

A COMPARISON OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE
PROVINCES OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
AND ALBERTA

A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN
ECONOMIC BUSINESS MODEL AND ITS EFFECT ON
EDUCATION REFORM IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND
LABRADOR AND ALBERTA

DENNIS E. YABSLEY



A Comparison of Educational Reform in the Provinces of
Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta
A Document Analysis of the North American Economic Business Model
and its effect on
Education Reform in Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta

by

Dennis E. Yabsley, B.Sc., B.Comm., Dip.Min., B.Ed.

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, education has been a major focus of government policy in many of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Governments have had an effect on changes in the education enterprise including curriculum, testing, governance, finance, and accountability.

Greater accountability has been advocated for education systems as a means of ensuring that taxpayers are getting reasonable value for their education dollar. Strategies and tools for increasing school accountability have become an integral part of broader school reform initiatives.

In examining reform initiatives in Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1990s and Alberta in the early 2000s, it has been observed that business model techniques have played a major role in driving school reform. In comparing education reform in Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta, one finds that the Alberta model of reform is well advanced in areas of technology, school development models, and student performance. However, it must be noted that the Alberta system is well-funded compared to the Newfoundland and Labrador system.

The language and practices of the corporate world have increasingly become a part of school reform. As a result, today's Canadian education systems utilize business and economic models in pursuing the education enterprise.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Provincial Governments during the 1990s, in an effort to reduce budgetary deficits have highlighted education as an area for fiscal cutbacks (Wotherspoon, 1998).

Wotherspoon noted that these cutbacks, along with public perception of a less than ideal education system, have resulted in educational reform on a macro and micro basis in Canada. Apple (1993) argued that the public's concern over falling education standards, illiteracy, and violence in schools has resulted in dominant and political groups moving the education debate onto their own terrain – the terrain of tradition, standardization, productivity, and industrial needs. This education debate has resulted in various provincial jurisdictions instituting a variety of educational reforms in recent years.

Some Canadian educational reforms hold much in common with reform initiatives in New Zealand, England and Wales, and the United States over the last two decades (Hargreaves, Shaw, Fink, Giles, & Moore, 2002). For example, the authors observed that a new worldwide orthodoxy of educational change has focused on the achievement of higher standards of learning, centralized curriculum, literacy and numeracy, measurement of student achievements, and accountability. In the accountability process Canadian educational reforms have utilized economic business models through the use of traditional economic principles such as Management by Objectives and other accepted business planning processes (Alberta Commission on Learning 2003).

This study highlights education reform as instituted in the provinces of Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador over the past decade and explores how these two

provinces utilized the principles of modern economic business models in the reform process. These tasks were accomplished through the examination of two Royal Commission Reports and various working documents of the Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador Departments of Education. The recommendations and underlying philosophies of the Newfoundland and Labrador 1992 Royal Commission and provincial working documents were analyzed and their degree of congruency with the principles of modern economic business models is examined.

Purpose of Thesis

Over recent decades, as a result of economic, political, and social changes occurring in the local and global communities, education reform has occurred throughout the many industrialized countries (Wotherspoon, 1998). This study will examine the effects of education reform in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador and will focus on documental evidence as contained in two provincial Royal Commissions and provincial education departments published documents. The study will also assess the depth and breadth of economic business models in present day education in both of these provinces.

A major purpose of this thesis is to perform a comparative analysis of the education systems in two Canadian provinces – Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1990s and Alberta at the turn of the 20th century, during an era of education reform, accountability, and fiscal restraint.

Conclusions on the utilization of modern economic business tools will be made

and recommendations for further study will also be presented.

Thesis Overview

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the methodology of research used in the study with emphasis on critical social research, interpretative research, case study historical research and document analysis as the major tools in examining the education systems in Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of economic business models and will focus on the management concepts of planning, controlling, and organizing, along with economic cost-benefit analysis and Total Quality Management. These processes and concepts will be analyzed in the context of the Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador education systems. The chapter will also outline various models of education reform and compare these models to the North American Economic Business Model.

Chapter 4 will review and analyze *Our Children, Our Future*, Royal Commission of Inquiry in the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1992); this chapter will also review and analyze *Every child learns, Every child succeeds* (Alberta Commission on Learning 2003). Chapter 4 will also provide a comparison of the reform template proposed for Newfoundland and Labrador with the reform plan outlined for Alberta.

Chapter 5 will conclude the thesis with a summary of the educational reform initiatives in the Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta education systems and the

effect of the North American Economic Business Model on both education systems.

Recommendations for further study will also be presented.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The specific purpose of this thesis is to examine the effect the North American Economic Business Model has had on the education systems in two Canadian provinces - Newfoundland and Labrador in the 1990's and Alberta at the turn of the 20th century. For the purpose of this thesis a business model is comprised of the business management tools of Management by Objectives, planning, controlling, organizing, cost-benefit analysis and Total Quality Management. Economics has been defined as "the study of the way society makes decisions about the use of scarce resources" (Bolotta, Hawkes, Mahoney, & Piper, 2002, p. 453).

The design of this thesis will focus on the North American Economic Business Model, the Newfoundland and Labrador Education Model, and the Alberta Education Model. The study utilizes critical social research, interpretive research, case study, historical research, and document analysis as the primary research tools.

Critical Social Research

This study takes the form of critical social research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical social research is concerned with the broad social and historical context in which phenomena are interrelated. It is concerned with revealing underlying social relations and showing how structural and ideological forms bear on them (Harvey, 1990).

Research of this nature tends to cut through surface appearances by locating social phenomena in their specific historical context. For this particular study, it means placing

public education documents in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta. At the foundation of this thesis is the realization that there is an interconnection among power, politics, ideology, and economics. Public education documents and policies do not arise or exist in a vacuum. They are products of their cultural, social, and historical times. Harvey (1990) states:

So critical social research is concerned with the broad social and historical context in which phenomena are interrelated. It is concerned with revealing underlying social relations and showing how structural and ideological forms bear on them. Critical social research then, is interested in substantive issues, and wants to show what is really going on at a societal level. (p. 20)

Interpretive Research

The purpose of interpretive research is to clarify how interpretations and understandings are formulated and given meaning in real life situations (Cohen, Marion & Morrison, 2001). Hermeneutic interpretation accepts that we are a product of our history. Thus, our understanding is always an understanding of history. We live in history and we create history, understanding occurs in interpreting that history (Lee, 1999).

We can discuss a hermeneutic circle. That is, in doing research, we have to refer to the whole in order to understand the parts. For purposes of this study, it means that public education documents need to be seen as part of a larger social and political process. It is necessary to be mindful that knowledge is constructed in the sense that it is a

product of human interests, purposes and prior conceptions. Part of this study is to examine these interests, purposes and existing conceptions. Therefore, the research findings are culturally and historically significant well as laden with moral and political values.

Evans (2002) states:

The danger in perceiving research as a technology as a set of procedures from which we make a selection before applying them to the pursuit of a separate field of study, is that we see no real need to explore issues such as those relating to the bases, the nature and enhancement of procedures. In this way, the status of educational research as an academic discipline is undermined; its knowledge base remains underdeveloped and, therefore, deficient, and the practice which emanates from it is, in turn, less effective than it potentially could be. (pp. 21-22)

Case Study

Case study is a particular research design that can be used to study a phenomenon systematically. A case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon, such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, a social group, or in this particular study, a set of public documents that purport to reflect a "business model." The significant thing is that a case study calls for "interpretation in context" by concentrating on a particular phenomenon, like an educational model in a particular province; this approach aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors that characterize the phenomenon.

The qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic, and descriptive analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely on inductive reasoning in handling multiple sources (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2001). This understanding of a qualitative case study fits the description of this thesis (Lee, 1999; Yin, 1994).

Historical Research

Historical research is concerned with a broad view of the conditions and not necessarily the specifics of a particular phenomenon, such as an educational system. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001) state that:

The act of historical research involves the identification and limitation of a problem or area of study; sometimes the formulation of a hypothesis (or set of questions); the collection, organization, verification, validation, analysis and selection of data, testing the hypothesis (or answering the questions) where appropriate; and writing a research report. This sequence leads to an understanding of the past and its relevance to the present and future. (p. 158)

Harvey (1990) writes about a "historical comparative method" (p. 42), which in this instance is a case study that analyzes its different forms of development and finds material connections. Harvey observed that only then can the real state of affairs be revealed. This particular study does indeed make use of a historical comparative method where public education documents and policy statements from the provinces of

Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta are examined.

Document Analysis

The hermeneutic tradition involves the study of texts. Hermeneutics, as the science of interpretation, was originally used to interpret “sacred texts.” The agenda is a deeper understanding of the texts or documents being studied. Lee (1999) talks about the various steps in the study of such documents: the researcher extensively and intensively reads and rereads the text; searching for underlying themes and taken-for-granted assumptions; the researcher clusters or organizes the themes; the themes are analyzed; the researcher then triangulates with other comparative data such as *Supporting Learning* (2000), *Alberta Learning Business Plan* (2003); and the researcher finalizes the data in an academic document or case study report. That is the process that has been employed in this study.

The major source documents to be used for Newfoundland and Labrador in this study will be the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education - *Our Children, Our Future* and for the province of Alberta the major source document will be *Every child learns, Every child succeeds* (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

BUSINESS MODEL

Introduction

This chapter will introduce the concept of economic business models particularly in non-profit organizations. The chapter will introduce the reader to economic business concepts such as Management by Objectives, planning, controlling, organizing, economic cost-benefit analysis, and Total Quality Management. These core processes and concepts are fundamental to examining the impact of economic business models on various education systems. It is necessary to understand these processes and concepts as they have been utilized in education reform models in various provincial jurisdictions.

The Economic Business Model

Humankind has experienced a long history of cooperative endeavors involving leadership. The earliest forms of cooperation were probably a matter of trial and error (Albers, 1974). Albers further noted that successful cooperative experiences were repeated until a particular style or mode became customary or routine. This approach to management was passed on to future generations and at some point, humans began to develop formal organizations. Formal organizations became established at some point in history based on the lack of success of informal structures. Formal organizations became important as technological innovations, population growth, and urbanization gave rise to more comprehensive and complex divisions of labour (Albers, 1974). This development created a need for more managers and more effective management, which resulted in

specialized fields of management.

Management is an essential ingredient for many organized activities and the management process is present in most kinds of enterprises and organizations (e.g., business, government, military, education, and religious organizations depend upon management processes (Berkowitz, Kerin, Rudelius, & Crane, 1991). Often, non-profit organizations, government, health, and education turn to business to learn the basics of management (Pointer & Orlikoff, 2002). Profit and non-profit organizations can be distinguished as enterprises defined by purpose. The purpose of a profit organization is to make money, to earn a profit; its success is measured by its increase in profit on a year over year basis. A non-profit organization exists to render a service. Its success is measured primarily by how well it renders this service (Berkowitz et al., 1991). These authors observe that non-profit organizations utilize business management processes to operate their enterprises. These processes include such aspects as management training, systems analysis, planning, Management by Objectives, marketing, and budgeting processes, however, the management process is often described as planning, organizing, and controlling (Certo, 2002).

Planning is essential to the management process. Planning is the process of determining what an organization is, where it wants to go, and what alternatives exist toward that end. Planning exists on a variety of levels in each organization. Strategic or long range planning may be up to five years while operating planning concerns itself with planning over a one-year period, day-to-day planning is concerned with the day-to-day activities which are tied to the operational plan which supports the long term strategic

plan (Certo, 2002).

Organizing is the second major element in the managing process and involves the division of work within the organization. Organizing, like planning, is process-oriented. Resources are allocated and reallocated, and authority and responsibility are integrated toward carrying out the organization's plans. The inputs of personnel and interpersonal relationships are vital to the organizing process. To achieve the stated organization's objectives, the manager must allocate resources of which the largest portion is people (Certo, 2002).

Controlling is the third segment of the management process and answers the question, "Did we meet our objective?" It involves the process of ensuring the effective and efficient use of resources to meet the organizational objectives. Controlling can involve performance review sessions, designing work plans for employees, and individual and department performance appraisals. The results of these activities then link into the management and planning process. The last activity of a management process is evaluation, which determines how well the organization has performed in reaching its planning objectives. The process is repeated to reach the stated objectives or new objectives raised in a new planning cycle (Certo, 2002).

Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit organizations seek to provide goods or services to consumers with the greatest efficiency and at the least cost. "Government agencies have serving the public good as their primary goal. Such organizations include all levels of federal, provincial,

and local government, as well as special groups such as city schools, universities, and public hospitals" (Berkowitz, et al., 1991, p. 35).

Non-profit organizations are sometimes viewed as being not as well managed as profit organizations (Kearney & Berman, 1999). It is generally accepted that this results from the absence of profit motives and competition, the influence of politics, weak governing boards, a lack of resources, and low management salaries. The absence of a profit motive is inherent in a non-profit organization. Measuring profit offers a valuable tool to profit managers versus non-profit managers. In a profit organization, managers can measure performance in profits per employee versus year-to-year objectives. Danger signals arise when profits (earnings) do not reach monthly, quarterly, or yearly objectives.

In a non-profit organization, the situation is very different. Non-profit organizations (e.g., school districts) exist primarily to provide and monitor services to stakeholders. However, these services are not as easily measured as profits. It is difficult to measure how much service was rendered and to decide how much money must be spent to achieve a certain service level. For example, does a 10 per cent increase in education spending give a student a ten per cent better education or does a 10 per cent spending decrease yield a correspondingly poorer education system? Does the 2004 decrease in the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial school districts, from eleven to five, yield an increase or decrease in service levels of 50 per cent? In a service organization, such as a school district, it is virtually impossible to establish a mathematical relationship between money spent and benefits received. Non-profit organizations have difficulties in ascertaining resources to meet objectives, and

measuring the efficiency due for example, to a lack of profit motive when compared to profit organizations (Kearney & Berman, 1999).

In most non-profit organizations, the competitive force is muted (Berkowitz, Kerin, et al., 1991). Business companies compete for customers to improve profits while new customers for many non-profit organizations generally create operational problems. The new customer is not viewed as an opportunity but as an additional burden to the existing system. In a business organization, internal competition leads to increased employee performance and innovation in pursuit of cost competitiveness. This contrasts with non-profit organizations (e.g. school districts) which generally have no competition.

In most major organizations top management is usually responsible to a review and policy making body. In the profit organization, it is generally the Board of Directors whose members are chosen for their business acumen and expertise. The non-profit organization generally reports to a Board of Trustees whose members are generally elected by the public or are politically appointed. These appointees typically have very limited business acumen to offer the non-profit organization (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003). This is beginning to change in North American culture as governments realize the importance of competent trustees who can influence and assist the operational and planning functions of non-profit organizations (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Non-profit organizations have traditionally chosen managers who are specialized in their field of endeavors. For example, the hospital administrator is typically a former physician and the school district Director/CEO is most always an experienced educator.

This trend is changing in some jurisdictions as some institutions realize the importance of good business managers and have chosen instead to go with management expertise rather than exclusive practitioner knowledge (Pointer & Orlikoff, 2002).

Modern profit organizations have developed a number of tools for assisting managers in making decisions such as modern budgeting methods, economic cost-benefit analysis, Management by Objectives, and Total Quality Management. Often these techniques are slow to be utilized by non-profit organizations. For example, in the educational system, while there are many graduate degree programs for educators aspiring to be school administrators there are relatively few management programs offered by universities for school or district level administrators. This system is changing in Alberta where school and district administrators are now being trained in the management techniques of profit organizations (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

It would seem that more and more educational institutions are being asked to adopt standard business methods in their planning and daily operations (Levin, 2001). In Alberta, for example, a variety of new managerial and administrative tools has been adapted for educational enterprises from large business organizations as a result of increasing costs and public pressure for accountability (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Management Tools

One of the management tools that has been adapted for educational use is the business management concept of Management by Objectives (MBO) (Kearney &

Berman, 1999). The term relates to the setting of objectives as part of an overall strategy for the organization. Departmental and individual performance targets are coordinated with the main overall strategy of the organization (Kearney & Berman, 1999). If the strategy of a particular school is to raise academic standards then various performance targets are set and mutually agreed to by all parties including teachers, school district specialists, and administrators in order to reach the anticipated outcomes or objectives. The objectives or outcomes must be achievable, measurable, and regularly monitored in order for the MBO system to become effective. The MBO system is readily adapted to an education enterprise due to the nature of the enterprise (e.g. curriculum outcomes, student assessments, and strategic or school development planning).

Another management tool adapted for educational use is the concept of Total Quality Management (Levin, 2001). Total Quality Management is the principal tool that business managers use to increase the reliability and quality of their product offering (Hill & Jones, 2004). Total Quality Management stresses that all the operations of the company be oriented towards continuously improving the reliability of the company's product offerings.

A Total Quality Management program is comprised of a well-defined business model and the acceptance by management that poor quality is not acceptable and should be eliminated. Management must continuously create an environment where employees recommend improvement, where the quality of supervisors is constantly improved, and where commitment to better quality is the objective of the organization (Hill & Jones, 2004). This process focuses on the customer (students), finds ways to measure quality

(testing), sets goals and objectives (curriculum), identifies problem areas and institutes a plan to solve these problem areas.

Economic cost-benefit analysis models are increasingly being used in non-profit organizations. This model takes many forms such as a cost-benefit analysis, cost-outcome analysis, cost-effective analysis, and cost-feasibility analysis, but is simply an analytical method that measures advantages and disadvantages of various actions where cost is being measured. This cost analysis approach results in rational decision-making because a cost comparison is made between two alternatives. This method of decision-making has been used in business models extensively (Maurice & Thomas, 2002).

Educational Accountability

Public education has become a topic of popular debate in media reports and in the business, political, and educational communities. Within the Canadian public, there was during the 1990's a feeling that the country's education systems are not internationally competitive (Wotherspoon, 1998). Wotherspoon observed a number of reasons for fearing that the Canadian education system might not remain competitive with other advanced industrial nations. First, schools are too costly to operate; second, education systems and personnel need to be more accountable to the public; third, schools need to be responsive to market forces and lastly, consumers who use the system require a wider choice of programs. However we may feel about these claims by Wotherspoon accountability remains a crucial issue.

In times of scarce economic resources, the stakeholders in education, (i.e.

students, parents, employers, and the community) demand that schools make their achievement transparent to the outside world (Leithwood, Edge, & Jantz, 1999). Various Canadian school systems have responded to this demand by implementing different forms of educational accountability. There are a number of lenses through which to view educational accountability but for the purpose of this thesis I will use the framework developed by Leithwood, Edge, and Jantz (1999) as a result of their review of seven systems from around the world. In their framework they outline four approaches to accountability - the market competition approach, the decentralized decision-making approach, the professional approach, and the management approach. (Leithwood, Edge, & Jantz, 1999).

Market Competition Approach

One can see evidence of this market competition approach. This approach to accountability increases the competition among schools and districts for students. This approach is based on the belief that a monopolistic public school system is not efficient or sensitive to the needs of students or clients. The opening of school or district boundaries, privatizing schools, and developing schools with specialized missions are examples of the market competition approach to a variety of student clients.

The market competition approach enables schools to compete for students. This approach is customer oriented and aims to serve the needs and wants of a variety of target markets (students) through pricing and product design or curriculum. In this approach the deliverers of the service are held accountable i.e. the teaching staff and school administration. Customer or student/parent satisfaction is paramount in this model. The

consequence of unsatisfied customers in this system is the long-term viability of the school. Dissatisfied clients will simply exit the system and seek another education system or facility. The market competition approach utilizes the fundamentals of the business marketing equation that is to provide the correct product to meet the needs or wants of a consumer (Berkowitz, Kerin, Rudelius, & Crane, 1991). This product must be properly promoted and delivered at the right place and right price for the customer. The four dependent variables in business marketing; product, place, promotion, and price are present in the market competition approach (Berkowitz, Kerin, Rudelius, & Crane, 1991).

Decentralized Decision-Making Approach

When this approach is used for purposes of increasing accountability the voices of parents, students, and the local community are paramount in the operation of a school. The intention of such an approach is to directly reflect the values and preferences of parents, students, and the local community. This accountability method indicates that the power to make decisions about curriculum, budget and personnel is in the domain of the parents, and community constituents of the school through school councils. In theory, this approach assumes that the clients, that is, students, parents, and the community have the power to shape the educational services they receive. The proponents of this system, the parents, the students, and the community, are accountable to themselves for the success or failure of a particular school system.

Professional Control School Based Management

Professional control school based management is a second example of decentralization of decision-making. This approach increases the power of teachers in

school decision-making and holds teachers accountable for the success of a particular school. The goal of this local site management structure is to utilize teachers' knowledge in areas of curriculum, budgeting, and personnel. A second approach to professional control involves the standards approach where the teacher's classroom instructional and curricular practices are focused. The standards approach holds the individual teacher and administrator accountable to the client or student for delivering services which meet or exceed pre-specified standards. In this system, teacher associations (e.g. College of Teachers) police the actions of their members.

Management Approach

This approach assumes that there is nothing wrong fundamentally with the current school structures. The effectiveness and efficiency of these schools are improved through strategic planning and school improvement planning processes. This approach holds the school district and school administrations accountable.

In summary, the various approaches to accountability follow a variety of standard business practices. The market competition model follows the marketing concept as utilized by a variety of business organizations (Berkowitz, Kerin, Rudelius, & Crane, 1991). The decentralization of the decision-making approach is similar to a variety of business decision-making structures based upon a centralized top down or bottom up decentralized management decision-making style (Robbins & Langton, 2003). This approach involves decisions being made at the head office or district school office level compared to the regional offices or individual schools. The professional approach and the decentralized decision-making approach follow the principles of management of

objectives strategy as described by Kearney and Berman (1999). The management approach also follows the management planning process utilized in business as outlined by Certo (2002). This planning process is used in the school improvement planning process as utilized by various Canadian education jurisdictions.

Management by Objectives is a core management tool utilized by all models of education reform as all stakeholders set objectives and measure the educational systems success or failure in reaching predetermined objectives. Individual and/or collective accountability is determined by the success or failure of the predetermined objectives.

Summary

Chapter 3 has examined economic business concepts of management. These concepts include planning, controlling, organizing, economic cost-benefit analysis, Management by Objectives, and Total Quality Management. These concepts will be examined in later chapters as to their impact on various education enterprises.

The concept of a non-profit organization compared to a profit organization was discussed and the education enterprise was briefly examined in the context of a non-profit organization. Management tools were introduced and their application in education enterprise was noted. The use of business models utilizing various economic business concepts will be analyzed in examining education models in Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chapter 3 also examined the concept of educational accountability and the various approaches to education accountability. These approaches to accountability were

examined in relation to existing established business practices of planning, organizing, controlling, marketing, and Management by Objectives.

CHAPTER 4

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF THE ALBERTA AND NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR MODELS OF EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter will review and analyze the work of two provincial government commissions designed to review the then current education conditions in their provinces and to make recommendations for change. The documents are the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary and Secondary Education (1992), *Our Children, Our Future* and the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning *Every child learns, Every child succeeds*. For purposes of this thesis, the Newfoundland and Labrador Royal Commission, *Our Children, Our Future*, will be referred as the 1992 Royal Commission and the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning *Every child learns, Every child succeeds* will be referred as the Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) in referencing sections in this chapter. The 1992 Royal Commission Report and the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning produced voluminous reports which examined the education systems in both provinces in great detail.

For purposes of this thesis the comparative analysis of both education systems will focus on nine key areas that are unique to both studies: mandate and background to the reports, context for change, population dynamics, changing economic and social patterns, school development models, curriculum, technology, economic cost factors, and governance.

These key areas will be discussed in some detail under the following headings as a

means to comparison.

Mandate and Background to the Reports

To understand the evolution of the present Newfoundland and Labrador education model it is necessary to review the background to the 1992 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education. In 1992 The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education, was commissioned in an atmosphere of public and government concern for the Newfoundland and Labrador education system. The 1992 Royal Commission summary noted that there was a widespread public concern about the quality and direction of schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Commission's final report noted in its preface that the education landscape was marked by declining enrolments, decreasing achievement levels, and decreasing financial resources. The 1992 Royal Commission explained that declining enrolments along with increasing costs in the delivery of education which was exemplified by the existence of 531 schools, in 26 school boards, governed by 3 Denominational Education Councils. This was viewed as an overly expensive model of education, especially in a province with a precarious economic future. Through numerous public hearings and input from all educational stakeholders, the 1992 Royal Commission report was instrumental in moving the agenda of educational reform forward. It proposed a number of initiatives which it deemed necessary for the efficient and effective operation of the Newfoundland and Labrador school system. The final report called for a new

structure for school governance (removal of the DEC's – Denominational Education Councils), the establishment of elected non-denominational school boards, and the involvement of the public in the governance of local schools (e.g., school councils); the development of attainment standards for students (curriculum outcomes); the refinement of the curriculum development process (participation in APEF – the Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation – to guide new course development); and the improvement of existing practices at every level of the school system. In other words, the 1992 Royal Commission final report recommended a new education model for the province. This task was complicated by the fact that the denominational school system was enshrined in the Newfoundland and Labrador Terms of Union with Canada (1949). However, in 1997, five years after completion of the 1992 Royal Commission report, educational authorities were permitted to fully implement one of its major recommendations - the removal of the denominational school system. This was made possible by an agreement with the Federal Government to introduce legislation in Parliament to change Term 17 of Newfoundland and Labrador's Union with Canada.

With the battle for control over its education system complete, the province was anxious to advance the reform agenda and in 1998 it commissioned a Ministerial Panel on Education Delivery in the Classroom (2000) *Supporting Learning*. The mandate of the Panel was to examine the existing Newfoundland and Labrador education system and advise on ways to advance the reform process as recommended by the 1992 Royal Commission and to address outstanding issues of education improvement and effective program delivery. As a result, the 1992 Royal Commission, along with the final report of

the Ministerial Panel on Education Delivery in the Classroom (2000) *Supporting Learning* became the template for education reform in Newfoundland and Labrador. The challenge facing the Ministerial Panel was to ensure adequate school programming when it could no longer be achieved through school consolidation. As a result, the Ministerial Panel focused primarily on curriculum and instruction, teacher allocations, and teacher professional development.

In October 2003, the province of Alberta released the Alberta Commission on Learning report titled *Every child learns, Every child succeeds*. Alberta's education system is recognized as one of the top performing systems in Canada (Program for Internal Student Assessment (PISA, 2003) and has always been adequately funded. One of the challenges facing the Alberta's Commission was to look beyond the issues of the day and to imagine the future educational requirements of an Albertan society over a 10 to 15-year time frame. This Commission also had to recognize the skills, knowledge, programs and supports that children need for success now and in the future, which could be very different from today's needs. The Alberta Commission's mandate was to address topics such as class sizes, pupil-teacher ratios, hours of instruction, support of special needs students, curriculum development, the impact of globalization, technology, and the changing demographics of Albertan society. This Commission was charged, "To provide recommendations and advice to the Minister of Learning on ensuring a sustainable basic learning (Kindergarten to Grade 12) system that supports the lifelong learning needs of students and the social and economic well being of the province" (Alberta Commission on Learning 2003, p. 20).

Alberta's Commission was mandated to listen to all stakeholders directly involved in the Alberta's education system (i.e., students, parents, teachers, school board trustees, superintendents, secretary treasurers, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, representatives of private and charter schools, and members of faculties of education, aboriginal leaders, and community members) (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Both the 1992 Royal Commission and the Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) became the templates for education reform in both provinces. Both provinces utilized their Commission's reports as primary foundation documents for the implementation of education reform.

Context for Change

Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador are very unique provinces and as might be predicted there are both similarities and differences in the context for change in both locations. In both provinces the reform agenda has been driven in part by the effects of globalization and international competition. In Newfoundland and Labrador the drive has been to modernize the province's education system to aid in the transition from a traditional resource based economy to a knowledge based economy. Alberta, on the other hand, has been experiencing a vibrant, booming economy for most of the past decade and the focus there is to make an already high-performing education system even more competitive, while training people for successful careers in both the resource industry and

the knowledge economy. In 2003, PISA ranked Alberta in the top four education systems in the world in terms of student assessment in Math, Science, and Reading, whereas Newfoundland and Labrador ranked in the top seventeen. Alberta's education vision is to produce "the best learning system in the world" (Alberta Learning 2003-2006 Business Plan, p. 2)

Like Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador's provincial economy is in transition but the demand for highly skilled workers is nowhere near the demand in Alberta. In fact, due to the rapidly expanding economy in Alberta, there is increased pressure from industry to ensure that students complete high school and are well prepared for a post-secondary education.

Meeting the demand of all learners is a concern for both provinces but in Alberta the situation is compounded by a high rate of immigration; "Most of Alberta's immigrants come from China, the Philippines, India, Korea, and Pakistan" (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 27). In Newfoundland and Labrador the situation is compounded by high rates of out-migration and many of these people relocate to the province of Alberta.

Population Dynamics

The 1992 Royal Commission report noted provincial population dynamics are affected by declining fertility, aging population, changing family structures, and out-migration. Simply put, the number of students requiring education services is dramatically decreasing. The following table provided by the Department of Education

(K-12 Education Statistics) illustrates the effect of the province's population dynamics from 1993 to 2003.

Table 1. Education Statistics 1993 – 2003

YEAR	STUDENT ENROLMENT	OPERATING EXPENDITURES (millions)
1993	114,558	4957
1994	110,227	5190
1995	106,728	5367
1996	102,794	5440
1997	97,379	5557
1998	94,483	5612
1999	91,053	5839
2000	87,438	6090
2001	84,173	6688
2002	81,651	7200
2003	79,151	7688

(Source: Department of Education School District Profiles 2002 – 2003, p. 9)

Table 1 illustrates that over the 10-year period, student enrolment declined by 31 per cent and the cost per student increased 55 per cent – two undesirable trends that show no signs of reversal. In Newfoundland and Labrador a decline in the number of live births combined with low fertility rates and high rates of out migration means the school-aged population is declining rapidly (Dibbon & Sheppard, 2001). It is further suggested by Crocker in his 1998 analysis of teacher supply and demand within Newfoundland and Labrador that the projected student population in the 2010-2011 school years will decrease to approximately 59,000 students (Crocker, 1998). The impacts of the population decline in Newfoundland and Labrador are complex but decreasing school enrolments typically means changes to the structure of schooling that result in increases in teacher and administrator workloads (Dibbon, 2004), for example, an increase in the

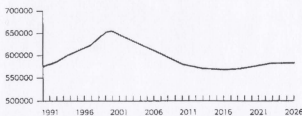
number of multi-grade classrooms.

The demographics of Alberta are also changing. Over the past five years, Alberta's population has grown faster than all other provinces and is projected to grow between 8 to 13 per cent over the next 10 years, which will add over 260,000 people to the province (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003). During the period between 2006 and 2016, the school age population is expected to decline by 12 per cent or 80,000 students. This is a direct result of the baby boomer's children having left school and the next generation is smaller with fewer children (Foot & Stoffman, 1996).

Alberta's population is also aging which means there are fewer children in school. In 2000, the number of Albertans aged 45 and older was approximately 31 per cent of the population and by 2016, the average is expected to increase to 43 per cent. During the same time, the percentage of people in their prime working years -- from 25 to 44 years -- is projected to decrease from 33 per cent in 2000 to just over 28 per cent in 2016 (Figure 1, Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Figure 1. Alberta Student Demographics

Historical and projected school-age (4-18) population, Alberta, 1990-2026



Source: Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p.26

The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) claims that although Alberta's natural birthrate is low, the province has the highest net in-migration of any Canadian province. Over 20,000 people a year migrate to Alberta from other provinces in Canada. Like Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta is also experiencing a shift from rural to urban communities as Alberta's farm population has dropped from 40 per cent to less than 7 per cent of the total population since 1995 (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003). However, the impact on rural schools is similar to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador where there is a decrease in rural student enrolments.

Changing Economic and Social Patterns

Changing social patterns and family structures also have an impact on Newfoundland and Labrador educational service levels. The traditional family where the husband works outside the home and the wife raises the children is becoming less common in the province. Harsh economic realities, lack of suitable employment, and the rise of consumerism have resulted in both partners working outside the home. The 1992 Royal Commission claims that traditional family structures have evolved into both parents working, unemployed parents, single parents, childless couples, second marriages with children from unrelated backgrounds, common-law partners with children, and the same-sex parents.

The 1992 Royal Commission report stated "in today's society, many children arrive at school ill-fed, ill-dressed, ill-nurtured, and socially, economically and emotionally disadvantaged" (p. 31). This reality is placing additional burdens on the

teaching staff and the micro-educational system as schools struggle to implement and continue breakfast programs. The teacher's role is changing from leading the teaching/learning dynamic to one of caregiver on an emotional and physical level.

The 1992 Royal Commission noted that future offshore oil exploration and development programs hold increased employment prospects for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The labour market in Newfoundland and Labrador is changing from the traditional goods-producing sectors to non-traditional service and knowledge-based industries. The 1992 Royal Commission further noted that this change has occurred, in part, due to globalization and the rapid use of technology.

The implications of these changes for the education system are far reaching. In the future, the 1992 Royal Commission noted that there must be a high level of congruency between educational skills and needs of the employment market. In 2006, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador initiated a skilled trade pilot project to attract provincial workers to the trades due to industry demand (<http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2006/edu/0323n02.htm>).

In Alberta, the economy is driven largely by the oil industry, and as a result it is somewhat dependent on commodity prices. When oil commodity prices are high the Alberta economy is booming but when the prices are low even the Alberta economy can experience a slowdown. To counter the uncertainty of oil prices and the provincial royalty uptake, the province established the Alberta Sustainability Fund in 2003. The Sustainability Fund is intended to reduce the impact of volatile provincial revenues and enables government to provide stable, sustainable budgets for priority areas like health

and education from a potential downturn in the province's economy. The Alberta Commission noted that the future looks bright for the next 10 years with annual gross provincial product increases predicted to be in excess of 3.3 per cent. Alberta's economy is projected to create over 35,000 new jobs between 2003 and 2006 and the province's unemployment rate is expected to remain in the 4 per cent range until 2010.

As a result of this employment boom, Alberta has also experienced a number of social issues that are having an impact on the provincial education system and Albertan society. For example, Alberta "has the highest labor force participation rate and the second lowest youth unemployment rate in Canada" (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 28); however, the province is experiencing a labor shortage in certain key areas such as information technology, communications, and health care.

In a thriving economy there is also a high availability of jobs in the Alberta workplace which pay relatively high wages and as a result many potential high school graduates decide to leave school in search of these jobs. In fact, according to the Alberta Commission, only 65 per cent of the province's students complete high school within three years of entering Grade 10 and only 74 per cent complete within five years (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 28).

The Alberta Commission on Learning also observed that today's children grow up in a mix of different families including the traditional two parent families, single parent families, blended families or no families. Children can live in families where both parents work outside the home, where one parent is at home, or where parents work in flexible work arrangements. Alberta is a home to people with a wide range of cultures, traditions,

religions, and languages. Each year the province welcomes new citizens from other parts of the world. This means that schools will experience a rich diversity of children whose first language is not English. These new citizens must adjust to a new school, country, community, language, and school curriculum. This can create many challenges for the Alberta education system.

As a wealthy province, it is hard to imagine that a significant number of Alberta's children live in poverty with an estimated 15 per cent of Alberta families living below the poverty line. Alberta's youth crime rate is also above the Canadian average, and discipline problems in schools along with bullying are beginning to become educational issues (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 31).

In summary, the Alberta economy is in direct contrast to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. Out-migration is a problem in Newfoundland and Labrador and in-migration stresses the Alberta's social and economic structure. Alberta is experiencing a booming economy based on a vibrant oil industry while Newfoundland and Labrador is experiencing a burgeoning oil industry. The Alberta economy experiences low rates of unemployment while Newfoundland and Labrador continues to deal with high unemployment rates. However, the changing dynamics of family structures are universal in both provinces.

School Development Models

The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education describes school development as:

A school level planning process designed to guide and focus a school towards the achievement of its mission - enhanced student learning. While a plan is developed within the context of both the provincial and district strategic education plans, it reflects the uniqueness of the local school environment. Through a collaborative process, the school community analyzes school data - including standardized test results - and based on that analysis, sets goals, and creates and implements action plans to address those goals. (<http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/proj/schdev/description.htm>)

The goal of increased student achievement and the continuous improvement of the quality of education to the students in the province has been an articulated priority in the province for a long time. The 1992 Royal Commission report recommended that schools boards devise ways “to introduce a district-wide school improvement process” (p. 241). In fact, the report of the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom (2000) *Supporting Learning* supports and reaffirms the need for strategic planning and accountability at the school level “...to ensure that best educational and administrative practices are followed at the district and school level in the use of resources” (p. 36).

In response to these calls for a school improvement plan the provincial Department of Education has demonstrated its commitment to finding better ways for students to be globally competitive and one of the most recent initiatives is the release of a school development model (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2004). The current model embodies several schools of thought and provides guidance in developing school-level capacity building. The model, which reflects an outcomes-based approach towards

change and development, follows a cyclical process involving collective reflection, problem solving, actions and continual renewal and improvement. The business community would refer to this as a Management by Objectives model as it is a results-driven process geared towards the achievement of specific goals, student levels of achievement, and teacher learning along with community involvement.

Currently in Alberta, all school boards and schools are required to prepare and report on three-year education plans outlining their mission goals and broad strategies as well as measures and indicators of success. The plans must include certain goals specified by Alberta Learning and the expectation is “that the focus of school and jurisdiction education plans continues to be on improving student achievement levels and continuous improvement (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 97). The Alberta Commission also recognized that best schools continuously seek innovative ways of improving their students’ results and recommended the continuance of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement – a highly successful government funded initiative that supports research and encourages innovation within individual schools and across the province.

In Alberta, the Commission on Learning has also articulated a vision of the future such that the entire focus of the education system should be on students and ensuring the best possible education for every child. Their vision is composed of nine key elements or components. These components, *Excellent Teaching, Excellent Schools, Innovation, Choice Within a Strong Public Education System, Equity and Access, Accountability, Sustainability, Balance, and Parents and Partnerships*, are required to achieve the vision of *Every child learns. Every child succeeds*. Each of the components is described briefly

below.

Excellent Teaching

Alberta's students should be taught by the best teachers available. Teachers must be well-qualified academically and lead school professional learning communities. Teachers are expected to be proactive in working with parents, principals and others in the community to get the best for their students (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Excellent Schools

Every school in Alberta must be an excellent school in which every student learns and succeeds. Schools must operate as professional learning communities with the sole purpose to continually improve student performance. It means that schools challenge students to learn through inquiry, exploration, and active participation in their own learning (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003). In an excellent school, parents are actively engaged in their children's education. High standards are set and achieved and results from continuous evaluation are used to improve outcomes of students. Technology is fully integrated and used as a learning tool for both teaching and learning. Excellent schools are respectful schools and create safe and caring environments for all students (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Innovation

The Alberta school system must be ready for constant change. Thus, the system by definition must be innovative. New approaches to improving outcomes for students must be examined. Best teaching practices will be shared across the education system. Major investments will be made in educational research particularly through classroom-based

research. The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) states in its report that “schools should be closely tied to centers of excellence in post-secondary education, research and development and business, particularly in knowledge-based industries” (p. 37)

Choice within a Strong Public Education System

A strong public education system is the foundation of the Alberta education system. The public school system will remain the first choice for the majority of Albertans. Separate schools, charter schools, private schools and francophone schools along with home-schooling and distance-learning will continue to be funded and supported by the Alberta government. Residents of Alberta will continue to have choice within the Alberta system (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Equity and Access.

All students have equity and access within the Alberta school system. Flexible programs and placements will be made available for students in order to give them the best chance at success. For students with special needs, a program of full integration or a program of specialization will be available. Students who are new to Canada whose first language is not English or French will be able to participate in an English as a Second Language program. Children, who are at risk, will be identified before entering the school system so that early interventions and programs may be instituted to improve chances of the child in school. All children will be able to get the necessary help to achieve curriculum outcomes in order that the principle of equity for all is accomplished (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Accountability.

High standards will be set and met in the Alberta education model. Ongoing accountability will ensure that accurate information is available to maintain improvements in the Alberta model. All the stakeholders in the education system will have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and should be held accountable for fulfilling those responsibilities.

“Teachers should be accountable for continually improving their students’ achievement. School boards should continue to be accountable to their electors and to the province and should have the necessary flexibility and resources to meet their communities’ expectations” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 38). The provincial government should be accountable to parents, students, and the public overall for the quality of the Alberta education system and the results of its students. The government will be responsible to the taxpayer for the resources used in education compared to the results of students as measured provincially, federally, and internationally (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

The government will provide open, complete, accurate information to the public concerning all aspects of education including policies, funding, students results, and all factors that affect student achievement, stated the Commission (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Sustainability.

The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) observes in its report that “education is the best investment the province can make in the future of our children, our youth, our

communities and our province" (p. 38). Adequate long-term predictable, sustainable resources must be available to achieve the Alberta vision of education. Provincial funding and expenditures will ensure that adequate financial resources are required for education over a 10-year planning period (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Balance.

The Alberta Department of Education must maintain a delicate balance between the province-wide policies and directions and local school flexibility to meet student and community expectations. Balance and agreement is needed between communities' and parents' expectations and practical and reasonable school deliverables. There has to be equilibrium between roles, authority, and stakeholder power (parents, teachers, province, students, and school boards) for professional learning communities to operate efficiently and effectively. The education system must balance a holistic education model consisting of students' intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical requirements (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Parents and Partnerships.

For children to succeed in any education system, it is necessary for parents to be actively and positively involved in the children's education. The Alberta Commission on Learning observed that every school should have a strong school council that provides a vehicle for parents and the community to be actively involved in important decisions about their schools. It is essential that all stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, school boards, government, community and business members) work together to ensure that students receive the best possible education. Schools must be

recognized as centers of learning, community activity, and identity. Schools must also become the centre of well-coordinated and integrated services for children, which are provided by a range of government and community agencies and organizations, noted the Commission.

One of the biggest differences in the school development process between Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta is the ability of the Alberta government to finance new initiatives. In fact, the education strategic plan is tied to a three year business plan which identifies how the Alberta Ministry of Education plans to work to achieve and enhance lifelong learning for all Albertans. The Alberta Learning 2003 - 2006 Business Plan is, in fact, defined by corporate components consisting of vision, mission, principles, and values and is focused on principles of accessibility, collaborativeness, accountability, responsiveness, innovativeness, learner centered and equality for all participants. Values are also a key component to the Business Plan and are comprised of respect, integrity, trust, openness, and caring. This plan is comprised of strategic drivers which lead to goals outcomes, priorities and eventually business plan measurement tools such as Income Statements. As such, the Alberta system of education is using an economic business model format to plan, execute and monitor the Alberta education enterprise, and the model appears to be providing dividends for Alberta citizens.

Curriculum

The 1992 Royal Commission noted that of all of the components of the education system, the curriculum affects students most directly. The curriculum is fundamental to

the knowledge they acquire to develop new skills. "It reinforces social values, stimulates new thinking, prepares them to become participants in society, and helps them gain a critical awareness of their heritage, traditions and environment" (1992 Royal Commission, p. 295). One of the things that the 1992 Royal Commission heard during their public hearing was that the curriculum and curriculum development mechanisms were not appropriate for the time and that a new model was required – a model that facilitated the acquisition of process as well as content-oriented skills and knowledge.

The 1992 Royal Commission believed that the Department of Education had to act in partnership with the schools and school districts in the curriculum development process but that new curriculum would be developed under the auspices of the Department of Education. It was with this understanding that the Commission recommended that the Department would take responsibility for establishing the vision, overseeing the development of the curricula, setting general level and program level goals, setting specific grade and subject specific objectives and achievement standards, developing evaluation guidelines, recommending multiple learning resources and publishing curricula guides. The 1992 Royal Commission recommended that once the curriculum was developed it would be the schools boards' responsibility to implement, monitor, and update the curriculum.

The 1992 Royal Commission recommended that all matters of curriculum development and revision should be the responsibility of the Department of Education. In the decade and a half since the report, this essentially has happened. This top-down government approach follows a centralized business model where major decisions

affecting the operation of the enterprise were controlled by senior management with minimal input from lower management ranks. The 1992 Royal Commission also recommended that curriculum specialists will be hired by the Department of Education to monitor curriculum issues and facilitate the curriculum development process as managed by the Department of Education. The school boards' responsibility under the business model is to implement the curricula as outlined by the Department of Education and create school plans that develop the learning objectives of the curricula. The top-down curriculum development has pretty much remained in tact; however, the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom (2000) *Supporting Learning* did recommend that the existing curriculum needs revision and that resources be made available to support the new curriculum.

In Alberta, as well, the curriculum is primarily developed at the provincial Department of Education and the province is noted for a world-class centralized provincial curriculum (PISA, 2003). However, curriculum implementation is left primarily to the school and school districts. During the consultation process, the Alberta Commission heard consistently from the districts and teachers about the importance of having appropriate resources and support in place whenever new curriculum is introduced.

The Alberta Commission strongly recommended that there is no need to make major changes to a program of studies that has proven to be successful at a world assessment level. However, to ensure that the outcomes that the Alberta Commission has outlined are achieved, the program of studies should continue to provide a balanced mix

of core subjects, as well as, provide “opportunities for students to gain an appreciation of fine arts, learn languages, maintain healthy active lifestyles explore emerging careers, and develop specific career-related skills” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 54).

The Alberta Commission was also forceful in stating that when new curricular priorities arise, “consideration should be given to replacing existing areas in the curriculum rather than simply adding more content and more objectives to what is already a packed curriculum” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 54).

Continually reviewing and revitalizing curricula is essential to ensuring that it is leading edge and that it meets the changing needs of students, society and the economy. At the same time, the Alberta Commission recommended that the pace of change needs to be reasonable in order to avoid overloading schools and teachers with the challenges of implementing too much new curriculum in a short period of time. The Alberta Commission stated that the “curriculum should continue to be designed so that students achieve a deeper and broader understanding as they move from one grade to the next. Because of the pervasive impact of technology on student’s personal lives and their careers, technology should be fully integrated as a teaching and learning tool” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 54).

An emerging concern in Alberta is that students sometimes believe they can succeed by not completing high school or attending post-secondary educational institutes due to the high demand for workers in the Alberta economy. The Alberta Commission noted that the vast majority of jobs in the present and future will require some level of post-secondary education and that moving from high school to the work force is a

complex and uncertain process. The Alberta Commission suggests that a "province-wide strategy must be developed and implemented with the goal of ensuring 90 per cent of students complete Grade 12 within four years of starting high school" (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 7). The Alberta Commission believes that a target of 90 per cent in this time frame is essential for the future of Alberta's students. Every school and jurisdiction will be required to report on actions they are taking to keep students in school and the results they are achieving.

Technology

In virtually every aspect of our society, our economy, and our personal lives, technology is having a major impact on the way people learn, live, work, and conduct business. The business of education is no exception as the use of technology to aid in the delivery of education along with its integration in the classroom has been a goal of most schools, school districts and education departments in Canada over the past decade.

In Newfoundland and Labrador a fairly large percentage of students receive their education in small rural schools and many have fond memories of their experiences in these schools. The 1992 Royal Commission commented that "virtually everyone recognizes that there are many limitations in the quality of education that they can provide" (1992 Royal Commission, p. 317). The Royal Commission went on to recommend "that a School of Distance Education and Technology be established to assume responsibility for the delivery of distance education courses and services, and the integration of new technologies in to the school system"; and that full-credit senior high

courses be available to students in an online format (1992 Royal Commission, p. 321). This recommendation was actioned by the *Ministerial Panel* (2000) when they called for the establishment of a Center for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI), an approach to distance education and technology use that called for a departure from the conventional conceptions of schooling and aimed to bring technology into the mainstream of schooling. The Panel recommended a phased approach to the development and implementation of the Center but the first phase was to start with emphasis on ensuring all high schools, no matter how small, can offer the essential program outlined in the report and that planning would also begin for the integration of distance education services. Subsequent phases would call for the development of supplementary resources for teachers and the roll-out of distance education services to all schools and students in the province.

Today, the CDLI is an innovative online school that offers over 30 high school courses to over 1000 students from all across the province. Its mandate is to increase learning opportunities and career options for students; particularly, those in small and isolated schools; develop and deliver e-learning programs and services for students and teachers, and, in particular, to develop and deliver courses for senior high school students; develop and deliver professional development programs for primary, elementary, and secondary teachers; provide programs and services for other adult learners using the Internet; and develop and export educational products and services. (<http://www.cdli.ca/index.php?PID=AnnounceFull&NewsID=6612>).

There is no disputing the impact that the CDLI has had on the delivery of high

school courses to students in rural and remote portions of the province and their capacity to provide online professional development to teachers. However, the province still has a long way to go before it gets to the point where technology is pervasive in all its schools.

Alberta has also been a leader in developing courses and providing access to online learning opportunities for students from grades 7-12 and with the expansion to the provincial technology backbone SuperNet in 2004 to virtually every community in the province; most homes and schools now have access to high-speed broadband connections.

The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) states that:

In May of 2003, a proposed Learning and Technology Policy Framework was released for discussion by Alberta Learning. The proposed framework indicates that technology can provide greater access to resources, expose students to real world problems and authentic contexts for learning, and provide alternative methods of representing and communicating knowledge. It fosters innovation, facilitates dialogue and offers potential for developing new practices among the education and research communities. (p. 105)

The Alberta Commission went beyond the mandate to provide access and said that “unless technology is integrated throughout the classroom experience and teachers are provided with adequate support to make it work and work well, the full potential of using technology to improve learning will not be achieved” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 107). The Alberta Commission called for a switch in the focus of teaching that would enable students to learn with technology not about technology. Specifically, they recommended that: the province “implement the Technology Policy Framework and take

action to fully integrate the use of technology in every classroom over the next five years” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 108); “set province wide standards for the types of technology that should be available in every classroom” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 109); “all teachers be proficient in the integrated use of technology in their teaching and ensure that they have the necessary support in their classrooms” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 110); “model the appropriate application of technology in all teacher education programs and provide adequate on-going professional development” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 110); “provide adequate funding not only for the purchase of hardware and software but also for necessary technical support, training and continuous upgrading of equipment” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 111).

In conclusion, the approach to technology use and integration advocated in Alberta recognizes the use of technology in every Alberta classroom as a fundamental learning tool. In Alberta, the vision extends beyond access to full integration and it appears as if Alberta has the fiscal resources and the political will to make the vision a reality. While there are many schools in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador that have innovative technology plans, a clearly articulated plan calling for widespread integration of technology in all of the province’s classrooms does not currently exist. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the CDLI endeavours to provide access to educational opportunities for rural students through an innovative virtual high school program that is constantly expanding and improving but it is not their mandate to focus on technology integration for other schools. Clearly, in Alberta the existence of a clearly articulated

vision and physical resources makes it possible for that province to move the learning agenda to a higher level.

Economic Cost Factors

The Alberta Commission believes in a model of education that maximizes the economic use of all educational facilities in the province. Maximization of facilities leads to economies of scale and provincial budget savings. Education facilities are expensive to build and maintain. Even in Alberta, school boards and community agencies are struggling to acquire the economic resources needed to survive. It is important to note that there are examples of separate and public schools sharing common facilities in the province of Alberta including the Rocky Tri-Campus in Rocky Mountain House consisting of the Wild Rose School Division, Red Deer Catholic Regional Division, and Red Deer College. This project includes extensive shared space including library, textbook storage, audio/video multimedia room, weight room, and gymnasium. Students from the three schools use the facilities at different times (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003). The Mother Teresa Catholic School in Edmonton includes the City Center Church Association, ABC Head Start Big Brothers and Big Sisters Society, Project Adult Literacy Society, School Lunch Program, and Cantus Health Group. The school board provided extra space at the school to accommodate breakfast and lunch programs, early intervention, in-school mentoring, medical and dental health, and adult literacy programs.

The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) recommended that new school sites

in Alberta will pursue the following economic template:

School sites in communities will be centrally located, multi-use community knowledge campuses that serve students and learners of all ages and house a range of complementary, recreational, community, and public services. They will be beacons at the heart of the community that are relevant, flexible, and accessible. (p. 77)

This template, as described above, is an excellent example of a partnership model among public and separate school boards, community agencies, municipal governments, and post-secondary institutions. The Alberta Commission supports and encourages school boards and communities to look at cooperative models as possibilities for sharing sports and arts facilities, and career and technology studies facilities so as to make the best use of financial resources.

The 1992 Newfoundland and Labrador Royal Commission Report undertook a major cost-benefit analysis of Newfoundland and Labrador's education system, at the school, district, and provincial level. It was conducted along established business economic models, using a cost-analysis research model. This model takes many forms such as a cost-benefit analysis, cost-outcome analysis, cost-effective analysis, and cost-feasibility analysis, but is simply an analytical method that measures advantages and disadvantages of various actions where cost is being measured. This cost analysis approach results in rational decision-making because a cost comparison is made between two alternatives. This method of decision-making has been used in business models extensively (Maurice & Thomas, 2002).

The 1992 Royal Commission Report developed four distinct education models that could be compared in determining the cost effectiveness of the existing denominational model of education.

Model A. This model represents the status quo and is based on the number of students, number of school districts, schools, teacher allocations regulations, and grants that were in existence in 1989-1990.

Model B. This scenario illustrates what the existing school system would cost at a maximum level of consolidation, i.e. sharing schools and school districts. In this scenario, the number of school boards would be reduced to minimal levels and schools would be consolidated based on acceptable parameters for school size, and reasonable conditions for student transportation.

Model C. This model represents and costs out the education system if it were non-denominational and all other factors remained unchanged.

Model D. This scenario represents and costs out the education system at a maximum level of consolidation and sharing amongst schools. In this situation, there would be a single set of non-denominational boards reduced to minimum levels. Schools would be consolidated based on established school parameters and busing issues.

The following table outlines the results of the extensive cost analysis along with appropriate cost savings of each model (1992 Royal Commission, p. 196).

Table 2. Cost Analysis

Models	Total Operating Costs 1989-1990 Dollars	Description
Model A	519.7 Million	Denominational System Status Quo
Model B	512.9 Million	Existing System with Efficiencies
Model C	506.4 Million	Non-Denominational, No Consolidation
Model D	498.4 Million	Non Denominational System, Consolidation

(Source: 1992 Royal Commission, p. 196)

Model D represented savings of approximately \$ 21.3 million or 4 per cent per year which amounted to \$163.00 per student based on 130,000 students in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1990. Model D offered a significant savings to the provincial treasury of Newfoundland and Labrador. As a result, Model D was selected as the most economic model for the province's school system.

Governance

The 1992 Royal Commission quotes a 1959 document from the Department of Education that claims that "the aims of public education for Newfoundland and Labrador state that education is a process whose purpose is the fullest and best development of the student, achieved through an understanding and practice of the Christian and democratic ideals that are accepted in our society" (1992 Royal Commission, p. 215). In Newfoundland and Labrador, as in other jurisdictions, the school system and the government are inextricably tied together, but in this province a third element – the church – has had a significant role in defining the relationship between education and the society at large. The 1992 Royal Commission further noted that problems facing our education system were exacerbated by the presence of a denominational educational

structure that has long been criticized on the grounds that it is both discriminatory and costly. A brief examination of the denominational education system and its recent demise provides the necessary background for a full understanding of the evolution of governance in the education system within the province.

The 1992 Royal Commission states that:

Although the issue of change was at the heart of most of the questions and challenges brought before the 1992 Royal Commission, there were some widely diverging views about the direction that change should take and just how much – or how little – there should be. Of the views expressed to the 1992 Royal Commission those referring to the denominational aspects of the system were the most divergent, ranging from a secular public system to a strengthened religious presence. What emerged from listening to such opposing views was recognition that they are both based on different philosophical and moral principles, and that each side advocates an ideal system from its contrary perspectives.

On one hand is the belief that a democratic society which is serious about religious pluralism and individual freedom must accommodate and accept equally children from all backgrounds. On the other is the belief that our society and culture are founded on Christian values and traditions and that these must be part of any education system that prepares individuals to become part of that society. At one extreme of these philosophical convictions are those who demand a complete prohibition of religion in the classroom; at the other are those who are equally insistent that they will not accept the exclusion of Christian principles and

religious activities from schooling. (p. 218)

After a careful and extensive consideration of the opposing views on denominational education, the 1992 Royal Commission concluded that there were four major options for a school system in Newfoundland and Labrador. The full details are provided in Chapter 6 and 10 of the Final Report but for this purpose the options are outlined below.

- Option 1. To retain the current denominational education system in its existing form,
- Option 2. To abolish the present denominational education system and establish a secular public school system totally independent of any church influence,
- Option 3. To retain the existing denominational education system, and establish, under certain conditions, a parallel, secular public school system to serve the needs of those not fully served by the existing system, or
- Option 4. To modify the existing denominational education system to retain denominational characteristics but including those groups/individuals not presently served in the governance of schools.

After careful consideration of the fourth option – a modified denominational system – the 1992 Royal Commission concluded that it was the most practical, responsible and achievable. This option, they felt, retained many of the benefits of the

denominational system while incorporating, to an acceptable degree, the needs and concerns of those not fully served by the existing system. The 1992 Royal Commission also believed “ that the proposed system was the most cost-efficient and effective way of dealing with the demographic changes and educational challenges now confronting our schools” (p. 221). As a result the 1992 Royal Commission’s first recommendation was:

that, recognizing the reality of a pluralistic democracy, declining enrolments and diminishing resources, the proposed model which is responsive to the needs of all constituent groups, yet recognizes the desire of the majority to retain a school system based on Judeo-Christian principles, be adopted and implemented. (p. 221)

The 1992 Royal Commission’s proposed model implied major changes in the governance of the school but it was largely based on the need to provide more ownership of the system at the local level and to parents in particular. The 1992 Royal Commission believed that several fundamental changes needed to be implemented at the school level and that a shift in the decision-making process so that those closest to schooling could make more of the important choices would make it possible to raise expectations of what could be achieved in schools.

This fundamental change was recognition that participation by parents, teachers and others in the community could bring both improvements in educational achievement and an increase in public advocacy for education. The 1992 Royal Commission believed that it was essential to establish the means for effective parental involvement in the governance of the province’s schools, if the school system was to reach its full potential. Therefore, recommendations 15, 16, and 17 of the final report recommended that

“through legislation, provision be made for the establishment and maintenance of School Councils” (1992 Royal Commission, p. 231); “that policies be established by school boards to facilitate the effective operation of School Councils; and that each school board assign staff responsibility for the establishment and development of effective School Councils” (1992 Royal Commission, p. 231) and; “that the Department of Education assign staff responsibility for addressing parental issues and providing mechanisms to ensure the meaningful involvement of parents” (1992 Royal Commission, p. 232). It was the belief of the 1992 Royal Commission that such councils could contribute significantly to the achievement of the educational objectives of individual schools, school boards and the province as a whole.

There also existed in the province a general perception that school districts were over-administered (1992 Royal Commission). This perception was largely based on the existence of the denominational system of education and overlapping jurisdictions. However, the 1992 Royal Commission still questioned the role of central office and whether or not it was structured to address the real needs of teachers, parents and students within the current organizational model. As a result of concerns about the districts’ abilities to meet demands for improvements in the quality of schools, difficulties in delivering educational programs and services, particularly to small and isolated areas, and a lack of consistency among boards in policies, guidelines and standards the 1992 Royal Commission recommended in Recommendation 26, “that all existing school boards be dissolved and that new school boards be established” (1992 Royal Commission, p. 239) and that the new boards would be publicly elected and open to all citizens.

Since the publication of the Royal Commission in 1992 there have been dramatic developments in the governance structure of the education system and this all began with the abolishment of denominational education in 1997. Shortly after that the provincial government introduced legislation to reduce the number of school district from 22 down to 11. There were ten regional boards and one province-wide francophone district all with publicly elected school boards. In 2004, the new provincial government legislated further consolidation of districts so that there were four regional districts and one province-wide francophone district and that is still the current structure as of 2006.

In Alberta, the Commission on Learning did not have to deal with the issues surrounding denominational education, however, in 2001-02, labour unrest among Alberta's teachers, school boards, and the provincial government brought a number of related governance issues into sharp focus and the Alberta Commission did make a series of recommendations that would, if accepted, change the landscape of school governance in the province. The Alberta Commission felt that their recommendations were designed to redefine the relationship among teachers, school boards and the provincial government that would result in a balance of the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties and to create a new approach to collective bargaining in the province. Recommendation 81 of the Alberta Commission recommended:

creating a new approach to collective bargaining and they highlighted four key components: establishing a legislated employer bargaining association; maintaining the ATA as a single organization responsible for professional services and collective bargaining for teachers; limiting what can be bargained for

collectively; and expanding teachers' professional responsibilities but maintaining their right to strike. (p. 130)

During the 2001-02 labour dispute school boards did not have an effective mechanism for providing a unified bargaining approach. The Alberta Commission felt that there was an imbalance in bargaining power with a strong and effective Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) doing battle against a loose collection of school boards. As a result they wanted to establish a legislated employer bargaining association to negotiate collective agreements with the ATA. Not surprisingly, the ATA were not in agreement with the Alberta Commissions' recommendations arguing that the parties have enjoyed good relationships in the past and that the situation in 2001-02 was an aberration and did not warrant major changes to the collective bargaining process. "The ATA's preference was to leave the status quo in place (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 130)."

Also, following the labour dispute in 2002, there was renewed discussion about splitting the ATA into two organizations - one for professional responsibilities and one for collective bargaining. However, the Alberta Commission's view was that, while a case could be made for splitting the association based on successful models for other professions, on balance, there were not sufficient reasons for recommending that the organization be split. The Alberta Commission did recommend, however, that a separate professional organization be established for principals whereby principals would maintain only an associate membership in the ATA and not be included in the collective agreement (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

The Alberta Commission also reported that there was a perception that the

province was moving towards more centralized control of the education system. In responding to this concern they felt that this concern was more perceived than real and that Alberta's education system represented a true balance between provincial responsibilities and directions, local school board autonomy, and considerable flexibility for individual schools and communities. The Alberta Commission felt that it was important for this balance to be maintained and strengthened and that the best way for this to happen was through strong provincial leadership combined with maximum flexibility for school jurisdictions and individual schools to meet the needs of their students.

Like many other jurisdictions in North America, the Alberta Commission recommended that there should be "provincial incentives and supports or districts that wish to consider joint services and amalgamations in order to improve services to their students" (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 136). This recommendation was meant to build upon an earlier round of consolidation that had occurred in the 1990s. In 1995, the province took steps to reduce the number of school boards from 146 to 66 boards. However, in looking at further amalgamations, the Alberta Commission did not suggest that school boards should be amalgamated in order to save money claiming that while there may be some savings, they would be small in comparison with the overall budget for the province's education system. They did feel though, that smaller school jurisdictions have limited funds and they struggle to provide their students with access to a basic education program and that even with additional funds provided by the province to compensate for their 'smallness' they often find it difficult to attract teachers, provide counseling services, or maintain a full range of learning resources.

The Alberta Commission believed that as a part of a larger and more viable region, there would be greater opportunities to share resources, provide options such as traveling counselors and other specialists, and provide students with access to the range of opportunities that they want and expect. With expansions in technology, collaborative arrangements among school jurisdictions would be more viable, particularly in the area of sharing specialized services and administrative functions. At the same time, they acknowledged that there are downsides to amalgamating districts including increased distances for administration and loss of local control. However, in the final analysis they felt that there were good reasons for looking at potential economies of scale that could improve teaching and learning opportunities.

The Alberta Commission were also clear on the influential role that parents and the home play in the education process and in Recommendation 85 they reinforced “the role of school councils and the requirement for principals to actively engage parents in school improvement planning” (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 138). The Alberta Commission felt strongly that school councils could and should play an active and vigorous role in each and every school because they can provide an important vehicle for engaging parents, along with principals and teachers, in exploring ways of continuously improving outcomes for students through school improvement planning. They felt that principals should be required to involve school councils in the development of annual school improvement plans.

Summary

The document analysis of the Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador models of

education has resulted in areas of congruence and non-congruence between the two models. A comparison of the mandate and background to the reports, context for change, population dynamics, changing economic and social patterns, school development models, curriculum, technology, economic cost factors, and governance are illustrated in the following table. This table briefly summarizes the similarities and differences of the two education models.

Table 3. Comparison of Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador Education Models for 1992 and 2003

CATEGORY	NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (1992)	ALBERTA (2003)
Mandate and Background to the Reports	Public concern for quality and direction of schooling	To improve on a world-class education system
Context for Change	Recognition of global factors affecting education	Recognition of global factors affecting education
Population Dynamics	Provincial population decreasing	Provincial population increasing
Economic Patterns	Weak economy	Strong vibrant economy
Social Patterns	Continuous impact on education system	Continuous impact on education system
School Development Models	In development	Developed and well advanced
Curriculum	Major development revisions and structural changes	Minor development revisions and structural changes
Technology Analysis	In development	Well advanced and state-of-the-art
Economic Cost Factors	In development	Planning well advanced
Governance	Denominational education issues	Labour union issues

In comparing the education models as outlined by the 1992 Royal Commission

and the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning, it is observed that the background for these Commissions is quite different. During the period between 1990 and 2000 rapid changes occurred in the Newfoundland and Labrador education system. The reform of the 1990s were driven by four major forces: the long decline in student enrolment, the elimination of duplication of educational services, financial constraints of the provincial government, and the perception that the education system was not producing graduates with the knowledge and skills required to succeed in a rapidly changing society (Supporting Learning, 2000). The issues of educational attainment and cost effectiveness of the education enterprise were also the issues that were recognized as being national and international in scope and had an impact on the educational reform within Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta. However, in 2003, the Alberta Commission's mandate was focused on a further improvement to a recognized world-class education system.

The Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta education models recognize the effects of globalization on their respective education systems. Both jurisdictions are in different stages in a process to produce cost-effective, efficient education systems that are easily adaptable to technological and economic change.

In comparing the provincial economies and demographics, it is noted that Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Alberta's economy is booming with an increasing population while Newfoundland and Labrador's economy is slowly developing with a decreasing population.

Social patterns vary significantly between the two models. The Newfoundland and Labrador model is faced with patterns of out-migration, while conversely, the Alberta

model is faced with increasing patterns of in-migration. Ironically many Newfoundland and Labrador families are moving to Alberta to take advantage of near full employment due to Alberta's booming oil sector.

The government of Alberta has embraced an economic business planning methodology for the education enterprise in Alberta which is evident in the Alberta Learning Business Plan (2003-2006). The 2003 Alberta Learning Business Plan utilizes economic cost/benefit analysis, business planning techniques, accounting principles and concepts in presenting an improved Alberta education model.

Like Alberta, 1992 Newfoundland and Labrador Royal Commission has utilized economic cost analysis models to deconstruct economically the long-standing denominational education system in the province. The economic cost-benefits of a public education system were a major determinant in the adoption of a public education system for Newfoundland and Labrador.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the establishment of a public school system replacing the age old denominational system, the establishment of school councils, and school boards amalgamation were the major governance issues outlined by the 1992 Royal Commission. In Alberta, governance focused on the collective bargaining process with the ATA, the role of school councils, and the engagement of parents in school improvement planning.

The 1992 Royal Commission Report visualizes that all stakeholders, parents, teachers, students, and community become actively involved in the operation of their local schools. There is a thrust in Newfoundland and Labrador to have a more inclusive

collaborative model of education based on the concept of *Professional Learning Communities* (Dufour & Eaker, 1998), which has been implemented in Alberta. The school development model recognizes the responsibilities and accountability of all stakeholders in the Newfoundland and Labrador education system. This model will form a major segment of the future education template for the province.

Finally, in comparing the education models as outlined by the 1992 Royal Commission and the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning, it is observed that in areas of curriculum, technology, school development models, and economic planning Alberta is well-advanced compared to the Newfoundland and Labrador education model. The point must be made that the Alberta model is well-funded compared to the Newfoundland and Labrador model and one would expect superior results with adequate funding.

The Alberta model of education as highlighted by the Alberta Learning Commission of 2003 is the envy of Canadians and many countries around the world. Traditionally, the education system in Alberta has been well-funded and consequently has been able to institute many improvements to its education system.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In an era of declining enrolments, restricted budgets, and increased public demand for accountability, business economic theory and practices have been introduced into the education system. Basic business tools such as controlling, organizing, planning, Management by Objectives techniques, economic cost-benefit analysis, Total Quality Management, and individual accountability have resulted in controls being placed on various education systems. Business economic techniques have also yielded improved budgeting and fiscal control measures for the education enterprise. The Alberta Model, in which assets such as school buildings and offices are shared and schools are fully utilized beyond the traditional school day by other government departments, has led to the improvement of overall provincial budgets (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Two of the driving forces of our society today are economics and business. Economics and business practices permeate education at all levels. "Practices of the corporate world have increasingly come into play in the school reform arena" (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002, p. 115). It is understandable that an economic business mentality finds most resistance in the field of education. According to Smith (1999) the education fraternity has seen itself as separate and distinct from business and economic philosophies for decades and teaching has been viewed as a profession where the traditional standards and methods of a liberal education are sacred (Preston, 2001). While

the use of business and economic models has proven to be useful in education, they are viewed by some as direct attacks on the philosophical principles of education (Smith, 1999).

Economic Business Models in the Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta Education Systems

During the 1980s “a long period of rapid growth in the provision of education fueled by a rapidly expanding economy and greater faith that education could be a means of resolving many enduring social and economic problems came to an end” (Levin, 2001, p. 10). Levin goes on to say that in its place we entered a period of declining funding and dissatisfaction with what schools were seen to have achieved. Governments began to struggle to develop new education policies which were more effective and less costly.

During this period business groups were gaining influence within government and particularly the education system (Manzer, 1994). The increased influence of big business on government and on the education process resulted in business leaders becoming intimately involved in the process of government policy making (Livingstone & Hart, 1998). The resulting emphasis on business practices and methods transferred by business to government led to government adapting business model methodologies. Ideas such as Total Quality Management were exported to the school sector (Levin, 2001). Private sector planning and contracting out practices were suggested as cost efficient tools for education management. As a result, business model practices became entrenched in the North American education system.

The 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning contended that due to these practices

and methods, the public is demanding increased accountability of the education system. The government of Alberta has embraced an economic business planning methodology for the education enterprise in Alberta which is evident in the Alberta Learning Business Plan (2003-2006). The 2003 Alberta Learning Business Plan utilizes economic cost/benefit analysis, business planning techniques, accounting principles and concepts in presenting an improved Alberta education model.

Like Alberta, the 1992 Newfoundland and Labrador Royal Commission has utilized economic cost analysis models to deconstruct economically the long-standing denominational education system in the province. The economic cost-benefits of a public education system were a major determinant in the adoption of a secular public education system for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Management tools such as Management by Objectives and Total Quality Management are prevalent in the education models in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta. Management by Objectives and Total Quality Management practices are the business philosophies which underline the school development plan process as instituted in Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta.

Effects of Education Reform in Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta

Lack of government accountability in the field of education has been a major political issue since the 1990s. The public has demanded increased efficiency in school and school board systems and, as a result, restructuring education systems without holding governments accountable is unacceptable in our modern society.

"In recent years, education has been a major focus of government policy in many countries (Levin, 2001, p. 1)." Governments have had an effect on changes in the education enterprise including curriculum, testing, governance, finance, and accountability.

Greater accountability has been advocated for education systems as a means of ensuring that taxpayers are getting reasonable value for their education dollar. Strategies and tools for increasing school accountability have become an integral part of broader school reform initiatives.

Education reform in Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta has focused on improvements to their existing education systems. In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, the education system was completely reconstructed, while in the Alberta system improvements were recommended to an already established world-class education system.

The mandate and background for education reform in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1992 and in Alberta in 2003 were quite different. Education reform in Newfoundland and Labrador was driven by four major forces: the long decline in student enrolment, the elimination of duplication of educational services, financial constraints of the provincial government, and the perception that the education system was not producing graduates with the knowledge and skills required to succeed in a rapidly changing society. Issues of educational attainment and cost effectiveness of the education enterprise were also issues that were recognized as being national and international in scope and had an impact on educational reform within Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta. However, in 2003, the Alberta Commission's mandate was focused on further

improvement to a recognized world-class education system.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the establishment of a secular public school system replacing the age old denominational system, the establishment of school councils, and school board amalgamation were the major governance issues outlined by the 1992 Royal Commission. In Alberta, governance focused on the collective bargaining process with the ATA, the role of school councils, and the engagement of parents in school improvement planning. Both provinces recognized that all stakeholders must become actively involved in the reform process.

The 1992 Royal Commission Report visualized that all stakeholders, parents, teachers, students, and community become actively involved in the operation of their local schools. There is a thrust in Newfoundland and Labrador to have a more inclusive collaborative model of education based on the concept of *Professional Learning Communities* (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) which has been implemented in Alberta. The school development model recognizes the responsibilities and accountability of all stakeholders in the Newfoundland and Labrador education system and this model has the potential to form a major segment of the future education template for the province.

The Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta education models recognize the effects of globalization on their respective education systems. Both jurisdictions are in different stages in a process to produce cost-effective, efficient education systems that are easily adaptable to technological and economic change.

The government of Alberta has embraced an economic business planning methodology for the education enterprise in Alberta which is evident in the Alberta Learning Business Plan (2003-2006). The 2003 Alberta Learning Business Plan utilizes

economic cost/benefit analysis, business planning techniques, accounting principles and concepts in presenting an improved Alberta education model.

The Canadian education system must continue to adopt demographic planning in order to manage an efficient education system. "The failure of those who manage the education system in Canada to study demographics is the root cause of the system's present inflated costs (Foot & Stoffman, 1996, p. 146)." Canada experienced the world's largest baby boom and saw dramatic increases in school enrolments during the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, elementary schools, then high schools, and finally, universities were expanded to accommodate the new students as the population bulge passed through different levels of educational training. The next generation of Canadians formed a much lower population base while the education system did not adjust to the smaller number of students. As a result of this blunder, Foot and Stoffman (1996) noted that permanent inefficiencies were built into the education system. In the mid 1990s, demographics caught up with public school systems and since then rapidly decreasing student demographics have resulted in the closure of schools and the reduction of school boards in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta.

Numerous models of school reform accountability have been presented and they are present in various forms in both provinces. The Alberta education system follows elements of the market competition, professional control, and managerial approaches to accountability. The 2003 Alberta Commission of Learning noted that choice is a strength in Alberta's education system. The ability to choose among public schools, separate schools, francophone schools, private schools, charter schools, home schooling, distance learning, and a variety of alternative programs within the public system is viewed as a

strength that is unique to Alberta. The Alberta citizenry suggests that this diversity enhances the quality of education, enhances accessibility, provides more options for parents and students, provides parents with a right to choose, strengthens the overall system and allow for religious instruction (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003).

Alberta Learning, through the school development model and the Alberta Learning Business Plan, utilizes a variety of business model concepts and follows the management approach in terms of strategic planning and the professional-control site-based management approach in developing school development models.

The Newfoundland and Labrador education model follows elements of the professional-control site-based management and management approaches to accountability. The school improvement planning process holds teachers accountable to parents, students, and district supervisors for the overall effectiveness and efficiency of a particular school. The Newfoundland and Labrador system utilizes the management approach through strategic planning setting objectives and measuring the degree of success or failure in reaching these objectives. The school and its administration are accountable most directly to district personnel in their rate of success in reaching school objectives.

The Newfoundland and Labrador education model does not follow the market competition approach model to accountability. There is very limited choice in the Newfoundland and Labrador model. There are a scattering of three private schools within the Newfoundland and Labrador education system which are not publicly funded. Thus, the ability of students to attend private schools is a function of the availability of parents to provide funding. Therefore, the choice is available but limited.

Curriculum is viewed by many teachers as a cornerstone of the teaching/learning dynamic. Under an economic reform approach, schools have been amalgamated and small rural schools offer only the mandatory curriculum. A case can be made that rural students do not have the same availability of education as their urban counterparts. Due to declining enrolments in rural schools in Newfoundland and Labrador, distance-learning education has been implemented to offer essential courses that cannot be efficiently offered otherwise. The distance-learning program is not universally suited to all students. Students require discipline, familiarity, and a comfort level with technology, along with the ability to work alone in order to succeed (Supporting Learning, 2000). Unfortunately, all students involved with distance-learning do not possess these qualities.

Further Study

The use of business model techniques is prevalent in the Alberta model. The Alberta Learning Business Plan (2003-2006) is becoming implemented and entrenched in the Alberta education model. Further study is warranted as to the success of the recommendations of the 2003 Alberta Commission on Learning in reaching its objective of producing the best education system in the world.

Based on the 2003 Alberta Commission recommendations, further study is required to ascertain whether there has been an improvement in student PISA results. Further study is also required in the Newfoundland and Labrador system to ascertain whether the 1992 Royal Commission recommendations have been implemented and if the elimination of denominational education system along with school and school board

consolidations has resulted in projected economic cost savings. Further study would analyze the success of both Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador in producing graduates with the knowledge and skills required to succeed in a rapidly changing society based on the recommendations of the two Royal Commissions. A Pan-Canadian study to investigate the impact of business and economic models on the education enterprise would also be timely.

Today's Canadian education systems utilize business and economic models in pursuing the education enterprise. The use of economic business models has assisted Alberta, in particular, in becoming a world-class education system. Business models are becoming an integral part of education systems. The only question that remains is how deep it will permeate the teaching/learning dynamic.

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