practice inherent in learning organizations suggests somewhat differing purposes for each mode of communication. For Senge, dialogue amounts to a collaborative and collective discovery of beliefs and values within the organization. For Habermas, practical discourse is epistemic to the validation of claims to moral justifiability and rightness; hence determining the validity of moral norms is necessarily discourse-dependant. The differences should neither be exaggerated nor minimized. Yet, if discovery is understood as an important precursor to validation through discourse, then common ground may be seen to exist between the two frameworks at least at the level of their dialogic genealogy. The contiguity of discovery and validation suggests a common intent whereby each mode of communication is undertaken in order to discover and clarify the worldview of participants, later allowing the rational force of the better reasons to convince all participants of the rightness of their ensuing decisions.

There are also parallels between the respective sets of conditions under which discovery and assessment are to take place. There is a sense within both frameworks, for example, that discovery and assessment should be collective and cooperative undertakings. When Senge states that "all participants must 'suspend' their assumptions", the premise of this condition is that, by "being aware of our assumptions and holding them up for examination", collective agreement can be sought: that the truth and coherence of the participants' assumptions can be explored collectively (Senge, 2006, p. 226). Senge's second condition of dialogue then takes up the need for uncoerced cooperation, "Dialogue can occur only when a group of people see each other as

colleagues in mutual quest for deeper insight and clarity” (p. 228). Colleagues must be willing to cooperate in the exploration and testing of assumptions, even when faced with differences of view. In the same vein, Habermas claims “The practice of argumentation sets in motion a *cooperative* competition for the better argument, where the orientation to the goal of a communicatively reached agreement unites the participants from the outset” (1998, p. 44). This is why communicative acts must be free from deception and coercion and why Habermas’s third and fourth conditions of practical discourse address these concerns. Deception and coercion can tip the communication away from cooperative exploration of what is equally in everyone’s best interests. Only in the recognized absence of these factors can participants reach mutual understanding and agreement based solely on the giving of reasons.

Still, meaningful distinctions exist. From the perspective of establishing moral validity, it seems the most significant difference between these two dialogic conceptions of communication is captured in the single phrase “relevant contribution” from Habermas’s first condition of practical discourse. For it is in the interpretation of this phrase that much of the case for satisfying either the counterfactual conditions of moral validity or the contingent conditions of strategic validity appears to rest. If, for example, the senior administrators of an education system hold a moral imperative of student learning as the purpose of their organization, then dialogue around new initiatives need only satisfy inclusion on the basis of relevant expertise in the effective teaching of students. From the perspective of establishing the protocols conducive to strategic thinking, there is no epistemic right of inclusion for all affected in dialogues on

educational initiatives. In such cases, it may be assumed that instrumental reasoning is all that is required for the successful implementation of the imperative.

Notwithstanding the limited interpretation of inclusion that suffices for strategic thinking, there may exist organizational norms of inclusion that warrant prudential consideration by senior administrators and some educational leaders may well “practice the art of inclusion” out of a sense of moral respect for their constituents (O’Toole, 1996, p.37). If, however, the intent is to establish the moral validity of an initiative, then all who might conceivably be affected by the initiative have an epistemic right of inclusion. From the epistemological perspective of practical discourse, as a rational reconstruction of the impartial point of view, this right of inclusion is necessitated by the norms of argumentation. All who might be affected by a policy or decision have a right to participate in the consideration of its adoption or rejection because all affected persons, and possibly others as well, may have a relevant perspective to bring to its understanding and assessment. Only by satisfying this condition can the impartiality of a proposed policy be fully tested through communicative rationality.

It is key philosophically, therefore, to distinguish between grounding the criteria of a moral epistemology (i.e., the conditions of practical discourse) in presupposed moral norms or in universal, epistemic norms of argumentation. As already discussed, Habermas makes this distinction to avoid having practical discourse appear premised on any substantive moral norms (such as “inclusion” understood as a right to equal respect), which would beg the question of its derivation as a universal moral epistemology. The aspect of this distinction that matters most epistemically, moreover, is the possibility of

incorporating new perspectives relevant to establishing what is in the general interest of all constituents. Administrators may promote inclusive dialogues to abide by the principle of equal respect but, for Habermas, the condition of inclusion in practical discourse is an epistemic necessity. The degree to which Habermas successfully argues for a non-moral grounding of practical discourse on the merits of avoiding performative self-contradiction in the epistemic practice of argumentation is, therefore, highly important. As a key philosophical underpinning of practical discourse, Habermas's universal-pragmatics marks it as a distinctly separate and philosophically robust mode of communication for the purpose of establishing moral validity in comparison with Senge's dialogic enterprises. As such, the necessity of the conditions of practical discourse, and inclusion in particular, rests on a sound reconstruction of the impartial point of view that does not need supplementing with moral convictions. At a more practical level, the practice of inclusion may be firmly grounded in either the moral norms presupposed by critical perspectives on public education or in the epistemic norms of argumentation. Inclusion is, no doubt, an important consideration, both from a substantively moral perspective, as the generally accepted norm of respecting and representing the diversity of needs present in multicultural societies, and from an epistemic perspective that does not resort to a circular justification based on a moral assertion. On either account, the necessity of inclusion is not contingent on other considerations. Philosophically, however, defending inclusion in decision-making as a substantive moral norm may prove more challenging in a posttraditional society. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive of a means of convincing people of the universal necessity of inclusion as a moral norm without recourse to

communicative rationality. That is, redeeming the validity of inclusion as a moral right, if it were challenged as such, appears to require some form of justificatory discourse which (if Habermas is right) will inevitably resemble practical discourse.

Systems thinking and the learning organization model hold no such necessary commitments, either to members of organizations as persons who deserve the respect of their administrators or to the indispensable epistemic conditions of morally valid decision-making discursively understood. In terms of strategic thinking, inclusion and participation in policy- and decision-making are instrumental considerations governed by strategic salience to the organization wherein the relevance of a person's contribution is measured against the optimization of the systemic imperatives, not by whether the decision is equally in the impartial interests of all. Constraining participation in dialogue and skilled discussion within the behavioural norms and strategic objectives of an organization, instead of within the norms of practical discourse, may not present a contradictory set of aims and assumptions within a private organization. In public education, however, the norms of strategic communication ought to be superseded by a moral imperative, such as equal respect for all, or by an epistemic principle, such as (D). While this latter approach requires a communicative rationality oriented towards inclusiveness for epistemic reasons, it by no means contradicts the moral impulse to include as many constituents of school systems as possible in the development of policy. It simply supports such intuitions with a well-justified and well-defended philosophical framework.

The implication for public education is clear. Alongside the responsibility of making successful decisions in educational administration is the reasonable assumption that public education is a vital institution carrying out a moral imperative to improve people's lives. Seen as a generalizable interest or value held in common, the impartial and universal benefit of public education is consistent with other egalitarian concepts and expectations such as justice in law, democracy in governance, and universal health care. Public support for the benefit provided by each of these institutions presupposes the validity of an impartial and universal point of view – i.e., some guiding ideal about the equality of all persons and an obligation for the equitable fulfillment of their needs. As such, there exists a moral dimension within each of these public domains. From a critical perspective, this moral dimension is often expressed in terms of equity and social justice and rests on whether a principle supporting impartial and universal interests is collectively respected (Okshevsky, 2001; 2004).

Maintaining the morality or “rightness” of decisions by acting in the interest of all persons is presupposed, therefore, in the administration of public education and should be a crucial consideration when adopting initiatives. It is on grounds such as these that the progression of thought in educational administration has come to rest. When theoreticians in the field call for decision-making practices grounded in imperatives of democracy, justice, or equity, it is to this notion of an impartial and universalistic consideration of all constituents' interests that they implicitly appeal. From this moral point of view, educational policy and initiatives should be continually assessed for impartiality and universality in their adoption, interpretation, and application. In keeping with Habermas's

conception of practical discourse, such assessment can only justifiably take place under epistemic conditions of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion.

The incorporation of such views and expectations in public education gives a much stronger sense of the necessity of certain conditions of moral rightness than is evident in Senge's dialogic but success-oriented theory. In public education, the moral point of view should not only guide the decision to adopt and sustain an initiative, it should also shape the decision-making process. This claim motivates development of an epistemic perspective on educational policy that goes beyond describing how to make strategically successful decisions. A moral epistemology for public education should set the criteria for initiatives that are morally just, compelling the public and ongoing examination of all educational policy, and, as with the current study, promoting a deeper consideration of the communicative conditions necessary for impartial understanding and mutual agreement.

With the exception of inclusion, however, a comparison of the norms of practical discourse and the protocols of dialogue and skillful discussion in the context of public education need not be taken as signalling the incommensurability of Habermas's and Senge's respective positions. On the contrary, the comparative importance of participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion in these communicative processes demonstrates a significant overlap in the two theoretical perspectives. In large part, this commonality may be attributed to the conceived purpose of dialogic communication insofar as it aims at understanding and facilitating agreement. In subsequent chapters, however, this overlap will be further explored in the specific context of senior, school-

district administration in Newfoundland and Labrador. This exploration will show clear distinctions between the theoretical overlapping of strategic and moral conditions of validity and current understanding of the conditions in the concrete context of administrative practice.

Before continuing in this practical direction, there is a final point of interest to be made at the theoretical level. When Senge raises the importance of “guiding ideas” with regard to the learning organization, the general interest in establishing morally valid imperatives within educational learning organizations reveals further grounds for arguing the general overlap of these perspectives. For Senge, “Guiding ideas constitute the governing concepts and principles that define why an organization exists, what we seek to accomplish, and how we intend to operate” (2006, p. 285). As such, it is possible to identify the moral validity of initiatives as a guiding idea for public education. The direction charted in this study, to revitalize and resituate the moral point of view within educational administration, can thereby be posited as a guiding idea commensurate with Senge’s conception of a learning organization. Once the moral underpinning of public education is acknowledged, this guiding idea can be articulated in principle and the norms for operating in accord with this imperative can be investigated in context. Habermas’s principle of discourse (D) and, more importantly for this study, the supporting conditions of practical discourse, offer a well-articulated and well-theorized approach to establishing the moral point of view as means of constructing morally valid policy and governance in public education.

Chapter Four Methodology

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the ways in which epistemic conditions of inclusion, participation, non-coercion, and truthfulness are recognized and practiced in school-district policy- and decision-making. This research further aids in establishing the groundwork for developing innovative approaches to decision making in educational administration that better instantiate the necessary epistemic conditions of practical discourse. While policy- and decision-making has long been a subject of inquiry in the field of educational administration, very little attention has been paid to the place and extent of epistemic conditions supporting moral validity in decision-making processes. This research helps fill the gap in existing studies of educational decision-making through an advanced, discourse-theoretical understanding of the attitudes and practices of senior district administrators. The approach taken is via direct interviews with district leaders, asking questions about their conceptions of inclusion, participation, non-coercion, and truthfulness, and the role each condition plays within the context of school-district administration. By garnering the professional experiences and thoughts of senior administrators, the current research encourages thoughtful and informed reflection on how inclusion, participation, non-coercion, and truthfulness may be better represented in decision-making processes.

It should be made clear, however, that by examining educational administration from a moral point of view, the intention is not to use Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality to criticize the senior administrators who participated in this study for the decisions they make or the procedures they follow. The emphasis of this research is

instead focused on understanding administrators' opinions of the conditions of discourse while acknowledging and respecting the practical limits of the organizational positions they occupy. While prospects for a more "critical" direction in future research and practice will be raised, the current study seeks primarily to provide a better understanding of respondents' current attitudes and to focus clearly on examining the epistemic dimensions of moral validity; "Anyone who goes beyond procedural questions of a discourse theory of morality... will very quickly run up against the limits of his own historical situation" (Habermas, 1994, p. 176). It should, therefore, be noted that much of the following discussion involves relaying the views of district administrators and distinguishing between "epistemic conditions of strategic validity" – as described from within administrative roles – and "epistemic conditions of moral validity" – as identified by Habermas – as recorded in their interviews.

The work of critiquing specific attitudes, practices, and decisions from a discourse theoretical perspective is left to future research, however. This is because the current research makes only an initial foray into the working life of senior district administrators, to ask them the relevance and meaning of the counterfactual conditions of practical discourse. Understanding their views of the conditions in context is an important first step toward instituting a feasible discourse-theoretical practice around policy development. While such research can provide reference points to guide a more critical assessment of current practice, the acceptance of critical assessments and the directions for change they may present are dependent on a clear consideration of the educational setting. Moving too quickly to applications of the theory may incur a serious reduction in the force of critical

appraisal, a failure to provide specific direction for addressing current practices, and a crucial loss of credibility and support from the viewpoint of educational administrators. For these reasons, the current research seeks to clarify the meaning of the conditions and the role they play – to better understand their counterfactual in the current setting of school-district administration – as a basis for further research and practice establishing Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality as a viable moral epistemology for educational administration.

4.1 Ethical Considerations

This study proceeded under Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) ethics approval number 2009/10-087-ED. Given the focus of research on one of only four English speaking school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador and the relatively small community of senior district administrators in the province, potential participants were advised that their participation did carry some risk of identification (see *Appendix 1*). For this reason, there is no direct attribution of quotations used in the discussion of “The Four Conditions in an Educational Setting”. Nevertheless, all quotations used in this chapter are taken directly from the six interviewees (unless expressly attributed to a secondary source). This approach to the interview data is undertaken in an attempt to further protect the anonymity of the respondents and in recognition of their candour. It is also taken with the assurance that these are the actual words and opinions of senior school-district administrators in Newfoundland and Labrador as they consider each of the conditions of practical discourse in the context of their professional practice. Prior to all interviews, respondents completed a form

acknowledging the potential risk of identification and giving their informed consent to be interviewed for this study (see *Appendix 1*).

4.2 Participant Recruitment

Potential participants were recommended to the principal researcher by the supervisory committee. These recommendations were based on an interest in recording the views of senior, district-level administrators and on the committee's considerable knowledge of and experience working with district administrators in Newfoundland and Labrador. Initial contact with potential participants was made by e-mail. Respondents who expressed an interest in being interviewed were sent a letter of informed consent by e-mail. This letter provided the background information and aims of the study, and outlined the scope of their requested participation in agreeing to one semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interview (see *Appendix 1*). A total of four senior administrators from the school district under study and two former senior administrators from different districts within Newfoundland and Labrador agreed to be interviewed.

4.3 Limitations of the Study

The structural regularity of the interviews provides some support for the validity of the findings. Still, the generalizability of the current research could be regarded as problematic in that it is limited in scope to a handful of first-person accounts of the conditions in context. Such concern, though reasonable, is not of major interest in the confines of the present study. Instead, the current interest is in providing a groundwork for developing future research in the area of moral validity and educational administration, and in providing a better understanding of how the moral point of view

fits with current attitudes and practices in the field. The research is, in this sense, an important and novel contribution to the field of educational administration and it is gratifying to have the value of the work affirmed by the respondents: “I want to thank you for the stimulation and causing me to think about this. What you’re doing here is important...anything that moves this understanding forward, I think, is a real benefit to all of us.”

4.4 Data Collection

All interviews were scheduled and conducted by the principal researcher and digitally voice recorded for transcription. Two sets of interviews were completed. The initial set took place in late July of 2010. These interviews were conducted in person at the school-district office. The respondents interviewed at that time were the Assistant Director of Programs, the Director of Education, and a Former Assistant Director of Human Resources. The second set of interviews was conducted by telephone during April and May of 2011. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (who spoke of his intention to retire shortly after the interview), the new Acting Assistant Director of Human Resources (an interim position filled by a Senior Program Specialist), and a Former Director of Education comprised this second set of interviews.

4.5 In-Depth Qualitative Interviews: A Suitable Approach

While a general Interview Guide (see *Appendix 2*) was used throughout the study, the style of the present interviews is best described as semi-structured. The semi-structured approach to data gathering is characterized by an in-depth, conversational interaction between interviewer and respondent (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010; Klenke,

2008; Seidman, 2006). In this way, the Interview Guide acts as a general plan of inquiry and may be used to redirect answers for the purpose of elaboration while allowing the respondent to set the direction of topics and related themes (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). In-depth interview studies are respondent focused and provide an opportunity for participants to explain events and processes, and to express their own sense of an idea or concept in relation to their experience (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999).

Respondents are also free to choose and frame their own examples of practice thereby relaying meaningful context in their answers. In addition, an open-ended conversational approach allows the researcher to take a student or novice role during the interview (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). This encourages the interviewee to take an expert role – filling in background information or taking the time to express his or her thinking in greater detail – an attitude which may generate more insightful and fresher responses.

As an initial study of the conditions of practical discourse in the context of school-district administration, the in-depth qualitative interview method represents a suitable approach. With no specific concern or incident under investigation, the respondents were given a great deal of leeway in formulating their replies. This degree of flexibility allowed answers to be rethought and revisited throughout the interview, as respondents refined their thinking on the roles of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion in their administrative practices. At the same time, the semi-structured nature of the questions did provide a general focusing of discussion around specific

issues associated with the conditions of discourse and prevented an overworking or continued repetition of thoughts.

Each interview followed a similar though broad pattern. The respondents were first asked to provide some background information on the various positions they had held in the Newfoundland and Labrador school system. They were then asked to describe a district-wide initiative they had been part of while fulfilling their responsibilities as a senior, district administrator. The provision of background information and expert context took roughly one-third to one-half of the time allotted to each interview. The largest portion of the interview was directed at examining the role played by each of the four necessary conditions of practical discourse in adopting the initiative previously described by the respondent. The intention in using this pattern was, first, to have the interviewees begin thinking about their professional roles and the practices and responsibilities they associated with each position. Second, this pattern established a concrete situation familiar to the respondents within which to situate and reflect upon the role of the idealizing conditions of discourse. In this way, the well-acknowledged counterfactual nature of the conditions could be explored in a practical context based on first-hand information and from inside the actual practices and experiences of various school-district administrators. As respondents observed, "I sort of relive the whole thing while talking to you about it... thinking about this one particular district-wide thing that occurred, in that context, I would make the observations that I've made." Or: "I'm interested in your four concepts. I've thought about all four of those at different times but

not in a concentrated, cohesive thought process... you've forced me to put them in context and think about them in a deeper way.”

4.6 Analysis of the Interviews

Following completion of both sets of interviews, the digital recordings were typed out in their entirety by the principal researcher and printed. The printed transcriptions were then carefully analyzed by the principal researcher and open coded on the basis of content providing “Professional Background”, the description of “The Initiative”, and discussion of “Inclusion”, “Participation”, “Truthfulness”, and “Non-coercion” in the context of administrative decision-making. The open coded content was identified by different colours of highlighter marked in the margins of the printed document. In addition to this initial categorization of the content, general margin notes were made of possible themes and patterns emergent in respondents’ discussion of the four conditions of practical discourse.

Information for the following chapter, “Sketching the Perspectives”, was drawn from parts of the interviews open coded “Professional Background” and “The Initiative”. The sketches provide select relevant details of the administrators’ career paths and experiences with the Newfoundland and Labrador school system. This chapter also outlines each administrator’s discussion of a district-wide initiative with which they had direct involvement.

Once the sketches were completed for each set of interviews, a more focused coding was made of the content initially coded as relating to one of the four conditions of practical discourse. This second reading of the transcripts was made across the coded

content categories rather than sequentially within individual transcripts. For example, content pertaining to “Inclusion” was examined from one transcript to another. This cross-interview review of the content categories was repeated for “Participation”, “Truthfulness”, and “Non-coercion”. During this second reading of these sections of the transcripts, special attention was given to margin notes and the patterns of responses developing across interviews but within the condition categories.

Consistent patterns of responses that were evident within a condition category – discussions of “Truthfulness” in relation to empirical research, for instance – were recorded on a separate sheet of notes. These consistent patterns in administrative reasoning associated with each of the four conditions of practical discourse were then grouped and characterized by the principal researcher. This resulted in a condition-by-condition characterization of the respondents’ common attitudes and opinions. The result is a composite picture of each condition and its role in administrative decision making from the perspective of the participants.

Once this amalgamated characterization of the administrators’ attitudes toward each condition was made, the principal researcher undertook a third reading of the condition categories expressed in the transcripts. As with the second reading, the third reading focused on the open coded conditions of practical discourse. However, these categories were now read sequentially within each interview with the aim of identifying emerging themes. This thematization of respondents’ reasoning around the conditions in general was also noted separately and checked for consistency across each interview transcript. While the intent of this process was to allow the emergence of themes and

subthemes from the interview data concerning the conditions in context, attention was given to the active development of themes relevant to the current study. In this sense, the resultant themes and subthemes are informed by ideas central to Habermas's discourse theory of morality. The thematic findings thereby exhibit a distinctly Habermasian interest in the interview data. In particular, the process of thematization reflects an interest in understanding the similarities and differences associated with conceiving of the conditions from a strategic or moral perspective.

The results of this process of analysis are twofold. First, each of the four conditions of practical discourse is characterized in an educational setting based on a close reading of respondent opinion. As such, the characterizations of the individual conditions are a rather direct finding or expression of opinion that is attuned to the daily realities faced by senior administrators in education. Second, the major themes and subthemes drawn and developed from the current research represent an active thematization of administrative reasoning in education that, while supported by the interview data, reflects issues of special relevance to the study of communicative rationality in this context.

This approach to analyzing the interview data generated findings that represent both the characteristic understanding and opinion of senior administrators toward the necessary conditions of moral validity and a thematic representation of important considerations in the application of a moral point of view in school-district administration. In this way, the analysis of the interviews is consistent with the overarching aims of the current study in providing a thematic groundwork for developing

the moral point of view in educational administration and in providing a better understanding of how the necessary conditions of practical discourse are characterized in current attitudes and practices in the field. The characteristic and thematic results of the current study are detailed and supported in Chapter 6: “The Four Conditions in an Educational Setting”.

Chapter Five **Sketching the Perspectives**

The perspective offered by each respondent provides significant insight into the roles and responsibilities of senior administrators in the Newfoundland and Labrador school system. It is apparent in the interviews that the career path of an administrator may lead them into many formal positions at various levels of responsibility in the hierarchy. This wide path allows the gathering of experience and expertise throughout various areas of specialization in the system but, in particular, the departments of finance, programmes, and human resources. It also offers a notable degree of mobility both geographically across the entire public school system and regionally within the various individual districts. This wide range of administrative experience that is common to the participants lends force to observation of regular patterns inherent in their collective attitudes and understandings.

Taken together, these attitudes and perspectives offer meaningful context to the study of morally valid decision making in school-district administration. The respondents' collective familiarity with senior administrative positions and with the organizational role and expectations inherent therein provides a solid representation of executive views in the Newfoundland and Labrador school system. This solid representation of leading attitudes and perspectives supports a firm foundation for an initial study of Habermas's epistemic conditions in the context of educational administration and for understanding this context from the moral point of view provided by discourse theory.

5.1 The Director of Education

The Director of Education holds a Doctorate in Educational Administration from the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education. At the beginning of his career, he taught high-school students for five years before working as a Program Specialist for eighteen years. He spent a further three years as an Assistant Superintendent and, at the time of the interview, had served as the Director of Education for the district for nine consecutive years. The school district for which he is responsible covers a large and sometimes remote geographical area. It averages a total of 12,000 kindergarten to grade twelve students and maintains sixty-five individual schools.

The district-wide initiative presented by the Director as context for discussion of the conditions of practical discourse was “an initiative to enhance student learning in the school district.” This project aimed to advance a culture of learning throughout the district that was student-learning focused, results-oriented, and “combined in a seamless web our accountability initiatives, our enrichment initiatives, our creativity, our student-centered approaches and our teacher-driven approaches.” The Director characterized this educational scheme as:

Enhancing the culture [such] that student learning was to be the main goal of our school district and that organizational learning, or the learning of all the adults in the system in order to more strategically focus on student learning, must be the second goal.

This core idea grew from the Director’s experience and research, and the impetus to set this idea as a district-wide initiative came from his interpretation of the role of a director of education:

When I came to the district, I determined, based on my own experience and my own research and my own notions of what a directorship should be, that the main focus needed to be on student learning and that needed to be the overarching goal that guided everything else that we did.

The Director of Education further defined his organizational role in terms of a moral obligation to seek and promote such educational initiatives: “I believe it is our, not only legal obligation, but our moral mandate – our moral imperative, if we want to use Fullan’s term – to do so.” On this point, his conception of the “purpose” of formal education aligned exceedingly well with educational administration literature that seeks to optimize “strategic thinking” in the service of “maintaining a moral purpose that is focused on improving learning for each student” (Sheppard, Brown, & Dibbon, 2009, p. 72).

5.2 The Assistant Director of Programs

At the time of his interview, the Assistant Director of Programs had worked in the Newfoundland and Labrador school system for twenty-five years. The breadth of his experience within the system is extensive and varied. He began his career as a high-school teacher and, after eight years, became a Program Specialist for another five years in the areas of Math, Science, and Technology. He then spent two years in the position of Assistant Director of Programs at a school district in Newfoundland and Labrador other than where he was working at the time of the interview. Following this, he moved into the role of Director of Education at the same school district. He held that position for four years. When interviewed, he was in his sixth year as the Assistant Director of Programs for the school district of current interest.

The initiative discussed by the Assistant Director of Programs was a new, district-wide kindergarten to grade twelve “evaluation, assessment, and grading policy.” This policy was intended to incorporate the latest research on evaluation, assessment, and grading into teaching practices across the district. The Director of Programs characterized this initiative as a “change process” analogous to “the new model for school development.” This change was motivated by the opinion that existing policy was not as supportive of student success as it could be: “We’re doing it because our existing policies are, some of them, are rotten to the core. They’re substantially flawed and they’re causing substantial failure rates in our education system.” At that time, the policy was at the full-scale implementation phase. Draft policies originating at the district office had already undergone localized field trials and consultation with principals, vice-principals, teachers, and educational psychologists at these locations had helped shape and revise the final policy: “We had groups of people at the district office working on putting together the draft policies that went out to the field for review and feedback.” The aim of these consultations was described as “strategic [in] ensuring that we do take the necessary time to do the up-front stuff that’s so critical in allowing decisions to be effective and sustainable over time.”

5.3 The Assistant Director of Human Resources

The Assistant Director of Human Resources outlined over thirty-five years of professional service to schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador. His career began as a classroom teacher in elementary and junior high school. He first moved into administration as a school principal and then to the district office as a Program Specialist

in the area of school development. From this position, he went on to become a Senior Education Officer working mainly in human resources and, finally, to the position of Assistant Director of Human Resources. This role put him at the center of recruitment and hiring as well as professional development, collective bargaining, and grievance issues within the district. He retired from this executive position shortly after being interviewed for this study.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources drew on his experience with “school consolidations” as a long-term and ongoing context for consideration and discussion of the conditions of practical discourse. He described school consolidation initiatives as aiming to identify infrastructure needs with a view to “maximizing learning opportunities for all students and the provision of excellent facilities for all students.” While these were the two main objectives of the district office, the Assistant Director of Human Resources identified the initial source of consolidation as a provincial government mandate set in 2004 to integrate three regional school districts into a single district. Senior administrators at the newly consolidated district office saw this mandate as an opportunity to improve programming by addressing inefficiencies created by aging and under-populated school buildings. The overall restructuring plan made use of available demographic and geographic data, and attempted to incorporate local knowledge of specific issues such as road conditions for potential bus routes and maintenance schedules for existing school buildings. Consolidation strategies were presented to the Board of Trustees and, if acceptable, introduced for consultation at meetings with school staff and the general public. The Assistant Director of Human Resources described the gathering

and collation of data along with staff and public consultations as the main strengths of the process: “It’s a process that I’d follow in the future for any major initiative, getting stakeholder input [and] having good information, good data makes for a better chance for good, sound decision making.”

5.4 The Acting Assistant Director of Human Resources

Three weeks prior to the interview, this respondent had changed roles within the district office, moving from a position as a Senior Education Officer in student support services to the Acting Assistant Director of Human Resources. He began working in the Newfoundland and Labrador school system as a classroom teacher and entered an administrative role, first, as a vice-principal and then as a principal at a regional high school. He began employment at the school district office as a Program Specialist and had served long enough at the district to be eligible for retirement at the time of the interview. The Acting Assistant Director of Human Resources was also pursuing a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership at an out-of-province university in Canada.

The initiative discussed by the Acting Assistant Director of Human Resources was the reorganization of schools within the district, specifically, the decision to consolidate two area high schools: “Bringing the two high schools together is probably as big an initiative as we’ve gone through and probably one of the more complex.” The combining of the schools was driven by two ideals central to district governance: “We wanted our children in good facilities, modern facilities [and] we wanted our children to have good programming options in the high school.” While the expression of these core ideals echoes the Assistant Director of Human Resources’ perspective, there is a

remarkable difference in understanding as to the administrative level of decision making surrounding this initiative. While the previous Assistant Director saw school consolidation as a government mandate, the current Assistant Director viewed consolidation as a district level undertaking: “The decision came from district office because we needed new facilities and they [the two high schools] needed to be consolidated to get better facilities for children.” Moreover, the Acting Assistant Director of Human Resources clearly stated that the responsibility for such initiatives rested with senior district administrators. The respondent saw the role of senior administration as one of executive leadership informed by data and research: “That’s our job, to analyze numbers, look at what options are out there and what the current literature is and then present options to the Board [of Trustees] and to the community.” When asked for a general characterization of his work on the initiative, the respondent commented that, “my role in the process was part of the strategic planning and part of the, you know, just making it work.”

5.5 A Former Assistant Director of Human Resources

Though retired from the Newfoundland and Labrador school system at the time of her interview, this respondent had held an array of administrative positions. These included Program Coordinator, Assistant Director (termed “Assistant Superintendent” at the time) of Programs, and Assistant Director of Human Resources, and it was in the context of leading the personnel department in another school district that she offered her example initiative. It may be of further interest to note that this former Assistant Director of Human Resources is the only woman represented in this study of senior administrators

and that there were no women occupying senior administrative positions at the school district office when these interviews took place.

The former Assistant Director of Human Resources reflected on a large-scale, school consolidation initiative that had affected nearly every student in her district. In a similar vein as the Assistant Director of Human Resources at the school district of interest, she described this initiative as “An expectation from government [to] downsize and become more efficient.” A central responsibility of her department was to report on the potential reassignment and redundancy of teachers. These reports were combined with those of the Finance and Programs departments and generated a general plan that represented “the most appropriate educational decision” based on available data and the collective experience and expertise of each department. This consolidation plan was then submitted to the elected Board of Trustees for review. When approved, the plan was made public and parents were asked to respond: “We were looking for anything we had omitted in our consideration.” When asked to expand on what constituted an “appropriate educational decision”, the former Assistant Director of Human Resources raised a core idea in her view of educational administration to always maintain the best possible relationship between students and teachers: “We felt the reorganization was going to provide a better situation for student and teacher.” Moreover, she identified this idea as an educational imperative that was necessary to the integrity of the whole system: “If you’re in the system, you hold a position, and no matter what that position is, your job is to protect the student-teacher relationship.” It was from this perspective that she understood and assessed the district-wide initiative to consolidate schools. Adopting this

imperative also allowed related decisions to be made with a strategic outlook toward successful implementation and sustainability.

5.6 A Former Director of Education

The former Director of Education interviewed for this study has over thirty years of experience working in the educational system of Newfoundland and Labrador and holds a Doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of Ottawa. His various roles in administration progressed from vice-principal to principal and from Assistant Director of Programs to Director of Education, a position he had held at two different school districts within the province. He is also well versed in administration at the post-secondary level, having served four years as the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs at Memorial University's Faculty of Education.

The former Director of Education chose to outline an initiative designed to promote “shared decision making and collaboration” within his school district. The specific aim was to empower regional principals with greater decision-making authority concerning daily aspects of schooling from support for innovative teaching practices to discretionary spending on building maintenance. This was seen by the respondent as a means of decentralizing district governance through a greater levelling of the organizational structure:

The hierarchy serves an important role...it's not that the person at the top of the hierarchy makes all the decisions, [instead] it's someone who can take responsibility for leading a team which is quite different than administering or managing a team.

The respondent also explained that this collaborative model of leadership engaged principals in learning about “dialogue” and “consensus building” in order to tap the

collective expertise available within the organization. The former Director of Education further explained the initiative as a way of demonstrating authentic respect for people while fulfilling the responsibilities of a leadership position: “By including people in the process [through dialogue and consensus building] and genuinely respecting and valuing their contributions, people step up to become meaningful participants in the decision-making process.” When asked about the initial decision to move the district toward a more distributed mode of decision making, the respondent acknowledged the initiative engendered a somewhat paternalistic paradox: “I was talking about the importance of inclusion and participation... but at the same time I was saying this is my vision for the organization... I was mandating inclusiveness [in decision making].” In feeling an obligation to resolve this inconsistency, the respondent referenced the work of O’Toole (1996) and said that ultimately his philosophy of leadership was akin to O’Toole’s and “rooted in the most fundamental of moral principles – respect for people.” As such, his decision to implement shared decision-making within the district could be justified in that it advanced a moral imperative of equal respect.

Chapter Six

The Four Epistemic Conditions in an Educational Setting

This chapter provides discussion of the four necessary conditions of Habermasian discourse in the educational setting of school-district administration. The discussion draws on the interview data and is divided into four parts (sections 6.1 to 6.4) wherein characterization of each condition is based on the comments of the participants. These characterizations are intended as a general presentation of how the conditions are currently viewed in the field – the role of each condition, its importance, and its place in district-wide initiatives. As such, they address a central aim of the current research in examining practitioner attitudes toward adopting district-wide educational initiatives in Newfoundland and Labrador from a discursive moral point of view.

Interwoven throughout the four characterizations is a further thematic exploration of ideas central to Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality. This thematic approach to the interview data is intended to support discussion relevant to the additional aim of the current study in working toward development of a Habermasian perspective on moral validity within the context of educational administration. This thematization of participant responses shows there already exists certain common ground between a Habermasian conceptualization of the conditions necessary for securing the moral validity of a policy and senior district administrators' understandings of the conditions required for the strategic viability of an initiative. This commonality concerns acknowledgement of the initial importance of the conditions but further analysis also shows subtle (and not so subtle) differences in understanding the various conditions that emerge from viewing them as necessary to the strategic validity or moral validity of an

initiative. These two major themes of similarity and difference in how the conditions are understood are further divided and discussed in terms of five subthemes: two subthemes of similarity and three subthemes of difference.

One detailed exploration of the common ground rests on substantial evidence of administrators' recognition of the importance of the conditions in the context of their practice as overlapping with the conditions necessitated by strategic planning. This overlap of importance is demonstrated in the high degree of agreement among all respondents that the four conditions are essential features of successful and sustainable initiatives. When considered in the context of school district administration, the value of each condition emerged early (during the first interview) and presented a consistent pattern across participants. At no time did a respondent dismiss or downplay the importance of a specific feature of practical discourse. The general and consistent opinion was that inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion are essential components of effective and sustainable initiatives. Another subtheme of similarity draws on evidence that the administrators understand and are consistent in affirming that the conditions are always counterfactual in practice. All the respondents concurred that, in a practical sense, the conditions must be understood as scalar and be seen as more-or-less realised in any particular case. In this sense, the respondents note a reality inherent in their positions and practices that restricts the prospect of completely satisfying the conditions.

In addition to the similarities – an initial recognition of the importance of the conditions in principle and an unambiguous understanding of their counterfactuality – three subthemes of difference are discussed. The first of these subthemes is that

respondents frequently offered strategic reasons as to why the conditions are important for effective and sustainable initiatives. These accounts of the strategic salience of a condition were separated from statements solely acknowledging the importance of the conditions and/or describing how the conditions were respected in their example initiative. This finding shows a generally high appreciation and articulation of the conditions as strategically salient. A second subtheme of difference emergent in all of the interviews is the interrelated nature of the conditions. In this sense, the conditions are not viewed by the administrators as equally and independently necessary to the development and implementation of policy. Instead, the degree to which one condition is realized is seen to impact the degree to which the remaining conditions may be satisfactorily met. Following from this observation, the respondents (with the exception of a single respondent to the condition of non-coercion) further noted a third related subtheme: that strategically limiting one condition can enhance prospects for realising the other conditions, especially those considered by administrators to be more essential to the successful implementation of an initiative. From this strategic perspective, placing limitations on the conditions helps focus the activity of the district and is, therefore, an inherent prerogative of senior administrators who have the responsibility, expertise, and experience to determine appropriate levels of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and (non-) coercion around discussion of initiatives within their school district. In relation to the general characterization ascribed to each condition, the characteristic view of the condition in this context may rest on a subtheme of difference (the willingness to limit inclusion for strategic reasons, for instance) or a subtheme of similarity (the recognition

of non-coercion as a scalar ideal, for instance), whichever subtheme is most closely identified with and tends to best represent the collective view of the condition as seen from within this educational setting.

6.1 Inclusion: Setting the Table

Sometimes we set moral concepts up against utilitarian practice but they don't have to be. Sometimes the most moral way to go, I would argue most times the moral way to go, is the most effective way of implementing or creating change.

This statement is a prime example of the generally expressed opinion that the moral and strategic interests of school districts are best understood as overlapping rather than as competing. This idea was expressed repeatedly by each respondent and was made across all four conditions of practical discourse. As such, the interviews generate a strong case for the general overlap and recognition of the four conditions as important considerations of moral and strategic deliberation in school-district administration.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that each individual condition of practical discourse is also regarded in an important and essential sense by the administrators:

There are some things that are definite in the directions that I believe are important, that are non-negotiables. One would be inclusion, the other would be participation, the other would be truthfulness. So there's three right there that are essential principles [of administrative decision making] if we're to have an effective organization.

In their recognition of inclusion as an important condition for making decisions around district-wide initiatives, for example, the respondents are very clear:

Inclusiveness is an important concept... and change agents, change leaders, would be well advised to take into account the importance of inclusiveness in any decision-making process. To ignore that is likely to almost always result in decisions that are less sound, less sustainable, and less permanent over time.

With regard to inclusion, this statement is representative of the overlapping attention given this condition, however the reasoning behind the claim appears motivated by decidedly strategic interests. The respondent, for example, lists “less sound, less sustainable, and less permanent” as the motivating reasons for inclusiveness. This explanation of the role of inclusivity in decision-making is notably consistent with much of the administration literature (Senge, 2006). Yet, it begins to open a conceptual gap in understanding inclusion as aiding the strategic success of an initiative and recognizing the indispensable role it plays as an epistemic condition of moral validity.

While an initial similarity appears to develop around the condition of inclusion as “an important concept”, this similarity can be teased apart based on the respondents’ offering of reasons for inclusiveness in decision-making. Through further examination, the interviews suggest it is primarily the strategic salience or prudential value of the conditions that dictates their place in decision-making procedures. That is, the epistemic value of the conditions for securing moral validity is not the primary reason given by respondents in support of their importance. The conditions may “sometimes” or “most times” be sought for their epistemic contribution to morally justified policy initiatives but they are more frequently privileged for their strategic value in securing the success of a new programme. This, in turn, may lead to cases where the epistemic necessity of the conditions for moral validity is intentionally compromised for strategic purposes in securing the preconceived ends of the organization.

Another subtheme of similarity evident in the interview data is the acceptance of inclusion as scalar in actual practice. This evidence of the inherent counterfactual nature

of inclusion as an idealization tended to surface in connection with two aspects of the organization: hierarchy and communication. With regard to inclusiveness in communication, respondents consistently cited a norm-governed reality that places limits on who and when constituents are to be included in decision-making processes: "I would just add what I feel is a dose of reality... there has to be respect for the normal methods and means of communication." For these administrators, there exists an appropriate scale of inclusiveness that is inherent in the effective functioning of the organization's channels of communication: "An organization chooses its times to communicate when it is ready to communicate and all of those features are important and responsible parts of an organization that exists within a legislative framework." As such, inclusion is often intentionally limited. While this limit on inclusion may only be a temporary step in the decision-making procedure, it further indicates a decidedly success orientated attitude toward communication. This, in turn, suggests that the counterfactuality of the conditions as they appear in an educational setting may not always be a matter of inherent structural barriers but attributable to the preconceived aims of particular individuals within the organization.

In addition to the observation that the communicative norms and select goals of the organization mean the condition of inclusion may be intentionally limited, the respondents also noted a structural "reality" of their organizational positions that warranted placing appropriate limits on inclusion. The hierarchical nature of the school system was seen to require restrictions on the inclusive practices of even the most senior district administrators. These inherent limits on the inclusivity of senior administrators

were attributed to the expectations of bureaucrats and elected officials, such as members of the Board of Trustees or members of the provincial Ministry of Education, who oversee the education system. As such, the respondents expressed an acute awareness of constraints, which they described as “practical”, “legal”, and “dangerous to ignore”, placed on how they were permitted to operate in fulfilling their organizational role and on the range of policies they could bring forward for district-wide implementation. This sense of a constraining organizational reality was regularly given as a further reason for partial or selective adherence to conditions establishing moral validity:

A Director [of Education] has a direct link in responsibility to the Deputy Minister of Education and governments are anything but collaborative in how they do business. So it's a dangerous place to engage in inclusiveness and participation and the whole issue of being truthful and honest. It's more dangerous from a Director's perspective than being an Assistant Director or certainly than being a Program Specialist or a Senior Educational Officer.

This rationale for curtailing the conditions of practical discourse due to the structural reality faced by even the most senior administrators is especially linked to inclusion and concerns over whom in the education system may be included at the level of policy development:

At that level [of senior district administration], it's probably even more dangerous to engage in some of these things [“collaborative decision making” or “genuine dialogue”] because you do have direct responsibility to a School Board [of Trustees] and they come from models that are very traditional.

While ongoing pressure to demonstrate prudential respect for greater levels of authority may help explain the current practice of scaling inclusiveness in the decision-making procedures of the Newfoundland and Labrador school system, this more-or-less realized notion of inclusivity also represents a substantial barrier to moving a discourse-

theoretical moral point of view to the center of school-district administration. This finding suggests the existence of a gap between the rationally reconstructed necessity of inclusion and the prudential considerations that administrators feel pressured to accommodate. Identifying this gap and its particular relevance for the condition of inclusion is, therefore, an initial but important subject raised by the current research.

This study does identify a firm and consistent overlap in the importance of moral and strategic conditions of validity according to senior administrators (and in keeping with influential theorists such as Senge). The overlapping importance, however, is tempered by differences in interpreting the role or value of the conditions in decision making. As already discussed, prudential considerations involving structural and communicative realities clearly impact the inclusiveness of district policy development. Administrators may also see inclusion as an important condition but decide to limit the scope of decision making for reasons of employee expertise. As such, limits on inclusion tend to be based on the leader's understanding of an employee's official position within the organization, the leader's conception of appropriate norms of communication, and on the leader's assessment of whether a subordinate has the requisite level of expertise to make a valuable contribution to the initiative. In short, it is the strategic salience of inclusion as a general criterion supporting the success of new policy that tends to garner the respondent's attention.

What is common to all three strategic determinants – official position, appropriate communication, and requisite expertise – of inclusion is that the initial decision to include personnel is made at the discretion of the senior leadership. That is, the choice to include

someone in the discussion of an initiative is the prerogative of senior administrators and such choices are apt to be made for instrumental reasons intended to secure effectiveness and sustainability. Moreover, this discretionary authority is expressed as an inherent aspect of the senior leader's role in the organization. Although the decision to include is a reasoned judgement, its validity is grounded in organizational norms of decision making that are characteristic of the school system. While the key criteria for inclusion are norm referenced according to position, communications, and expertise, the condition of inclusion is discretionary – inclusivity is shaped by the expertise and experience of the senior administrators.

You need to include as many people as it takes to make your decision as valid as you can make it within practical parameters. If there's a chance that someone is going to add something to the improvement of that decision, include them. If you're going to need them in the implementation of the decision, include them, but it's within practical parameters.

From this perspective, inclusivity is designed to satisfy strategic validity whereby the initiative stands to gain effective and sustained implementation through appropriate levels of inclusion. This appears to represent an interpretation of the leadership role in decision-making processes from a primarily strategic or prudential perspective. In the interview data, this view of the leader's role in decision-making was associated most regularly with the subtheme of strategic salience, in the sense that the importance placed on inclusion was largely motivated by an interest in the condition's strategic relevance to successful implementation of organizational change. Inclusion, for example, has important strategic value: "Very little change will be sustainable and permanent if you don't have, or if you ignore, the inclusiveness piece." Again, it is this sense of the

strategic value of inclusion that was most often expressed and frequently presented in terms of effectiveness and/or sustainability:

To expect that you can effectively make decisions that are focused on changing an organization to improve it without factoring in the degree and nature and extent of participation or the whole piece around inclusiveness would be, you know, fool-hearty.

While the strategic salience of inclusion is a prevailing outlook of the respondents, a further, definitive reason offered for limiting the condition of inclusion is the expressed need to guide the district toward fulfilling assumed educational imperatives. That is, senior administrators justified the normative and discretionary attitude taken toward inclusion (and the other conditions of practical discourse) as a necessary approach to meeting the strategic requirements of predetermined educational imperatives. Such educational imperatives – often identified as “student learning” or “maximum learning opportunity” – are set as a goal and measure of “successful” and “sustainable” district policy. With these imperatives posited as the overarching aims of the school district, senior administrators focus on developing and implementing initiatives that satisfy strategically acceptable levels of inclusion for reasons of strategic validity.

Do we, as a school district and principals in their school, set up that table... create those parameters which focus the discussion, which focus the expectation – yes, we do. I believe it is our, not only legal obligation, but our moral mandate – our moral imperative, if we want to use Fullan’s term – to do so.

From a teacher efficacy, teacher satisfaction, lack of teacher stress perspective... my reading of the research would indicate that teachers feel greater satisfaction and greater sense of control in an environment where purposes are clear, where there is opportunity to talk about those purposes, and where there is a common focus on student learning.

These examples show how an educational imperative can focus the activity of the school district but with the understanding that strategic limitations must be placed on inclusion and that the choice of imperatives is the prerogative of senior administrative staff: “The discussion, and the dialogue, and the opportunity for input, and the opportunity for growth, and the opportunity for individual expression is rich, rich, rich but it is within a box [built by senior administrators].”

As such, the most enduring characterization of inclusion as expressed by the respondents is one of “setting the table”. This characteristic captures a sense of inclusivity as strategically salient, yet, in effect, a condition that may be limited in order to achieve the goals of the district office. The choice of whom to include in a decision should follow certain normative expectations inherent in the organizational and communication structure. Failure to consider these conventions can impair the success and sustainability of an initiative. The inclusion of others in policy development is, moreover, made at the discretion of senior personnel who view this prerogative as the appropriate domain of a responsible leader. On these grounds, district leaders may also include someone in a decision-making process on the basis of their expertise or relevant experience with similar initiatives. Ultimately, however, those constituents who are invited into a decision-making process must recognize that the table is already set, with the goals of the initiative and the parameters of communication predefined by senior administration.

6.2 Participation: A Common Feature that is Persistently Counterfactual

In terms of participation, the first thing you have to look at is trying to create structures within the district but also helping schools create structures within the

schools whereby teachers work together and school administrators work together and district teams work together in thinking about, talking about, planning, and actually implementing initiatives.

Statements such as this are clear indicators of the respondents' recognition of participation as an important condition for decisions surrounding district-wide initiatives. The reasons for placing high value on participation, however, tended not to be explicitly given in the interviews. Instead, the respondents preferred to associate participation with an all-purpose view of its salience. Participation, for example, was said to encourage constituents to "come onboard". It was also stated that participation is "critically important" and that the district administration would "always strive for participation". When talking specifically about their example initiative, administrators were clear in asserting that "No one can say they didn't get a chance to participate" or that "There was a possibility for every single person who wished to participate". In the contexts supplied by the respondents, therefore, participation is clearly identified as an important feature of initiatives but the rationale for this condition is opaque.

Unlike the discretionary process of selecting for inclusion, however, all participants are actively encouraged by senior administrators to engage in shaping and directing initiatives. Once admitted to the discussion or implementation of an initiative, it was generally believed that a participant had an obligation to contribute their thoughts and opinions, and to actively engage in realigning their practices where necessary. In this sense, a discernable difference between inclusion and participation begins to emerge from the interview data. Inclusion is under the discretionary authority of the senior administrators who consider and determine who to include in the discussion of an

initiative, based on organizational norms and relevant expertise. Participation, however, is encouraged and expected of everyone who is included in the process of making a decision or implementing an initiative. In addition, although participation is understood as an important aspect of policy- and decision-making, little was said about why this is the case. Instead, the respondents made general claims that participation is encouraged and expected in district-wide initiatives.

While direct attribution of the salience of participation was not forthcoming, the respondents did consistently raise the interrelated nature of the conditions as particularly relevant for participation. Their understanding of the conditions as having an interrelated effect in practice led to the common opinion that limiting one condition may promote other conditions. From this perspective, participation was strongly linked to the other conditions and often discussed in terms of the strategic limiting of conditions. It was stated, for example, that placing limits on inclusion can enhance participation in assessing an initiative by supporting the participants' sense of taking part in an uncoerced discussion:

If you want good input from the staff, you need to give them the opportunity to be away from other people that may influence their ability to speak freely... the participation we encourage is that way by having the private meetings with staff members.

In this regard, administrators expressed a strong understanding of the importance of participation and the lengths they were willing to go to in support of this condition, especially for staff members, even to the point of limiting other relevant conditions.

Despite such efforts, or perhaps because of them, the respondents were also acutely aware of the challenges to participation faced by the district. From their point of

view, a chief concern is the fact that not everyone who is invited to aid in developing or implementing a policy will actively participate – even when conditions such as inclusion are favourably adjusted. The nagging potential for lax participation, especially by teaching staff, was further identified as a possible source of prolonged organizational disruption and of failure to fully adopt policies throughout the district. As such, the respondents indicated that they had spent considerable time trying to better understand why the participation rates in the district were frequently below their expectations: “We do have participation, but probably not as much as we would like and probably not at the level that it could be because, I think, there is a degree of cynicism out there.” In addition to cynicism, respondents see a systemic apathy towards their attempts at encouraging constituent participation in decision making: “Sometimes there’s an apathy that’s in the system... in leadership, it’s important for everyone to make that second and third and fourth effort to ensure that we’ve given enough opportunities for people to speak.”

From the perspective of the administrators, cynicism and apathy appear as persistent obstacles to full participation in district-wide initiatives. As a subtheme relevant to Habermasian discourse theory, cynicism and apathy can be interpreted in light of the counterfactual nature of participation in all decision-making practices. As an inherently more-or-less realized condition of practical discourse, the understanding that participation cannot be fully met in any particular case seems less concerning. Instead, the counterfactual aspect of participation allows a refocusing of the issue from one of attempting to achieve full constituent participation to one of working to ensure there are opportunities for constituent-wide participation. By promoting and facilitating

participatory practices, administrators can acknowledge the counterfactual nature of participation without either moving toward autocratic decision making or expecting unfeasible levels of participation. In this way, real opportunities for participation can work against cynicism and apathy while staying within the reasonable limits of the organization's capacity for involvement. A heightened awareness on the part of senior administrators of their role in encouraging participation and providing for it could address observations such as "to have broad-based and full-scale participation, obviously, sometimes is impractical" while acknowledging that "people have learned to be very cautious about trusting senior leaders... they've been told so many times that they're to engage in shared decision-making at will and then they see that it doesn't really happen."

Overall, the evidence suggests that participation is understood by the respondents as a vital condition for promoting organizational compliance and improving large-scale initiatives. This crucial need for participation remains, however, unlikely to be fully met even through the concerted efforts of senior administrators. Given the recognition of importance and the expressed willingness of administrators to support and encourage participation, it seems reasonable from their perspective to attribute less-than-ideal participation rates to cynicism (lack of trust) and apathy (lack of interest) among constituents. Yet, by accepting the counterfactual nature of participation, it may be possible for administrators to refocus their interest in this key condition by concentrating directly on its promotion and facilitation within the district. In this case, the possibility for a more positive interpretation of constituent participation exists whereby its particularly counterfactual character (whether described as cynicism, apathy, or

impracticality) is taken as a good reason to give it close attention during decision making. Such a melding of the philosophical and real-world understandings of participation would be consistent with the current research in that the respondents' view of participation characterizes it as a common feature of strategic and moral validity that is persistently counterfactual in all actual instances of policy- and decision-making.

6.3 Truthfulness: What Research and Imperatives Provide

Recognition of truthfulness as an important condition for making decisions surrounding district-wide initiatives is evident in the interviews: "I think truthfulness is key, here." Statements such as, "We all like to go out and be honest and truthful" were prevalent in the transcripts. As in the case with participation, although to a lesser degree, a counterfactual or scalar notion of truthfulness was also clearly expressed by the respondents: "I don't think truthfulness is an absolute. I think it's more on a scale...it's an ideal to strive toward." On first reading the interview data, therefore, there appeared to be some similarity between how the respondents conceived of truthfulness and its conception within Habermasian discourse theory. It is evident that the respondents describe two major subthemes of truthfulness in the development and implementation of district-wide initiatives. Truthfulness is important and it is a matter of degree.

On closer reading, however, the importance of truthfulness in initiative development appears unresolved in that it is seen as directly related to the need for open communication and to strategic planning. That is, the respondents tended to speak of truthfulness as relevant to securing the success of new policies and to sincere attempts at understanding the authenticity of initiatives. This two-fold view of truthfulness was

reflected in the characteristic descriptions of the role played by truthfulness in policy development. Each of these characterizations is discussed in relation to either the strategic or communicative relevance of this condition as reported by the respondents.

The first characteristic of truthfulness described by the respondents is a general understanding that truthfulness is linked to factual information encountered first-hand in the district or through secondary literature on education. This characteristic was phrased in terms of the ability to make truthful claims about a given initiative. In this sense, the truthfulness of a claim made in support of a district-wide initiative is grounded in empirical data – the available evidence. Empirical evidence is, therefore, seen by the administrators as the warrant of “truthful claims” that set the direction for the district: “You look at all the available evidence, then you make a decision that you feel is best.” Moreover, such truthful claims are regarded as essential to successful and sustainable initiatives: “Within a broad initiative like this one, or any initiative, you’re not going to get anywhere without being truthful.”

The importance of making truthful claims and the public display of truthfulness in their strategic planning is further understood by the administrators as vital to establishing constituent trust in district decision-making:

If you’re going to mobilize people to prepare them for good decision making, decision making that will be sustainable and efficient over time, the element of trust and truthfulness and honesty, that whole notion is critical in the process and without it people will not genuinely participate.

This sense of needing to establish a sense of trust within the district tends, however, to be linked to the strategic interests of administrators in creating successful, sustainable initiatives. Their working conception of truthfulness thereby gives this condition

relevance as a strategically salient consideration in securing constituent trust. Viewed as an “element of trust” needed for strategic reasons, this conception of truthfulness loses its relevance as a necessary epistemic condition in the rational reconstruction of a moral point of view. To summarize, this first characteristic sense of truthfulness as given by the respondents is of truth grounded in facts and is recognized by the respondents as an indispensable element of trust, the trust that is essential to leading effective and sustainable change: “Change leaders attempting to achieve systemic change, permanent change, strategic change would be well advised to ensure that the processes that they put in place have a substantial element of trust and truthfulness and openness.”

The second characteristic of truthfulness expressed by respondents conveys a sense of acting in accord with one’s basic, fundamental beliefs about the ends of education. This attitude was expressed in terms of “your decision is true [if] it protects the system’s integrity” or of truthfulness as “almost a missionary value” for the educational imperative. Spoken of in this way, truthfulness exhibits a close overlap with its conceptualization as a necessary condition for reaching the understanding that precedes jointly attained agreements. Policy- and decision-making must reflect the common aims of the district: “That’s the way I would see truthfulness. How true is it [a proposed initiative] to what your focus is and what your purpose is and what you know is right and what you know is accurate.” Characterized in this way, truthfully expressed educational imperatives permit the validation of district policy through open communication.

Moving further in the direction of truthfulness as an important condition of communication, the respondents also spoke of its extending even to the self-reflexive understanding of one's own intuitions and beliefs about the ends of education. "Part of what you're doing in the kind of initiative I'm talking about is drawing out the truth that we collectively hold among ourselves." Communicating truthfully with others about what one believes is regarded as highly important as administrators seek the collective ideals of the school district. Although the function of truthfulness as an epistemic value in establishing moral validity is not readily articulated in the interviews, there is a subtext acknowledging the role of truthfulness in authenticating initiatives and tacitly affirming district-wide imperatives. This interpretation indicates that the respondents have an awareness that truthfulness has an important role in decision making that goes beyond the strategic presentation of empirical data. In this sense, truthfulness is seen to have an imminent relation to an authentic understanding of policy initiatives. If this is the case, it suggests that the administrators' indirect understanding of the role of truthfulness in the search for authenticity already extends beyond what is presented by theorists such as Senge (2006). Whether this understanding of the importance of truthfulness to decision-making could provide a means of fostering a more robust view of this condition as epistemically necessary to moral rightness remains an open question.

On the whole, truthfulness is understood in two ways by the respondents: as an important strategic consideration in establishing constituent trust, and as an essential condition for the communication of educational imperatives that can be understood and supported by others as the authentic aims of education. The parallel of this finding to the

progression of thought in educational administration is striking. On the one hand, the practitioners, alike with theorists in the field, are seeking an empirical knowledge base to guide, support, and warrant their decisions. On the other hand, the administrators, akin to administration researchers, are tacitly expressing a need for some means of aligning their policies with their convictions – on the assumption that their convictions are right. The respondents' thoughts on truthfulness, thereby, highlight and emphasize an important distinction that has yet to be well clarified in the educational administration literature: the difference between using the “truth” (in the sense of citing empirical evidence in support of educational propositions) to drive decision making, and communicating “truthfully” (without concealment of agendas or self-deception) about educational imperatives, policies, and initiatives. This is an important distinction because the truth of the former cannot on its own validate the rightness of initiatives. Nor can the truthful authentication of initiatives attain the greater sense of “moral rightness” without broad public participation in such deliberations. The understanding of the proximity of truthfulness to rightness presents an opportunity, however, to further the cause of practical discourse in educational administration as a moral epistemology that can collectively assess and validate the rightness of policies and initiatives under communicative conditions.

6.4 Non-Coercion: Consent is Best, but Pressure has its Place

Discussion of non-coercion and its role in executive decision-making elicited the most variant and ambivalent array of respondent comments. Among these is a high recognition of non-coercion as an important consideration in making decisions surrounding district-wide initiatives. For example, a general sense of the importance of

non-coercion for its own sake was frequently offered: “You have to work to ensure that decision making is not influenced by coercion. The only way to do that is really to engage in a genuine dialogue [as proposed by Bohm and Senge]” and; “In this particular initiative, the notion of coercion hasn’t been one that has come to the fore for a great deal of discussion. No one has said to me, ‘I feel coerced’.” However, the importance of non-coercion was also presented for the sake of its strategic implications: “From a practical level, you will get nowhere if you are beginning from the assumption of coercive strategies – certainly not anywhere with anything important. As Fullan says, ‘Nothing that’s important can be mandated’” and “If you go back to the early implementation literature, we knew then that it’s not a very effective idea, if you want something done, to just write someone a letter whom you know doesn’t want to do it and say, ‘Do this!’.” As such, the respondents clearly understand non-coercion as intrinsically and strategically important, although they were more able to cite and defend the value of this condition on the basis of practical reasons.

Compounding the variation in ascribed value that accompanied discussion of non-coercion was a persistent interest the respondents showed for re-termining the subject of their responses. For example, the subject of non-coercion was often recast by the administrators in terms of the appropriate use of pressure: “I might not use the word coercion, but I would use the word pressure, but that’s the job... there was certainly pressure [on district leaders] to build a plan but it’s pressure that I would say is appropriate.” Moreover, once the term “pressure” was brought into the discussion of non-coercion, the respondents were quite willing to consider the important role appropriately

applied pressure played in decision making: “Pressure injected into the decision-making process at the right time can have a big pay-off, but I think it requires a certain skill set and a certain set of experiences.” In moving the interviews in the direction of this terminology, some respondents clearly indicated the strategic salience of pressure and, thereby, linked the strategic validity of an initiative to their ability to limit non-coercion when appropriate. Indeed, understanding the strategic limiting of non-coercion was generally considered an essential administrative skill.

While the shift in terms from “non-coercion” to “pressure” was clearly significant for some respondents, others were quite comfortable initiating a discussion of the function of “coercion” as an “important element” in their practices. For these administrators, the occasional use of coercion was a straightforward part of satisfying the demands of the organization: “If you ask me whether or not coercion is important, it absolutely is. It is an important element in the overall change process.” and “Coerciveness in the decision-making process, in my view, is an important element. It represents some of the glue that holds the decision-making process together.” Moreover, for these administrators, coercion has a strategic salience that is to be acquired and honed through practice and experience: “Coercion is an important element in the recipe but it certainly has to be used cautiously... I would say it’s probably like salt, a little will do you.” This data suggests that, as with the use of pressure, coercion has an important place in the strategic management and shaping of district policy, although it should be used with discretion and expert knowledge. Such evidence also reinforces an acceptable limiting of non-coercion in decision making. So, while non-coercion is viewed by the

respondents as a meaningful and vital consideration in their strategic planning – as an important condition for establishing the strategic validity of an initiative – they also value its counterparts in the form of pressure and coercion. In this regard, the interview data reveals a good deal of strategic thinking surrounding this condition in current approaches to policy- and decision-making.

“Of course, coercion is on a continuum between persuasion and coercion.” As with the other conditions of practical discourse, (non-)coercion was at times referred to as a scalar concept whereby the fulfilment of the condition was never completely realized in practice. In this case, the idea that all organizational decision-making will have a degree of coercion is well represented. Also consistent with discussion of the other conditions, statements were made on the interrelated nature of (non-)coercion, inclusion, participation, and truthfulness, and on the implications of coercion, in particular, for satisfying the conditions generally. Such statements include, “If you do something to coerce me... it undermines truthfulness” and “My experience has been the more coercion that is brought into play, the more some people will argue that... they didn’t have an opportunity to participate or... they were not really included in the process.” Here, again, the emphasis of the respondents is placed on coercion and the observation that it can negatively impact the other conditions of validity.

Consistent, however, with the variance in opinion surrounding the discussion of non-coercion, certain respondents did on occasion express an absolute conceptualization of the condition as an unconditional feature of decision making that should never be compromised: “I don’t share the view that coercion has to exist in an organization. I think

wherever it exists it's a nasty piece of business and it's destructive" and "If the district authority makes all the policy decisions without engaging the people throughout the organization and people are going to be affected then that becomes coercion because the policy is defining what will happen." This attitude toward (non-)coercion tended to be given in the spirit of "respect for others" as a moral principle to abide by in policy development. Still, as no distinct moral epistemology was articulated, it is difficult to interpret such statements. That is, "respect for others" was not explicitly offered as a justifiable moral principle that could withstand philosophical assessment and be applied as an impartial criterion for assessing policy. Although it may, in spirit, be read as an expression of collective moral intuition concerning reciprocity, "respect for others" was simply asserted as a universally valid moral precept. Hence, the value of this principle in grounding a suitable moral epistemology for the field of educational administration remains undefended. In this regard, non-coercion appears vital to the voluntary and constructive engagement of constituents while itself bearing only an informal and tacit sense of moral worth.

While respondents generally agreed that gaining the consent of as many staff members as possible was always the best approach to advancing an initiative, there was much disagreement about whether coercion should be part of district decision-making and, if used, the degree to which coercion is acceptable. Some respondents, for example, were quick to take an opportunity to change the term under discussion from "non-coercion" to "pressure". This forthright acceptance of "pressure" as an important part of decision making seems to indicate an unspoken awareness that "coercion" is negatively

valued in egalitarian societies and an interest in actively distancing the district from coercive practices. Others, however, had little or no difficulty accepting coercion as an “important element” in decision-making processes. For these administrators, the periodic coercion of constituents, particularly teachers and other staff, who refused to agree to an initiative, is an accepted responsibility and an appropriate use of the power inherent in their organizational position. Increasing the complexity of the issue, still other respondents adamantly rejected the use of coercion in decision-making and claimed to energetically seek the approval, or at least the consent of, every employee who may be affected by a wide-scale initiative.

The high degree of variance in administrators’ willingness to reject, accept, or utilize coercive practices highlights the general sense in which a strategic view of the conditions appears to prevail in district administration. From this strategic perspective, non-coercion is thought of as a highly contingent characteristic of decision making that is regarded with ambivalence by most senior administrators. If the interview data provides representative examples of the respondents’ attitudes, their view is that non-coercion is strategically salient to achieving the ends of the organization and should be maximized whenever possible as the best assurance of a policy’s success. Moreover, coercion in the decision-making process can and should be reduced whenever possible by purposefully limiting other conditions of practical discourse, such as inclusion. In this sense, the interrelated nature of the conditions is well acknowledged and put to use when deemed appropriate by senior administrators. Through such practices, the respondents affirm a belief that the most effective support for an initiative is to be gained through seeking the

informed consent of their constituents. In this sense, non-coercion is clearly seen as an important ingredient in successful and sustainable initiatives.

However, the importance of coercion as a factor contributing to the viability of an initiative is also well acknowledged in the interview data. This evidence clearly connotes the other side of the administrators' ambivalence towards non-coercion as a decidedly contingent condition. Moreover, the accepted use of coercion (or pressure) in school-district administration, especially in ensuring successful implementation of policy initiatives by school staff, stresses the complexity of maintaining that both non-coercion and coercion lend strategic validity to decision making. In turn, the need for expertise in navigating this complexity is quick to surface in the interviews: "Timing is critical because if you apply pressure too soon, some of your otherwise supporters, you know, people who have buy-in, will be critical that you were too harsh." From this strategic perspective, non-coercion is no longer portrayed as a vital condition that will, nevertheless, always be counterfactual in practice (as is the case with participation), but as a relevant tactical consideration that may be actively limited in furtherance of district initiatives. The result is a generally strategic characterization of non-coercion that oscillates between garnering the consent and assuring the compliance of staff and other constituents. The administrators' collective understanding of non-coercion in policy- and decision-making is thereby characterized as consent is best, but pressure has its place.

Chapter Seven

Considerations in Applying a Discourse Theory of Morality

The interviews raise concern over whether applying the conditions of practical discourse to the context of school-district administration may prove to be an instance of implausible theorizing or impractical idealism. In addition, questions arise concerning the ability of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality to be sufficiently sensitive to the particular circumstances of specific cases and contexts of administrative decision-making. As such, this application of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality invites consideration of at least three questions that are central to theorizing and adapting his work for real world application. The following chapter addresses each of these issues under sub-headings of plausibility, particularity, and practicality of the conditions of practical discourse.

In the first instance, the plausibility of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality largely depends on his claim that the conditions are universal and necessary presuppositions of argumentation. The question here is: are the conditions identified by Habermas universal conditions of discourse that are essential to impartial mediation between all the possible value orientations present in pluralistic societies, or are they simply Eurocentric norms of deliberation? Answering this question in the latter risks greatly diminishing the philosophical value of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality for guiding and assessing the impartiality and universality of decisions made in the current (and other) context(s).

In the second instance, the question is one of context sensitivity and whether Habermas's discourse theory provides a procedural framework that is genuinely open to

expressions of the particular views and interests of a heterogeneous society. This question asks if practical discourse should be understood as an inclusionary practice or as an inherently exclusionary practice in need of substantial modification. Examining this question leads to an interpretive discussion of the meaning of the conditions in light of a willingness to reach joint understanding. Also included is a brief introduction to the idea of discourses of application and the important role such discourses can play in further assuring the context sensitivity of a discourse theory of morality.

In the third instance, on the question of practicality, the stringent requirements of the conditions of practical discourse as counterfactual idealizations may appear too demanding to be of value to practitioners and researchers in the field of educational administration. Then again, if read too literally, the counterfactual nature of the conditions could be understood to render nearly all district-wide initiatives immoral from the outset, despite the best intentions of administrators, because the procedures by which they are approved do not (and can not) meet the requirements of practical discourse. The risk in either case is a serious reduction in the interest of administrators, and the field of educational administration more generally, to adopt Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality for guiding and assessing district initiatives. To address this problem, the role that trust and, more specifically, "rational trust" can play in bridging between counterfactual idealizations and organizational realities is explored.

The interviews, therefore, disclose important implications of applying Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality that align with major theoretical concerns raised in connection with placing the conditions of practical discourse in concrete contexts. To

summarize, the objections to be addressed are that Habermas's discourse theory should not be applied as a moral epistemology to school-district administration because (a) practical discourse is not an impartial and universal means of reaching agreements in pluralistic societies, and/or because (b) the conditions of practical discourse do not allow for the particularity of individual cases to be sufficiently considered, and/or because (c) the conditions of practical discourse are simply too demanding and restrictive for real-world application. If any of these claims is valid then the moral point of view articulated through this research risks rejection by practitioners and researchers who deem this theoretical framing too biased, too insensitive, or too demanding. In what follows, clarification of the plausibility of Habermas's epistemic conditions as universal and necessary to the moral point of view is made, an interpretation of the conditions as allowing sufficient opportunity to consider the particular features of individual cases is offered, and a discussion of the practicality of a discourse-theoretical model of decision making when supplemented with a conception of rational trust is provided.

7.1 Plausible Conditions: Addressing Concern over Universal Presuppositions

Arguably, the earliest and most ardent voice against the plausibility of Habermas's rational reconstruction of the universal conditions of practical discourse is Thomas McCarthy. McCarthy's (1991) problematizing of a Discourse Theory of Morality turns on the assertion that ethical communities instill in their members a set of value orientations rooted in particular traditions, practices, and experiences. These substantive values form a fixed world view that is often incommensurable with the diversity of understanding held by others. On this account, there is little reason to think

that Habermas's moral epistemology is any less a product of his own particular, Western world view. As such, it becomes questionable whether Habermas's depiction of reaching mutual understanding and agreement under putatively universal presuppositions of argumentation is a universally valid approach to moral validity, conflict resolution, and/or social coordination. If the universality of practical discourse is shown to be in doubt, then it would be of little worth or relevance for resolving seemingly intractable political, legal, or moral conflicts outside European traditions. Moreover, as Western democracies continue to diversify, his project as constructed on supposed universal presuppositions would have less and less validity as an acceptable moral epistemology, even for modern societies. As McCarthy writes, "Habermas's conception of practical discourse is too restrictive to serve as a model, even as an ideal model, of rational will formation and collective decision making in the democratic public sphere" (p. 198).

There is a clear sense in McCarthy's rejection as "too restrictive" (or too Western, in this case) that, if adopted as a decision-making model, the substantive claims inherent in Habermas's conception of practical discourse will preclude the majority of public decisions from attaining impartial and universal moral validity. While this rejection aims at Habermas's overarching intention (i.e., of attaining valid mutual understanding and agreement through the practice of practical discourse), the primary concern for the current research is the implicit denial of Habermas's claim to rationally reconstructing universal presuppositions of argumentation as the conditions of practical discourse. As McCarthy (1991) points out, Habermas's rational reconstruction of practical discourse "raises the question of whether the model succeeds in capturing *universal* conditions of

reaching understanding in language, that is, *general* and *unavoidable* presuppositions of communicative action, or whether it represents instead a thinly disguised Eurocentrism” (p. 134).

The stakes are high for Habermas and he shows an acute awareness of the implications of McCarthy’s appraisal, particularly in “the regulation of culturally sensitive matters, such as... the public school curriculum” (1998, p. 144). In practice, such policy decisions are regularly based on normative evaluations formed from within culturally specific traditions. While public school policies, for example, are generally made through dialogical procedures, there is potential for minority groups to be excluded from participating in these procedures simply because they are not versed in the communicative norms of European tradition. Such exclusion is not necessarily intentional and may occur even when well-intentioned efforts are made to encourage minority participation in policy development. If, however, Habermas’s conditions of practical discourse are in fact culturally bound conventions of conduct (i.e., particularized norms of communication) learned through the traditions of the European majority, then embedding them in moral argument and the decision-making processes of public education may further suppress the interests of already marginalized cultures and, indeed, represent a thinly disguised Eurocentrism in educational governance. The best case in this scenario is an institutional entrenchment of deliberative processes favouring majority interests. At worst, though, the systemic and perpetual prejudicing of educational initiatives may lead to disengagement from schooling or adoption of coercive strategies

by minority groups frustrated with their lack of representation. Neither outcome would legitimate promotion of Habermas's moral point of view in educational administration.

Habermas's response to McCarthy is often indirect and tends to build upon and refine concepts central to practical discourse as a specific practice of cooperative reasoning. This is certainly true of "the exacting presuppositions of argumentation that force participants to decenter their own interpretative perspectives [or "the formal conditions of practical discourse"]" (2003, p. 86). For Habermas, the "universality" of these conditions rests in their pragmatic "necessity" to practical discourses aimed at mutual agreement in the social coordination of action. He argues that these are the presuppositions communicatively engaged actors must make if they are to participate in the fundamental social practice of coordinating their actions in the interest of all. In this sense, the formal conditions have "an 'inevitability' stemming from the conceptual connections of a learned – but for us inescapable – rule-governed behaviour" (2003, p.86). This means that the conditions transcend all culturally substantive value orientations because there exists no functional equivalents, no set of alternative conditions, that could fulfill the fundamental aim of mutual understanding and agreement through cooperative practical reasoning.

At this point, it is worth briefly reviewing Habermas's justification of the conditions of practical discourse as necessary and, therefore, universally present in communicative rationality. The basis of his justification rests in demonstrating the existence of a performative contradiction in cases where interlocutors aim at understanding each other's positions on a controversial norm without recourse to certain

presuppositional orientations. Truthfulness, for instance, must be given on the part of all participants if a collective understanding of an issue is to be established. Truthfulness is a necessary guard against self-deception and the deception of others for which there is no possible substitute. As such, truthfulness exhibits its necessity to practical discourse and so too for each additional condition: inclusion, participation, and non-coercion. As presuppositions of argumentation, each is indispensable to the act of reaching a shared understanding (even about what constitutes the necessary features of argumentation); hence each is affirmed as a necessary condition of practical discourse aimed at establishing a generalizable norm: “The presuppositions themselves are identified by convincing a person who contests the hypothetical reconstruction offered that he is caught up in performative contradictions” (Habermas, 1990, p. 89). In this sense, Habermas is simply identifying the transcendental presuppositions that interlocutors always already abide by in the cooperative search for mutual understanding and agreement. He therefore avoids giving a Eurocentric (or ethnocentric) account of intersubjective moral reasoning by identifying the presuppositions necessary to any and all communicative practice. Habermas then formalizes these logically necessary conditions of communicative reasoning in order to provide performative criteria for his moral epistemology.

There is, however, an additional subtlety of Habermas’s analysis that bears mentioning. Habermas is careful not to claim that he has given a purely transcendental argument or “ultimate justification” for the universal rules of practical discourse as facts of reason. That is, Habermas does not want to maintain that his conditions of practical

discourse are “immune to the fallibilism of all experiential knowledge” and, therefore, universal and absolute as *a priori* knowledge available through transcendental deduction (1990, p. 95). Instead, he insists that he is providing a transcendental-pragmatic justification of his discourse theory that depends on a weak form of transcendental analysis whereby “the fact that there are *no alternatives* to these rules of argumentation is what is being proved; the rules themselves are not being *justified*... this kind of argumentation cannot accomplish a transcendental deduction in the Kantian sense” (p. 95).

The emphasis, as such, is on aiding those who are sceptical of Habermas’s rational reconstruction to become aware of the presuppositions inherent in their own arguments, pointing out the performative contradictions they would engage in if they did not abide by those presuppositions in argumentation, and corroborating through counter-examples that there are “no alternatives to the presuppositions” that can provide an impartial route toward reaching an intersubjective understanding (p. 97). In this way, Habermas’s modification of the transcendental argument, to incorporate a pragmatic sense of language use, avoids engaging in speculative metaphysics while still maintaining that the presuppositions he articulates are founded in a “fact of universal pragmatics” (1994, p. 50). This move also opens the prospect of corroborating (or refuting) his discourse theory with empirical evidence or examples, provided such evidence is itself submitted to argumentation (i.e., discursive justification of its validity).

Inasmuch as the inescapability of Habermas’s reconstruction of the moral point of view may satisfy shared assumptions about morality, there remains a further criticism

that specifically questions the universality of “impartiality” or “impartial judgement” that forms the core of a modern moral point of view. Ferrara (1988) sets the concern as follows: “Its [Habermasian discourse theory’s] central presupposition – the possibility of sharply distinguishing form from content – can rarely be satisfied” (p. 251). From this observation it follows, for Ferrara, that what Habermas proposes in his Discourse Theory of Morality amounts to “one language game alongside others [and] while the plausibility of this claim cannot be denied [as] a reconstruction of what we Western moderns [understand as impartial justice]” it thereby endorses a “substantive [and Eurocentric] vision of good [that is not universally applicable]” (p. 250). Ferrara is first targeting Habermas’s claim that the epistemic conditions of discourse are purely formal and procedural (i.e., that they constitute a universal pragmatics of argumentation), and not substantive moral values or a Eurocentric view of what is good. To Ferrara, the substantive value or good that is at the core of Habermas’s rational reconstruction of the moral point of view is the need for impartiality in moral judgements. Ferrara implies, however, that impartiality is a Western assumption about what it means to be moral and just, and, as a distinctly Western assumption, the criteria securing impartial judgements cannot form the basis of a universally acceptable moral epistemology. Whereas, for McCarthy, the practice of practical discourse appears as a Eurocentric form of moral deliberation, for Ferrara the central aim of impartial judgement is not necessarily a universal function of morality.

As to Ferrara’s objection, it can first be asked if the impartial moral point of view is an accepted modern view of how to coordinate social interactions. On this point, even

Ferrara grants the plausibility of this view as “an inescapable standpoint for us” in Western pluralist democracies from which there is no turning back (p. 250). For us moderns, then, Ferrara appears to agree with Rehg (1997) that Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality proposes a “unique sort of metavalue [or metagood or metapractice] that one cannot rationally reject” without great cost, such as a complete disengagement from the testing of moral validity claims (p. 147). On these grounds, there seems little objection to applying the conditions of practical discourse to administrative decision-making in Canada's public school system. That is, if one presupposes the context of a modern pluralist democracy, then the universality of Habermas's reconstruction for such a setting appears plausible. In cases such as the current study, therefore, Habermas’s discourse theory appears to furnish universally valid criteria for moral justification.

Still, Habermas understands his Discourse Theory of Morality as a universal-pragmatic reconstruction of the necessary conditions of validity claims to moral rightness. It's not simply plausibility for a modern world view and Western social institutions that he is after. This is an especially important consideration in light of Canada’s continuing cultural diversification (Wotherspoon, 2009) and in recognition of the epistemic traditions of Aboriginal Peoples (Madjidi & Restoule, 2008). The greater question of universality, however, can readily be turned on the sceptic and proponents of communicative rationality might ask whether he or she is willing to give up impartiality in favour of some other substantive value that could regulate peaceful social interactions? Once such a discourse is entered, Habermas’s own program of establishing the universality of his discourse theory can be undertaken in the argument. Ferrara, for

example, might be asked if he would not want his own proposal for an alternative moral epistemology to be understood and judged without prejudice. Would he not expect, in this case, that his proponents and opponents alike take an impartial view of his proposal, engage in a sincere and reciprocal attempt to examine and understand his position, and freely decide if they agree with him? Moreover, would he not want some assurance that the examination of his proposal is performed without bias, that certain conditions pertain during the deliberations to ensure that a common understanding and mutual agreement as to its validity is achieved? And, if pressed on this point, it is not unreasonable to expect that Ferrara would have to specify some set of conditions akin to inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion. Finally, if Ferrara agreed that, short of disengaging, he had no alternative but to submit his proposal to such a procedure (thinly sketched as it is here), this would certainly appear to count as further evidence that Habermas has given a more or less acceptable rendering of necessary conditions of moral validity.

Of course, the same may be said of Habermas. Although much of his project depends on the claim of the universal necessity of the conditions governing practical discourse, he cannot simply turn to empirical evidence (or collective intuitions) to substantiate his position. This is because the validity of such evidence would need to be assessed under the same rationally reconstructed conditions of cooperative reasoning (Rehg, 2009). For Habermas, there exists no alternative means of testing empirical claims that can fulfil the pragmatic aim of reaching understanding through language while, at the same time, avoiding the necessary presuppositions of argumentation. This he attributes to the fact that “The presupposed objectivity of the world is so deeply entwined with the

intersubjectivity of reaching an understanding” (2003, p. 100). Given Habermas’s position that all reasoning aimed at reaching understanding between people must involve the formal pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation, the epistemic conditions under which empirical validity and moral validity must be sought will not differ (Apel, 1992; 1980). Without recourse to empirical evidence that could, without undergoing a justificatory discourse, definitively verify the culturally transcendent nature of the conditions, the trans-cultural concern questioning the plausibility of Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality as a universally valid moral epistemology remains irresolvable on the basis of empirical research alone.

This, however, does not mean that empirical evidence cannot be given in support of the validity of Habermas’s rational reconstruction of the conditions as universal. It simply means that such evidence would not constitute proof of the truth of their universality but, instead, stress the fallibility of Habermas’s reconstruction and hold open the possibility that empirical evidence, offered at some point in time, might work to refute Habermas’s project. Somewhat ironically, McCarthy suggests this very possibility of introducing empirical evidence in validating Habermas’s reconstruction of the universal presuppositions of communicative rationality. In this sense, McCarthy is in agreement with Habermas as to at least one direction open to exploring the empirical and theoretical adequacy of practical discourse as a universally valid model of moral justification: “Several lines of research suggest themselves [including] investigation of pathological or distorted patterns of communication in the light of the standards and

conditions established for normal communication by formal pragmatics” (McCarthy, 1991, p. 138). It is along these lines that the current research travels.

While investigating whether the epistemic conditions of practical discourse, as rationally reconstructed by Habermas, can offer productive guidance and assessment of school-district policy, it is also possible to see if the conditions fit with administrators’ collective and individual understanding of what is important in decision making. To this extent, the interviews show some parallels between the actual conditions sought in policy development and the necessary conditions of practical discourse. On the indispensability of participation, for instance, “It’s critically important to create, not only the perception, but also the reality that people did have a clear opportunity to participate in multiple ways.” On the basis of such evidence, a fit can be found in that the interviews yield insight into an overlapping recognition of the salience of the conditions to public decision makers. The importance of the four conditions to senior administrators, in turn, underscores the plausibility of Habermas’s rational reconstruction. For it appears that whether district leaders’ interests are strategic or communicative, these are the conditions that demand their attention and are unavoidably interwoven with both aims.

While the interview data is not conclusive, it does support the plausibility of the necessary presuppositions as already inherent in the decision-making practices of public administrators who are well aware of their mandate to act in the general interest of all their constituents. As such, the interviews may be read as validating the universality of the four conditions of practical discourse, at least in the current setting of educational administration. This interpretation is possible despite those aspects of the interviews that

do not appear to fit so well with Habermas's universal norms of practical discourse. There are many instances, for example, where the conditions are not seen by the respondents as absolute, irrevocable "rights" of communication. At such times, the administrators link the conditions to strategic considerations of "buy in", "support for", and "success of" initiatives. As such, the working knowledge they have of the importance of the conditions often exhibits a closer fit with an instrumental, ends-means mode of reasoning.

Even this finding can, however, be interpreted in support of the conditions as universally relevant. This is because it suggests that even a tacit understanding of the communicative function of the conditions can lead to their effective use in securing the preconceived ends of the school system. That is, the value placed on the conditions – albeit for strategic reasons – is itself an indication of their perceived importance in the decision-making process. Administrators have learned that their constituents have certain expectations concerning inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion, and if these expectations are not adequately satisfied then district initiatives are less likely to be successful. In this sense, the administrators appear to be reflecting a set of universally valid communicative expectations but for pragmatic reasons of their own understanding.

Of course, the question of whether the evidence provided at this time corroborates or undermines Habermas's claim of identifying universal presuppositions of argumentation remains open. What is being suggested is merely one interpretation of the empirical support that can be established for Habermas's rational reconstruction. Further interpretations may abound and these particular findings "must be checked against [other]

individual cases” (Habermas, 1990, p. 97). Yet, without evidence or reasons to the contrary, it is still the case that collective understanding of, and mutual agreement on, this and like questions can only take place under a set of impartial conditions closely resembling those identified by Habermas as necessary for communicative rationality.

7.2 Particularistic Conditions: Attending to Inclusivity and Context Sensitivity

Early formulations of Habermas’s discourse theory were often criticized for failing to allow the particularities of individuals and relevant aspects of their circumstances to surface in moral deliberation (Johnson, 2001; Young, 1997; 1995). Drawing again on the work of Ferrara (1988), this criticism is articulated in the claim that Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality provides "no adequate role for reflective judgment understood as a capacity to mediate the universal and the particular without eliminating the specificity of the particular" which leads to “the lack of context-sensitivity in his universalism” and the eventual quashing of each individuals’ sense of identity (p. 251). For Honneth (1995), the issue of accounting for the particularity of others in discourse is a matter of supplementing communicative rationality with a sense of “care” for the other as a means of furnishing the moral point of view with “the affective impulses of reciprocal recognition” (p. 319). In this way, the particularity of each human being can be recognized and “asymmetrical acts” that do not conform to the modern principle of equal treatment for all can be morally redeemed (p. 316). A further reconceiving of moral discourse as a practice more capable of attending to the particularity of others is offered in the work of Young (1995). Her interest is in articulating “an ideal of asymmetrical reciprocity” that does not obscure “the difference

and particularity of the other position” (p. 346). Such an ideal would entail that “We mutually recognize one another, and aim to understand one another...we each must be open to learning about the other person’s perspective, since we cannot take the other person’s standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own” (p. 354). The upshot for Young is that “Normative judgement is best understood as the product of dialogue under conditions of equality and equal respect. Ideally, the outcome of such dialogue and judgement is just and legitimate only if all the affected perspectives have a voice” (p. 360).

While objections to Habermas’s work on the basis of a greater need for attending to the particularity and situatedness of individuals can be subtle and varied, it is possible to thematize these objections as taking a common interest in the “reciprocity” that takes place between individual subjects in discourse. Moreover, depending on how the concept of reciprocity is interpreted, there may actually be a general agreement between Habermas and his critics in this dispute. If this is so, the dispute appears more likely a matter of how to meaningfully operationalize reciprocal communication and sufficiently fulfil the conditions of inclusion and participation. By parsing the above objections, for example, it is possible to identify the reciprocity thread that ties them together. Ferrara claims the need in practical discourse is for reflective judgement that discovers and takes account of the contextuality of differently situated actors. Honneth posits care for the other as a precondition of the reciprocal recognition that can generate asymmetrical treatment. For Young, practical discourse lacks an asymmetrical reciprocity that does not reduce the difference between participants but allows the equal expression of all voices.

Each objection can, however, be addressed by taking seriously Habermas's statements about the sort of reciprocity he is advocating. The following comment illustrates this point well:

Generalized reciprocal perspective-taking requires not just empathy for, but also interpretive intervention into, the self-understanding of participants who must be willing to revise their descriptions of themselves and others (1998, p. 42).

Such statements convey a clear need for mutual recognition and reflexivity in practical discourse. All participants must be willing to reflect on the interests and value-orientations of others and themselves alike, and this attitude must extend beyond an initial sense of self-interest or empathy and open all participants to a collective appraisal. This requires a non-levelling symmetry in cooperative acts of communication that does not attempt to appropriate or assimilate, but actively seek the "inclusion of the other *in his otherness*" (1998, p. 40). In fact, Habermas has gone so far in his articulation of a reciprocity that is sensitive to difference that, as early as 2001, Johnson was able to suggest that his later formulations of communicative rationality "have opened up possibilities for a new and productive episode [that] must be seen to rest precisely on its open-ended and dialogic character" (p. 59).

Perhaps, disputes over the inclusivity of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality should also draw attention toward the meaningful operationalization of sincerity in the form of truthfulness and non-coercion. Engagement in practical discourse allows – indeed, requires – that particular interests and value-orientations be incorporated into the joint search for acceptable practical norms, an elaboration of what it means to communicate a sincere self-clarification and make an honest appraisal of interests and

values seems forthcoming. In terms of moral intuitions about sincerity, it may be the case that Habermas's philosophical account of the conditions of practical discourse provides space for further development of critical practices. More imaginative self-clarifications and aesthetic self-explorations may have an important role to play in satisfying the condition of truthfulness, for example. Such work could assist in the identification and articulation of relevant personal perspectives. Or it may be that a wider range of literary forms including storytelling, drama, autobiography, and narrative could encourage participation in discourse through a more positive expression of individual perspectives and values (Johnson, 2001). To the extent that such forms of expression are practiced and familiar to certain participants, they may present a less coercive, in the sense of more comfortable and less intimidating, means of disclosing one's identity and contextual reflections. On these grounds, such forms deserve further consideration when working to enhance the communicative conditions of sincerity and the collective agency of all parties in practical discourse.

Regarding the context-sensitivity available in practical discourse, Habermas clearly acknowledges major additional considerations beyond the initial justification of norms. To this point in the current study, the presentation of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality as a theoretical framework has focused on the moral justification of norms and policy, and the function of the conditions of practical discourse in that respect. Once a norm is considered justified under conditions of practical discourse, it may be accepted as part of a constellation of valid norms guiding moral interactions. This reservoir of morally just norms can, however, create a need for a "further discursive step"

in Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality (1994, p. 37). Habermas writes: "The application of norms calls for argumentative clarification in its own right. In this case, the impartiality of judgement cannot again be secured through a principle of universalization; rather, in addressing questions of context-sensitive application, practical reason must be informed by a principle of appropriateness" (1994, p. 14). At this next step, interlocutors work together to choose the most appropriate moral norm for a given situation as they move from a procedure of justification to one of application. This secondary step is articulated in the concept of "application discourses" and the "sense of appropriateness" in applying justified norms to particular cases. Rehg (1997) explains this transition as follows, "At issue is not the justification of a general norm but rather the question of which concrete action is warranted in the light of prima facie norms and situational particulars" (p. 247).

On this aspect of his discourse theory, Habermas especially endorses the work of Klaus Günther (1993) and often defers to Günther as the authority on this matter. However, unlike Habermas's clear articulation of the conditions of practical discourse, Günther provides no clear stipulation of conditions for application discourses. Rather, it seems implied that discourses of application would necessarily take place under the same presuppositions of argumentation that ground the conditions of practical discourse. This is implied because both practical discourses and application discourses require argumentative clarification. If an application discourse is to result in the appropriate choice and application of a valid norm, then the participants cannot dispense with the necessary presuppositions of argumentation. This is a reasonable assertion because the

conditions necessary to the possibility of understanding and impartiality still need to be in play in discourses of application – to assure that everyone's interests are understood in the circumstances and that the application of a norm is made appropriately in the specific context. In this sense, the conditions assure that discourses of application remain oriented towards understanding and impartiality in the appropriate choice and application of norms. In application discourses, as in practical discourses, the conditions act to preserve the reciprocity and sincerity inherent in the moral point of view. Inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion establish a moral viewpoint for both the justification and application of norms, enhancing opportunity for participants to consider what is right in general and appropriate for them in a given situation.

The possible implications of considering application discourses and the principle of appropriateness in educational policy and practice are many (Martin, 2012). The interest at hand, however, is in noting the provision of this supplementary step as an important resource for addressing concerns over the level of context sensitivity inherent in Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality. In introducing the sense of situational appropriateness, Habermas and Günther clearly acknowledge that the individuals most affected by a norm or policy are in an epistemically relevant position to determine its applicability. They are opening space in Habermas's discourse theory for deliberating on "the right thing to do in the given circumstances" (1994, p. 36). In deciding what is appropriate, however, participants in application discourses are not free to dispense with the moral point of view. They cannot, for example, act exclusively or deceptively if the aim is impartial understanding and joint agreement. Habermas explains, "In discourses of

application, the principle of appropriateness takes on the role played by the principle of universalization in justificatory discourses. Only the two principles taken together exhaust the idea of impartiality” (p. 37). In this way, the impartiality that is so intrinsic to mutual understanding and agreement is preserved in the movement from the justification to the application of norms and policies.

This preservation of the moral point of view is particularly relevant to directions sought in the current research. The specific interest, here, is in theorizing and understanding the conditions of practical discourse in relation to initiative development in school-district administration. A further intent is to explain and recommend Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality as a suitable moral epistemology to the field of educational administration – to outline and promote it as a means of assuring educational initiatives are morally valid. As such, the theoretical framework and interviews have focused solely on the conditions of practical discourse in relation to the justification of initiatives. Introducing the concept of application discourses, however, hints at a much broader research programme open to this course of inquiry. It raises the possibility of examining whether the moral point of view operates not just in the development but in the actual application of educational policy.

While further study is left to the future, the need to maintain a moral point of view in the situated application of policy suggests the conditions of practical discourse could supply a key entry point for this research. Habermas, moreover, outlines a number of possible types of rational collective will formation that could be foci of administrative studies. In addition to practical discourses for the justification of policies in the general

interest and application discourses for determining situational appropriateness of policy, Habermas introduces conceptions of ethical-political discussion, negotiation of compromises under fair bargaining conditions, and pragmatic implementation discourses (McCarthy, 1991). Common to each of these types is “the neutralization of power differentials attached to conflicting interest positions or concealed in traditional value constellations” (p. 192). So, while each type of intersubjective deliberative practice may be bound to its own distinct formal principle that defines an acceptable outcome, it appears that the conditions of practical discourse would still be needed to orient this collection of communicative procedures toward mutual understanding. Furthermore, practical discourse would remain as the central practice of justification for the moral integrity of the “whole web” of overlapping communication types. For these reasons, the study and application of conditions of practical discourse in institutional settings is singularly important (p. 193).

7.3 Practical Conditions: Resourcing “Rational Trust” for Educational Settings

Inasmuch as this research lends support to Habermas’s rational reconstruction of the conditions of practical discourse as a plausible framework for educational decision-making, it also focuses attention on the highly demanding intention of fulfilling the conditions satisfactorily in practice. Recall that each respondent indicated their direct experience with the scalar nature of all four conditions and characterized participation as inherently and disappointingly low. As apprehension concerning their fulfilment may pose a serious impediment to the acceptance of a discourse-theoretical model of decision-making in school-district administration, an attempt at supporting the practicality of the

conditions in this context appears warranted. Again, McCarthy offers a clear-cut and succinct summation of the issue: “Since political discourses always take place under less than ideal conditions, it will always be open to dissenters to view any given collective decision as tainted by de facto limitations and thus not acceptable under ideal conditions” (1991, p. 197). If this is the case, then no actual decision-making procedure or policy can fulfill the requirements of moral validity, and it may appear that no initiative may justifiably be deemed morally valid. This repercussion of real-world instances of practical discourse may, thereby, impair the moral standing of all policy decisions made at public institutions. The implication for the current study – an implication that certainly resonated with the respondents – is that educational administrators and researchers in the field might find the conditions of practical discourse too unrealistic or idealistic for guiding and assessing policy initiatives. Moreover, even if school-district administrators were to take a more communicative moral point of view in decision making, the district’s initiatives would remain tainted by the de facto limitations of the actual procedure. In turn, by excluding at the outset all but the most generally accepted policy decisions from valid considerations of moral worth, practical discourse resists wide adoption in institutional decision-making processes and invites rejection by public administrators as too restrictive and demanding.

There is some support in the educational administration literature for rejecting Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality on the grounds that it is of little practical value to the field. Evers and Lakomski (1991), for example, claim “According to the theory’s own argument [that is, Habermas’s recognition of the counterfactual nature of the

conditions], we could never know whether or not the ideal speech situation was actually obtained” (p. 163). This is coupled with the further claim that Habermas appeals to “doubtful evidence for the existence of such a [ideal speech] situation” (160). As these claims amount to an attack on the feasibility of Habermas’s project it is important to reply to them. Key here is Habermas’s forceful defence of the conditions as constitutive of a regulative ideal oriented to reaching shared understanding and agreement on a generalizable interest or norm. As such, the relevant distinctions not taken into account by Evers and Lakomski (1991) are twofold. First is the difference between discovering the conditions in “empirical evidence” and grounding them in a “rational reconstruction”. Second is the subsequent difference between supposing the existence of an “ideal speech situation” and identifying “idealizing conditions” having practical effect in actual practical discourses. While both of these distinctions are important in marking the progress of Habermas’s theorizing, missing their importance is not necessarily an omission on the part of Evers and Lakomski. Note, for example, the considerable and continued efforts Habermas made in addressing the issue of plausible necessity as derived through his universal-pragmatic analysis of argumentation. Indeed, Habermas’s willingness to take seriously the voices of his critics and to rethink his project of communicative rationality is well acknowledged (Rehg, 1997). As such, it may reasonably be argued that the negative assessment made by Evers and Lakomski represents a historically-specific lacuna in administrative understanding.

At this point in the development of his Discourse Theory of Morality, Habermas struggled with general criticisms of the type levelled by Evers and Lakomski. As Baynes

wrote in 1992, Habermas's use of terms such as "species-wide competencies" in identifying universal presuppositions of argumentation appeared to make practical discourse dependent "upon the empirical validity of its reconstruction of specific human competencies" (p. 109). On this reading, critics might well ask on what empirical evidence Habermas bases his claim of universal conditions of practical discourse. In response to such readings, Habermas sought to emphasize the universal-pragmatic justification of discourse-theoretical idealizations at the core of his Discourse Theory of Morality (Gunnarsson, 2000). On this account, any empirical example of a deliberation that satisfactorily meets the conditions of practical discourse can be explained as the result of interlocutors who are (consciously or unconsciously) avoiding performative self-contradiction in a cooperative search for mutual understanding and joint agreement on a generalizable norm or interest. While Habermas does suggest that empirical evidence can work to corroborate his rational (but fallible) reconstruction of the necessary conditions, "subjecting them to indirect verification" (Habermas, 1990, p. 32), the universality he claims for the presuppositions of argumentation is not dependent on producing such evidence. That is, the occurrence of discursive situations approximating the conditions of practical discourse do not in themselves provide the justification of his Discourse Theory of Morality. So, while support for Habermas's position may be found in the actual conditions enacted during communicative interactions, the validity of his philosophical argument is not dependant on observing such evidence but on the rational demands of communicative action.

This reading makes it possible to better address the second and perhaps more serious concern posed by Evers and Lakomski. Emphasizing the formal-pragmatic justification of practical discourse as a rational reconstruction of the necessary presuppositions for the possibility of impartial argumentation brings a concurrent shift from “ideal speech situation” to “idealizing conditions”. With this shift, emphasis is now placed on the critical perspective made available by advancing the presuppositions of argumentation as idealizing conditions of practical discourse – conditions that may now be used to rationally criticize and revise decision making procedures but without demanding the impossible – i.e., their complete realization at any specific instance. This shift makes it clear that Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality is not intended to establish a fixed place or “situation” in the world but to construct a point of reference or orientation for guiding and critically assessing the impartial coordination of social interactions.

Practical discourse, as such, is a moral end only in the sense of advancing a moral epistemology, a means of normative assessment that reconstructs an ongoing orientation toward the epistemic conditions that operationalize (D) for intersubjective moral deliberation. The idealizing conditions provide an orientation toward taking a moral point of view in the regulation of interests as the formalized presuppositions of argumentation – the presuppositions people always already make in reaching an understanding. This means critical questions can be asked of actual decision-makers concerning their orientation to inclusiveness or truthfulness, for example. In this way, Habermas’s theorizing of practical discourse can provide educational administration research with “an

ideal that can be more or less adequately approximated in reality, that can serve as a guide for the institutionalization of discourse and as a critical standard against which every actually achieved consensus can be measured” (McCarthy, 1978, p. 309). In overlooking the rational reconstruction of specific conditions of practical discourse and thereby misinterpreting the conditions as ontological suppositions, Evers and Lakomski miss-assess the potential of Habermas’s Discourse Theory of Morality as a critical ideal for educational administration research.

Still, even if the philosophical coherence of Habermas’s rational reconstruction of practical discourse affirms its value as a regulative ideal, the many constraints inherent to organizational decision-making place additional demands on its real-world application. This challenge to the practicality of communicative theories of morality for institutional settings is recognized in the philosophical literature on education (Martin, 2012). More generally, Apel (1980) notes that an ethics of communication based on idealized presuppositions does not necessarily take into account the fact that administrators “remain bound to their *real* social position and situation” (p. 279). In formal education, for instance, time, confidentiality, resources, and the general competencies of decision makers are often factors that influence how a decision is made. In grappling with the practicality of applying Habermasian discourse theory to educational settings, the counterfactual nature of the conditions in real policy discussions is still seen as a reason for concern. Martin (2012), for example, has sought to address this issue by modifying and extending the conditions or “rules of argumentation” to create a better fit with educational settings: “By restating the pragmatic presuppositions of discourse, reasons of

educational relevance can become more salient to participants” (p. 158). In this way, he suggests that the condition of non-coercion be interpreted more specifically to include a “developmental coercion criterion” to protect “those who are not yet dialogically mature enough to participate in public discourse” from distorted educational processes such as “indoctrination” (p. 158).

How fruitful it may be to amend and/or extend the conditions of practical discourse for application to educational settings is debatable. Certainly, as shown in the literature, there is philosophical interest in seeking fuller interpretations, operationalizations, and applications of these “clearly counterfactual” epistemic conditions for a variety of reasons (Martin, 2012, p. 156). In the specific sphere of educational policy studies, it might therefore be asked of theorists such as Martin if a reasonable case could be made for the extended operationalization of inclusion, participation, and truthfulness as may be applicable to this particular domain? Perhaps, such theorizing could follow in a similar vein to Martin’s (2012) work extending the condition of non-coercion as an operant criterion for moral policy development in education? Habermas certainly appears to invite such explorations when he points out that:

It has become clear to me in retrospect that (U) only operationalized a more comprehensive principle of discourse [i.e., (D) plus the four conditions necessary for moral justification] with reference to a particular subject matter, namely, morality. The principle of discourse can also be operationalized for other kinds of questions, for example, for the deliberations of political legislators or for legal discourses [or, presumably, for deliberating on educational policy]. (1998, p. 46)

Likewise, it appears that Martin (2012) willingly takes up this challenge and devotes much of the second section of his text to proceeding precisely as Habermas suggests:

I examine different ways in which Habermas' Discourse Principle (D) can be applied to the educational domain. I argue that the most promising approach is to revise his moral principle of universalization (U) in order to account for the educational interests of citizens and persons who may be unable to participate fully in public discourse. (p. 14)

Despite the encouragement of Habermas, and however philosophically plausible Martin's results, extensions of the basic criteria of (U) are unlikely to satisfy the practical concerns of applying counterfactual rules of argumentation to rationally criticise and revise administrative decision-making. From the matter-of-fact perspective of current administrators, it is difficult to appreciate how adding another counterfactual requirement to the already morally operationalized discourse principle might facilitate widespread application of practical discourse in education. In short, the problem of practical application lies elsewhere. It is the inherent counterfactuality of the epistemic conditions of practical discourse that raises concern over its general adoption as a realistic procedure for educational decision making. What is needed, therefore, are strategies for facilitating satisfactory fulfilment of the conditions in real-world settings.

Recall Günther's (1993) sense of the appropriate application of discursively justified norms. His theorizing of application discourses does not suggest a new or amended set of epistemic criteria but works to improve case sensitivity within the necessary conditions identified by Habermas for practical discourse. On these grounds, the following section offers a different theoretical course from that taken by Martin (2012), one that attempts to address the counterfactuality of the conditions in a manner consistent with the practical interests of contemporary educational administration

research while, hopefully, continuing to support and extend the philosophical relevance of Habermas's rational reconstruction of discursive criteria for the field.

Regarding the problem of overcoming real-world constraints, no one has worked more consistently or systematically in addressing problems associated with practical application of Habermasian discourse theory than William Rehg. For Rehg, the basic issue to be addressed is one of philosophical abstraction: "In view of the strong character of discourse-ethical idealizations, one might rightly ask whether discourse ethics does not abstract too much from the empirical limitations of real actors and their conflicts" (1997, p. 182). In *Insight and Solidarity*, Rehg (1997) sees a promising way forward, despite the counterfactual nature of the conditions, to concrete instances of situating a discourse theory of moral decision-making through the incorporation of "something like... rational trust" (p. 237). Rehg tentatively posits rational trust as a means of addressing the objection to the practical value of Habermasian discourse that it is too constrained by its idealizing conditions.

For Rehg, rational trust bridges between what is called for and what is possible in real processes of discourse. It acknowledges that those affected by a decision must to some degree "trust the opinions of experts... trust the public processes of debate and decision-making... have some confidence in one another's sincerity... [and in] the representatives' capacity to consider thoughtfully a variety of view points" (p. 237). In this sense, the moral validity of a decision is situated within the trustworthiness of decision-making procedures and, specifically, in the sincerity and reciprocal perspective taking of those entrusted with making public policy. If decision makers can maintain the

trust of their constituents by displaying reciprocity and sincerity, then there is good reason to seriously consider their decisions as morally valid. This is because they have made a convincing effort at understanding the foreseeable consequences and side effects of an initiative and because their decision has met (or could meet) with the acceptance of all concerned in practical discourse. That is, the decision makers have employed a moral epistemology in assessing the initiative such that, given time and resources, the deliberations could satisfy the demanding conditions of practical discourse, stay in keeping with collective moral intuitions, and result in the understanding and agreement of their constituents that the “right” decision was made. Rational trust, as such, grants by general agreement that (D) will be operationalized for moral deliberation in advance of the decision.

In support of his project needing something like rational trust, Habermas recognises that “trust” must be present as part of “the intersubjective commonality of communicatively achieved agreement [based upon] reaching understanding in language” (1999a, p. 142). That is, to reach joint understanding and agreement, interlocutors must, without alternative, depend on “mutual trust in [the] subjective sincerity” of the other (p. 142). While this suggests that a step toward incorporating some form of “trust” is necessary for concrete implementation of practical discourse, there is also a tacit assumption by Habermas that trust must have a grounding in the actual conditions of discourse, perhaps by way of shared moral intuitions about reciprocity and sincerity. If so, then rational trust, as established between participants in moral deliberations, is warranted by the satisfactory and mutual fulfilment of the specific conditions of

argumentation. Interlocutors have good reason to trust each other insofar as everyone involved in a decision appears sincerely engaged in cooperative reasoning and perspective-taking under the necessary conditions of practical discourse. By extension, constituents may have good reason to trust their representative decision makers if the specific features of practical discourse are in evidence.

This is an important point as Rehg (1997) introduces the idea of rational trust as a bridging mechanism between idealizing and actual conditions of practical discourse but leaves open the question of what would merit consideration as “criteria of rational trust” (p. 238). He only surmises that such criteria are likely to have “a moral weight of their own” (p. 238). He further suggests that if constituents can trust their public decision makers without recourse to the conditions of practical discourse, then Habermas’s reconstruction may not correctly depict the specific features of intersubjective, cooperative reasoning. While these suggestions may prove of interest for future philosophical and empirical research, it appears an implausible task to construct a set of independent criteria warranting the rational trust of constituents in their representatives that does not take into account satisfactory levels of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion as the basis of the warrant. To use Rehg’s own words, “We can intuitively elicit these conditions [of practical discourse] by asking...which features of a discourse would increase our confidence that the outcome of a discussion is [morally] trustworthy” (2003, p. 86). From this perspective, it appears that only if the specific conditions identified by Habermas are shown to form inadequate “criteria of rational trust” would they require supplementing with additional conditions or discarding

altogether in favour of criteria that are, perhaps, more rationally trustworthy. Moreover, as with the conditions of practical discourse, any set of alternative criteria satisfying rational trust for a pluralistic society would also need to pass a close examination of its universality and necessity – an examination made all the more difficult for criteria carrying a moral weight of their own.

Despite the rather open-ended direction for rational trust indicated by Rehg (2003), when taken with Habermas's comments it does appear to comprise a supplemental and sensible addition to situating a Discourse Theory of Morality in concrete contexts of public administration. As a practical means of addressing the counterfactual conditions of discourse, for example, a conception of rational trust could offer a rough gauge of the moral validity of initiatives – not as a fifth idealizing condition but as an indicator of general satisfaction (or lack of satisfaction) with levels of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion present in a public decision-making procedure. Understood as a rough gauge of moral validity, rational trust allows for social and institutional stability while assuring that the always necessarily less-than-ideal character of organizational decisions is open to critical assessment against the idealizing conditions of practical discourse.

It is possible to find support for this application of rational trust by turning to Rehg's (2009) recent consideration of the function of the necessary presuppositions of practical discourse:

In effect [the four conditions are] a set of *dialectical process* norms, cast as an ideal procedure. Moreover, as counterfactual, the norms are not only abstract but primarily negative: they ask us to test for possible blind spots – excluded persons

who may have contributed an important argument, prejudices that undermine reasonable assessment, and so on. (p. 137)

In line with this pragmatic conceptualization of the conditions, rational trust provides an opportunity to check the full set of dialectical process norms at a glance, assess if they are functioning, and be assured there are no remaining blind spots in the moral vision of the decision makers. As an amalgam of the conditions' roles in supporting moral validity, rational trust renders the discourse-theoretical moral framework more serviceable at a practical level by providing a heuristic for the study of institutionalized discourse in educational administration.

Viewed as a rough gauge of moral validity satisfying conditions of practical discourse, decisions appealing to the rational trust of constituents would always remain open to critical assessment using criteria of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion. In terms of its heuristic value in the critical assessment of policy initiatives, it may also be possible to reduce the number of criteria comprising rational trust in a way that makes the concept even more applicable for educational administration. Such a reduction in the criteria of rational trust can be made by subdividing the four specific features of practical discourse into two more general categories corresponding to collective moral intuition: reciprocity and sincerity. This further step requires working backward from the four epistemic conditions of practical discourse to the formal-pragmatic analysis of argumentation, and, finally, to Habermas's identification of collective moral intuitions and how individuals come to understand each other and reach jointly acceptable decisions.

Such a restructuring in the epistemic criteria of rational trust to the intuitions everyone shares about moral judgement is consistent with having confidence in a representative's sincerity and capacity to consider a variety of viewpoints. A move to fewer criteria would also assist and encourage applications of the conditions of practical discourse to the context of educational administration by tailoring the meaning of reciprocity and sincerity to practical considerations found in the field. Aligning inclusion and participation with a general conception of "reciprocity" as the act of perspective taking undertaken by administrators during the development of initiatives, for example, would help specify practices that satisfy two of the specific criteria of rational trust. Similarly, a general assessment of actual practices in light of criteria of rational trust would also be possible by placing truthfulness and non-coercion under the wider, morally intuitive category of "sincerity" in the articulation of imperatives and publicizing of information.

While these are only tentative suggestions, they do argue for the practical value of employing rational trust as a critical resource for educational administration. As a shorthand assessment of the moral validity of educational initiatives, rational trust gives an account of the visible sincerity and reciprocity of a decision-making procedure. In specific instances, rational trust may be taken to indicate constituent confidence in the perspective taking of district administrators and their overall satisfaction with the availability of information. The basic suggestion, therefore, is that a conception of rational trust could be crafted for the needs of educational administration, a conception that provides assurance that the moral point of view is taken by administrators during

consideration of large-scale initiatives while recognising the contextual limitations school-district administration places on decision making.

Conceptualized as a heuristic, rational trust could allow articulation and identification of disruptive factors in cases where trust in administrative decisions is eroding. In such cases, the failing confidence of constituents in the orientation of the decision-making process toward impartial conditions of deliberation may be traced to a lack of one or a number of the indispensable criteria of rational trust. Tangible considerations of perspective taking, for instance, may reveal that the gap between the idealizing presuppositions of inclusion and participation, and the actual features of deliberation, is not sufficiently bridged to assure rational trust. As such, the orientation towards inclusion and participation exhibited by the decision makers has failed to show reciprocity to the extent required for maintaining the rational trust of those affected. That is, the decision-making process is failing to function in a specific way – that impinges on the satisfaction of essential criteria of reciprocity – to allow rational trust to bridge the gap between constituent presuppositions about inclusivity and participation and the actual practices of decision makers. Conversely, a generally acceptable degree of rational trust would indicate confidence in the decision-makers' perspective taking as a substitute for full inclusion and participation. In cases such as this, the rational trust of constituents would be their own assurance that a policy could be justified under conditions of practical discourse and that the decision maker's capacity for perspective taking is functioning as it should.

There is already support for conceiving trust as a measure of satisfaction with decisions made in educational administration. For example, “active trust” is identified by Hargreaves and Fink (2008) as an indicator that constituents are confident in the expertise of teachers and principals to make good decisions about schooling (p. 235). Bryk and Schneider (2003) view “relational trust” as an important resource for school improvement, noting that leaders of successful school reform demonstrate “respectful exchanges”, “openness to others”, and “personal integrity” in their day to day dealings with constituents (p. 42). Kouzes and Posner (2003) are adamant that all successful organizational leaders must earn the trust of those they work with: “Being seen as someone who can be trusted, who has high integrity, and who is honest and truthful is essential” (p. 24). Senge et al. (1994) raise the strong relationship between skillful discussion and “an atmosphere of trust”, insisting this is the only way this type of communication works (p. 394). Trust also plays an important role in the influential writings of O’Toole (1996), whose work is cited twice by the respondents in this study. In his conception of leadership, trust is generated by the “integrity” of leaders “to achieve the ends of the people” (p. 28).

Furthering the significance of trust as an indicator of constituent satisfaction are numerous unsolicited comments made by the respondents. For example, “Leaders of decision-making and change processes need to be able to portray the element of trust and honesty and integrity and openness in their work” and “If you coerce somebody or you violate the trust, then the others [inclusion, participation, and truthfulness] begin to go out the window.” Still, as with the conditions themselves, trust appears to have a strategic

value in administrative decision making: “We shouldn’t pat ourselves on the back for creating trust, it’s a necessity. We can’t live without it, not in the way that education is organized” and “Buy-in is substantially impacted by the concept and notion of trustworthiness.” If, however, Habermas’s reconstruction of the moral point of view has it right, then administrators should be able to build the rational trust of staff and constituents by demonstrating their commitment to reciprocity and sincerity. In this case, “creating trust” need not be seen as a solely strategic activity but as affirmation of a commitment to inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion as irreplaceable moral and communicative norms.

While more focused research of trust in the setting of educational administration is indicated by such examples, the conceptualization of “rational trust” offered here could form the basis for developing and testing a heuristic that represents a moral point of view for educational administration while acknowledging the practical limits of institutional decision making. The course of action being suggested, therefore, is: rather than attempting to further operationalize the conditions of practical discourse for a variety of educational settings, allow the conditions to define what trusting in the morality of educational initiatives means. This approach accepts the counterfactuality of the conditions while giving them a practical role in establishing the moral validity of policy in a manner consistent with contemporary educational administration thought on the importance of trust.

Chapter Eight

Summary, Future Work, and Recommendations

This research establishes “inclusion”, “participation”, “truthfulness”, and “non-coercion” as important concepts of interest in the communication practices of educational administrators. This claim is based on considerable recognition of the significance of these communicative ideals by senior school-district administrators in Newfoundland and Labrador. As such, a key finding of the current research is the present awareness of and positive attitude in principle toward the conditions of practical discourse in district-wide decision- and policy-making. In addition to existent support for the general application of conditions of communicative rationality, the interview data can be further divided into subthemes of specific relevance to situating a Discourse Theory of Morality in the field of educational administration. The scalar nature of satisfying the conditions in practice, for example, is evident and presents a subtheme consistent with their counterfactual designation in Habermas’s discourse theory.

Subthemes of difference, however, are also present and distinguish the current administrative understanding of the conditions in this educational context from Habermas’s view of their necessity in relation to moral validity. For the respondents, support for the conditions is generally understood as basic to the strategic validity of district-wide initiatives and as vital to the effective and sustained implementation of policy. In the case of each individual condition, therefore, the conceptualization and characterization of its “necessity” by senior administrators permits differing degrees of acceptable fulfilment in actual cases of decision making. As strategically salient conditions, they are viewed as contingent on the ends of the school system and open to

purposeful limiting and adjusting in order to leverage their interrelated effects. Their application and acceptable fulfilment is, therefore, at the discretion of senior administrators and made to satisfy strategic standards deemed practical and appropriate for the successful development and implementation of policy initiatives.

These findings of difference, entailed in the preferential appreciation of the conditions as strategically salient, offer insight into the nature of barriers obscuring a moral point of view of the kind delineated by Habermas in school-district administration. When present, such barriers limit the conditions of practical discourse, reducing the validity of procedures aimed at impartial and universally acceptable decision making. If a discourse-theoretical moral epistemology is to bear strongly upon district-wide initiatives, then consciousness of the moral relevance of the epistemic conditions will need to be raised. This aim should include enhanced analysis of administration literature that promotes strategic forms of communication for educational organizations, greater questioning of accepted norms of communication at the level of school-district decision making, the challenging of preconceived understandings of educational leadership roles, and formal examination of educational imperatives that may be narrowly interpreted into policy by senior administrators.

Although the current research does not represent all who could conceivably be affected by district-level decisions, or all relevant opinions of decision-making practices in the district, taken together these interviews give meaningful insight into the internal dynamics of school-district administration and the attitudes and priorities of its senior leaders. These findings contribute to educational administration research by providing a

more comprehensive description of administrative policy- and decision-making in a Canadian school district and by establishing a groundwork for using a Discourse Theory of Morality to guide and assess the moral validity of administrative practice in public education. Despite existing barriers to the practice of a Discourse Theory of Morality in this educational setting, the explicit awareness senior administrators have for the importance and general relevance of the conditions of moral validity is an encouraging finding. This finding should be understood, however, in relation to the pertinent subthemes of difference. These subthemes often demonstrate a clear preference for the strategic value of the conditions at the expense of taking a moral point of view in decision making.

In addition to providing insight into the four idealizing conditions of discourse in the context of school-district administration, implications concerning the plausibility and practicality of Habermasian discourse theory for this particular setting were also raised by participants in the current research. On the issue of plausibility, the significance of the conditions as recognized in the attention they are given by senior administrators, is consistent with Habermas's rational reconstruction of the universal presuppositions of argumentation. Senior leadership appears to intuitively know the value of each discourse-theoretical idealization as an important condition of communication and their understanding of the "necessity" of the conditions for dialogical processes (and strategic purposes) is supported by influential systems theorists such as Senge. As a pragmatic analysis, Habermas's (1990) reconstruction is fallible – it is not an "ultimate justification" of the absolute necessity of the specific conditions of practical discourse for

moral deliberation (p. 32). As such, the plausibility of the conditions may be challenged by various interpretations taken from other philosophical orientations and real-world experiences of discourse. The evidence presented here, however, does not refute Habermas's analysis but may be counted as supplementary corroboration. While such empirical findings cannot in themselves settle the concerns raised by McCarthy, they do present evidence that further validates Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality as a universalizable moral epistemology. In this sense, the current study generates confirmation that is consistent with Habermas's central philosophical claims and extends the relevance of practical discourse for guiding and assessing decisions made in public education.

In terms of the practicality of this moral epistemology for an educational setting, a case is made for developing a rough gauge of constituent satisfaction with degrees of inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion during administrative decision making. Rehg's notion of "rational trust" is posited as a viable indicator or heuristic of constituent satisfaction. The moral validity of a decision could be gauged by the rational trust of constituents in their school-district leaders. Conceived in this way, rational trust would be a pragmatic bridging mechanism working to sufficiently ground the moral validity of concrete decisions. The importance of maintaining rational trust arises in recognition of the finite and fallible nature of real decision-making in a context constrained by time, resources, and jurisdictional authority – that is, in an educational setting where the conditions of practical discourse will always be present as counterfactual.

While much ground is covered by this enquiry concerning the specific conditions of practical discourse in an educational setting, there remains a good deal more to be explored. It is not difficult to envision an extensive research program centered on further studying the conditions in the theoretical and practical contexts of educational administration. Toward such work, the following sections offer a brief prospectus for continuing research from empirical and critical viewpoints. In addition to possibilities for future research, this final chapter also highlights an opportunity raised by the current research to reflect on new directions for educating educational administrators. These directions for the future study and enhancement of educational governance are consistent with the need to develop a viable moral epistemology for the field and with the aim of developing a Habermasian moral point of view in the administrative practice of public education.

8.1 Empirical Work: Checking Veracity and Barriers in Specific Cases

As an initial foray into understanding the four conditions of moral validity in the context of school-district administration, the scope of participants was narrowly focused and the contexts provided by the participants were open and general. This approach to investigating moral validity in administrative decision-making could, however, be more finely focused on a particular case where the rightness of an initiative is in question. In such an instance, the range of interviews could be expanded or the interview data could be supplemented with a large-scale survey of constituents in order to test the veracity of the claims made by senior administrators. Additional questioning and measures could be used as checks of district-wide practices to assess levels of truthfulness and non-coercion,

for example. Another approach to issues of veracity or the reliability of respondents could involve ethnographic observations made of actual practices employed by the district during decision making. Such observations could be used for comparison to senior interviews and claims of inclusion and participation, for example.

A possible outcome of additional empirical research could be practical proposals to ease morally constraining factors in school-district administration from a discourse-theoretical perspective. Through further communication and partnership with district administrators, educators, and constituents, this research may stimulate modification of present decision-making practices and the implementation of new procedures that better attend to the democratic needs of a multiculturally diverse population. Further extensions of this study could widen the foundation of critical perspectives on schooling by providing a tangible continuum of conditions for assessing the moral validity of educational initiatives.

Of course, it is also possible to anticipate the emergence of new questions prompting further empirical investigation of the point on the continuum of conditions at which rational trust is lost: How much inclusion, participation, truthfulness, and non-coercion are needed in educational decision making in order to maintain constituents' rational trust? When rational trust fails, what is (are) the specific condition(s) that has (have) precipitated its failure? Such questions are bound to arise given the counterfactual nature of the idealizing conditions and the recognition that, in concrete circumstances, how to apply the moral point of view is never crystal clear. As long as this conceptual constraint on the philosophical framework is acknowledged, however, future empirical

research would still have the advantage of starting with a well-identified and clearly verified set of relevant conditions. While much discussion around the requisite fulfillment of specific conditions is certain to take place in concrete cases, the discussion will be informed and supported by a vital and sound philosophical grounding: a moral epistemology that provides real possibilities for advancing understanding and assessment of morality in the field of educational administration.

8.2 Critical Work: Checking Imperatives and Understandings in Specific Cases

Another avenue of investigation arising from the current study is an opportunity to test the core assumptions under which district initiatives proceed. Questioning, for instance, if there is wide agreement among all the constituents of a district that “student learning” should be the priority of public education, or if there are other priorities of equal or greater importance to the stakeholders, other claims on generalizable interests and values that may meet with acceptance under conditions of moral validity. Furthermore, if student learning is validated as the highest priority of public education then new questions emerge concerning what specifically this priority means in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, and how progress toward this goal will be assessed. This work would result in wider verification, clarification, and interpretation of assumed mandates that are the impetus of particular initiatives. Such research might also rely on more extensive interviewing, administering general surveys, and observing concrete instances of consensus building. The results of data collection could inform a critical assessment of the underlying assumptions supporting educational objectives and measures. Arguments grounded in the necessary conditions of moral validity could be advanced according to

whether the assumed imperatives that drive policy are, for instance, impartial in nature or in fact represent a hegemonic worldview favouring the dominant socio-economic class and legitimized by the formal structures and processes of the educational system. The relevance of such research is supported by the reflection of one senior administrator that “we’ve not had any kind of process in this country about what people really want in their public education system. People simply have accepted the dominant voice, so we’ve not had any legitimate discussion of education.”

In addition to providing means of challenging the impartiality and interpretation of specific educational initiatives, critical extension of this research may have additional implications for initiatives that appear warranted on the basis of self-evident moral norms. Such moral norms include the principle of equal respect, which is often cited as the moral warrant for dialogical and democratic initiatives aimed at establishing more inclusive decision making across school districts. Unless such norms are somehow understood as epistemic requirements or “argumentative rights”, however, they provide a substantively moral grounding of administrative practice – a ground that appeals to a residual moral intuition inherent in common conceptions of “justice” and “fairness”. When this is the case, the morality of initiatives rests on an explicitly moral assumption such as the self-evident right of equal respect. In turn, this valuing of equal respect may simply reflect the moral intuitions and attitudes of a particular ethos or worldview and cannot, therefore, satisfy the epistemic requirements of an impartial and universal moral point of view.

O'Toole's (1996) influential argument for values-based leadership provides an excellent example of how asserting the principle of equal respect can lead to a circular justification of inclusive organizational practices such as dialogical decision making. O'Toole's work is commendable for attempting to place morality at the center of organizational life and leadership. To his further credit, O'Toole conceptualizes dialogue in a categorically different manner than does Senge by identifying equal respect as an indispensable moral principle of successful organizations. For Senge, dialogue is a strategic necessity, but for O'Toole, dialogue within the organization is a moral obligation based on the principle of equal respect. While an initial reading of O'Toole suggests this is a positive approach to organizational leadership from a critical perspective, it must be recognized that this shift fails to satisfy Habermas's claim that moral validity can only be warranted through practical discourses. In this sense, O'Toole's account of values-based leadership is the inverse of Habermas's Discourse Theory of Morality in that a moral norm is supplied by O'Toole in justification of organizational dialogue. For Habermas, it is the moral validity of universal egalitarianism and any policy supervenient on this norm that is redeemed and reaffirmed through dialogical reasoning.

This inverse relation does not negate the importance of O'Toole and others who broach the topic of morality in organizational leadership. Starratt (2004), for instance, asserts that principals have a "moral responsibility" to ensure their decisions are not arbitrary, involve due deliberation, and show caring for all who will be affected (p. 47). It does, however, draw attention to a key implication of placing Habermas's moral point of

view at the center of educational organizations. That implication is a reminder that the moral point of view is an intersubjective, epistemic viewpoint and not a substantively moral position. From this critical perspective, leaders should actively promote the conditions amenable to establishing the moral validity of initiatives through engagement in practical discourse, and remain cautious and reflexive when justifying policy under generalized conceptions of morality. Not to do so risks jeopardising the impartiality of educational policy and fails at opening space for constituent engagement in morally justified policymaking. While in such cases the values and intentions of decision makers might be good and in keeping with perceived moral norms, the initiatives they develop may well lack the epistemic backing of communicative rationality and a claim to moral validity.

8.3 Recommendations: Cultivating the Moral Point of View of Administrators

This study has a final implication that concerns the teaching of graduate courses in educational administration and leadership. It suggests that course material and class discussion of the conditions of strategic validity, so prevalent in the administration curriculum, should be conducted in concert with teaching about the specific epistemic features of practical discourse. In this way, Habermas's discourse theory would provide students with a resource for argumentation on the generalizability of organizational norms, constituent interests, and policy initiatives. This would constitute a morally progressive approach that expands the deliberative awareness of future educational administrators by introducing them equally to strategic and moral dimensions of educational decision-making. By consciously introducing moral epistemology into the

educational administration curriculum, emphasis can be placed on how the strategic and moral domains converge, diverge, and conflict. This approach to the education of future leaders would allow enhanced analysis of administration literature, greater questioning of accepted norms of communication, the challenging of preconceived understandings of educational leadership roles, and formal examination of educational imperatives from a moral point of view.

A full extension of this educative process would further concentrate on cultivating the dispositions necessary for actual engagement in practical discourses (Kelly, 2010, 2013; Kelly & Okshevsky, 2012). This is a natural extension of the theoretical framing of the moral point of view (Rehg, 2003), moving from developing the moral competence of students of educational administration to fostering in them the dispositions of character that allow practical discourses to become the norm of decision making. There exists a precedent for the value of this approach to moral education in the abundant “teacher dispositions” literature (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp, 2007; Kelly, 2013; Kelly & Okshevsky, 2012; Sanger, 2008) and in the work of at least one advocate for situating moral virtues in the arena of school leadership (Starratt, 2004). Taking a step in the direction of “administrator dispositions” is also consistent with conveying a moral point of view toward the center ring under the “big tent” (Donmoyer, 1999) of educational administration. Developing such a dispositional approach to school-district leadership could also employ something like rational trust. As a starting point, rational trust could be conceived as an indicator of administrators’ disposition to be sincere and to engage in reciprocal perspective taking in their reasoning and judgement.

Whether administrators show a sincere and reciprocal character could then be examined by paying close attention to the normative conditions under which they make decisions.

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Appendix 1

Letter of Informed Consent to be Interviewed for Research Related to “Morally-Valid Decision Making in School-District Administration: Newfoundland and Labrador Case Studies”.

Please take a moment to read the following information about this research while considering your willingness to participate in giving an interview that will be audio taped and transcribed for analysis. The interview should take approximately one hour and may be conducted at a secure location at the Faculty of Education building or at any other location you deem acceptable. This research is being undertaken by Darron Kelly, a Doctoral student at Memorial University’s Faculty of Education and supervised by Dr. Jean Brown who is a Full Professor at the Faculty. The purpose of this research is to investigate the degree to which school-district policy- and decision-making uphold values of inclusion, participation, non-coercion, and truthfulness and to create new approaches to decision making that better instantiate these values.

While educational decision making has long been a subject of inquiry, very little attention has been paid to the place and extent of moral values in decision-making processes. Your participation in this research will help fill in this gap in the current understanding of educational decisions. If you participate, you will be agreeing to grant an approximately one-hour unscripted interview. During this interview you will be asked general questions about your conceptions of inclusion, participation, non-coercion, and truthfulness within the context of school-district administration. You will also be asked about your professional experiences with policy- and decision-making and if you have thoughts or ideas about how inclusion, participation, non-coercion, and truthfulness may be better represented in decision-making processes.

You should know that all information collected is confidential and the anonymity of all participants will be maintained to the fullest extent possible. You need not answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and any resulting publications or dissemination of findings will maintain the highest possible level of confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. You have the right to withdraw at any time and, if you so choose, all information you have provided will be destroyed. All interviews and transcripts will be held at a secure location at Memorial University for five years, after which time they will be destroyed.

Despite our sincere commitment to your privacy, the unlikely **risk** remains that someone other than the researchers may hear or read your interview and/or associate a particular interview with a particular participant. You need also know that due to the study’s focus on a single school-district over a specific time period, there is a **risk** that your statements or opinions may be identified by someone reading the research findings. This **risk** of identification may also be increased by the relatively small number of interviews we intend to conduct (approximately 10-15). We will take every precaution to

protect your privacy so that any information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be available to anyone except the researchers, and that future publication of the research findings will protect your anonymity. **Your participation is voluntary.**

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

If you agree to participate, please date and sign this consent form.

I hereby consent to be interviewed for "Morally-Valid Decision Making in School-District Administration".

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Appendix 2

Interview Guide

ICEHR No. 2009/10-087-ED

Anticipated length of interview: 60 - 90 minutes

Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

I'm interested in hearing your impressions of the decision-making processes that occur around initiatives in your school district. Is that alright?

Can you tell me about a district-wide initiative in which you participated?

Can you describe the process that brought about that initiative?

Can you describe your role in the process?

Do you remember some of the other key roles or contributions to the process?

What were some of the outcomes of that initiative?

Looking back... what would you say were the strengths of the decision-making process itself?

What weaknesses do you see in the process?

If the district had to make similar decisions today... what suggestions would you make for improving the process?

Are you familiar with some of the educational decision-making literature?

There are many factors that might be of interest in investigating decision making but, at this point, I'm particularly interested in hearing your thoughts on some aspects that are not often discussed in the literature. These include things like "inclusion", "participation", "truthfulness", and "coercion". Is it alright if I ask you some questions about these aspects of decision making?

Again, in relation to the process you've just described... can you tell me your impression of the "inclusiveness" of the process?

Do you think the process had an appropriate level of "inclusion".

(If "yes" or if "no") How so?

(If "no") How do you think the process could have been more "inclusive"?

Can you tell me your impression of the "participation" that took place within the process?

Do you think the process had an appropriate level of "participation"?

(If "yes" or if "no") How so?

(If "no") How do you think the process could have encouraged greater "participation"?

Can you tell me your impression of the "truthfulness" occurring within the process?

Do you think the process had an appropriate level of "truthfulness"?

(If "yes" or if "no") How so?

(If "no") How do you think the process could have better supported "truthfulness"?

Can you tell me your impression of the "coercion" that may have taken place within the process?

Do you think the process had an acceptable level of "coercion"?

(If "yes" or if "no") How so?

(If "no") How do you think the process could have worked with less "coercion"?

In your opinion, who else should we speak with about decision-making processes that occur around initiatives in your school district?

Thank you very much for this interview. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss at this point?

Do you have any questions or is there anything else you would like to know about this study?

Thank you again.

Appendix 3

Additional Relevant Interview Data (Coded by Subtheme)*

On the condition of inclusion:

“[If] we’re trying to enhance a certain culture that puts it in a stage of growth, then inclusion has to be there.” [SS]

“If you tell people what to do, they generally won’t do it if you’re not looking. But if you include them and they’re a part of the decision-making process, they engage.” [SS]

“A big part of the inclusion is to try to create coherence.” [SS]

“People bring different things to the table and it’s the multiple voices that legitimize the dialogue and make it valuable.” [SS]

“From the point of view of inclusiveness, it [the example initiative] would have included and given everybody a chance to participate but it [the decision-making process] didn’t necessarily try to arrive at some kind of consensus building. It was not about that at all.” [SS]

“It [the example initiative] could possibly have been more inclusive from the perspective of involving principals. It’s not that we didn’t think about it. We made a decision that it would be most helpful to them to give them a buffer [from the parent community].” [SL]

On the condition of participation:

“When people are asked for views or asked to contribute and participate, they do come onboard.” [OC]

“We’ve tried various ways to get the consultation, through private meetings or public meetings, to get a full range of input.” [OC]

“Each participant has to be granted a clearly equal opportunity to make their contribution” [OC]

“You can’t have your employees out in the community knocking down some kind of an initiative that the district has. They [teachers] are given their opportunity to bring forward their concerns [privately] and so we can try to address them.” [SL]

* Coding: Overlapping Condition [OC]; Counterfactual in Practice [CP]; Strategically Salient [SS]; Interrelated Nature [IN]; Strategic Limiting [SL].

“Sometimes the participation rate in processes might be as simple as people giving a quick eyeballing of the change process or the decision that’s about to be made and drawing a conclusion, accurately or otherwise, that, ‘Oh well, this is nothing new so I don’t need to bother’.” [CP]

“When you invite people to engage and they say, ‘I don’t want to engage. I’m not interested in engaging. I’m too busy to engage’, then decisions have to be made [unilaterally].” [CP]

“There’s presentations by various groups with different points of view but there’s not lots of opportunity for some good to-and-fro discussion which brings you to a better decision point.” [CP]

“To think that you would be able to have a process in place where every single person could have equal opportunity for substantial participation might be a little bit of a stretch.” [CP]

On the condition of truthfulness:

“I think people were true to what they believed in and they were trying to find whatever evidence they could find to back it up.” [OC]

“Research gave me personally the surety of that truth which I instinctively felt anyway but which was confirmed for me in research.” [OC]

“The truthfulness was in that focus [the expressed educational imperative]. We were true to that.” [OC]

“All I can say about the truthfulness of this initiative is that it was to everyone’s advantage to put out there entirely what we [the District office] were about.” [OC]

“There’s probably that level of truthfulness that if you’re one-hundred percent honest, you probably would shut down some of the meaningful dialogue.” [CP]

“On the level of truthfulness that exists throughout the organization, I think it would be naïve to think that everybody in your organization is going to give you the truth.” [CP]

“We’re very truthful in that domain. We share the cold, hard data, the enrolment data, infrastructure, the age of buildings, any reports that we have and so on. We share those.” [SS]

“We’re not just picking this stuff out of thin air and just creating it. There is a solid research base to substantiate what we are talking about.” [SS]

“We did lots of research on it [the example initiative] and visited schools and [had] consultations with principals.” [SS]

“We used the literature and we used other schools in the province [to make a case for the policy]”. [SS]

“It’s really, I believe for education, a kind of golden age of the utility of research to our practical realities.” [SS]

“[If] people see that you’re genuinely working to include them, that you’re truthful and honest, then it does change the whole credibility piece and it changes [the level of engagement] on their end.” [SS]

“If this [the value of the example initiative] had not been true and we had not been paying attention to what was happening and to the concerns parents were expressing, it [implementation] would have been a much more difficult process.” [SS]

On the condition of non-coercion:

“If you give people an opportunity to dialogue and you have defined periods for that and processes to engage in reaching consensus and the processes are well defined, people don’t feel coerced.” [OC]

“If you don’t have equal players, players that are valued to the same extent, then it becomes a coercive environment.” [OC]

“[If] people said, ‘You make the decision. You’re in the position to make it’ [and] I make a decision that affects their lives, that’s not coercion because they said to me, ‘You make it’.” [OC]

“There’s a line there and what is viewed by somebody as being a persuasive article or persuasive arguments may be viewed by the person receiving it as coercion.” [CP]

“There’s always an element of coercion whenever you set out and try to put forth your point.” [CP]

“You’re going to have more success [implementing policy] with interactive and learning approaches than you would with dogmatic or authoritarian approaches. We [senior district administrators] believe there are better approaches, not only from a human perspective, but in terms of wanting to accomplish what we want to accomplish.” [SS]

“Anything that you can achieve without coercion is going to be achieved more fully, normally, than it would be with coercion.” [SS]

“I think my director wanted me to do that [implement the example initiative] in a way that would cause the least problem. My School Board [of Trustees] would have wanted me to do it in a way that would cause the least problem. The government would have wanted me to do that. There was pressure only in that sense, ‘do it and do it right’.” [SL]

“The whole point of communication and offering growth opportunities and trying to bring people onside with the important initiatives that you want to undertake [is that] you will try everything else before coercion.” [SS/SL]

“They [parents] probably felt we were being coercive, but, in my view, it was an appropriate coercion. It was appropriate because you needed to shape it [the initiative] in a particular way that in the long run would be better.” [SS/SL]

“When he [the head of the school district] convinced the district [administrators] that the best approach would be to go forward with a smaller number of options, it was the right use of coercion or the right use of power or influence.” [SS/SL]

“Not having teachers in the community just saying all kinds of things about this [initiative], I suppose, would be viewed by some as coercion. I don’t see it that way [because] teachers had their opportunity [in private consultations] to bring forward concerns.” [SS/SL]

“There’s certainly an element of the staff [teachers] that believe they are coerced into not speaking out [but] there are other staff members who would actually feel coerced [by the community] if they weren’t given an opportunity to speak out in private. I think you’re going to have feelings of coercion whichever way you move down that path [of policy consultation].” [IN/ SS/SL]