Political Action Through Consensus

A Case Study of the Federation of Independent School Associations of British Columbia

by

Peter Froese

B.A., University of Winnipeg, 1973
M.Ed., University of Victoria, 1990

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
(Educational Leadership and Policy)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)
February 2010
© Peter Froese 2009
Abstract

This is a case study which seeks to understand how individuals achieve consensus within heterogeneous groups. The Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia was formed in 1966 to lobby government for recognition and funding for independent schools. FISA consists of five separate associations with different ideological and pedagogical priorities that might make achieving consensus difficult. Yet over the past forty years, unanimity on policy has been achieved on all but one occasion.

This case study draws on Bourdieu’s (1985) analysis of how groups develop strategies of collaboration within a social space. Jarvis (1998) also provides a paradigm on group knowledge that has been adapted to analyze the interviews that constitute part of the qualitative data in this research. Data sources included archival records, press reports, Board meeting attendance, meeting minutes, internal FISA memos, and interviews with Directors and senior government officials.

The study’s purpose was to determine what strategies FISA used to achieve consensus on issues relating to legislation which provided partial public funding for independent schools in BC. The conclusions suggest five organizational facets that impact FISA’s consensus strategies: beliefs and values, group knowledge, external variables, personal identities and tacit
learning.

Foundational principles of FISA include the right to ‘disassociate’ on specific issues. Consensus is achieved through consciously limiting the issues addressed by the organization. The diversity of FISA is considered its strength and members respect one another despite differing belief systems through conscious misunderstanding. Finally, each association has an equal voice in shaping policy.

The common threat of losing public funding is a major motivator towards collaboration. Building relationships with senior government officials and elected representatives has been found effective to garner support for independent schools.

This research is based on a study of one non-government organization, and therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other diverse organizations, though the findings may be transferable. Further research would be warranted to determine if political or community groups function in a similar manner. The ability to deal with group diversity is important in the context of a multi-cultural society.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................. ii

Table of Contents ........................................ iv

List of Tables ............................................. ix

List of Figures ............................................. x

List of Abbreviations ...................................... xi

Acknowledgements ........................................ xiii

1 Seeking Consensus within Diversity ................. 1
   1.1 A Personal Journey with Conflict .................. 2
   1.2 Significance of the FISA Study ..................... 14

2 An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia .................................. 22
   2.1 Summary ............................................. 44

3 A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions .......................... 47
# Table of Contents

3.1 Introduction .............................................. 47
3.2 Definition of Terms ........................................ 50
3.3 Spatial Relationships Within Groups .................... 56
3.4 Symbolic Structuring of Groups ......................... 59
3.5 The Relationship Between Habitus and Field in Practice .. 64
3.6 Understanding NGOs and Networks ....................... 70
    3.6.1 Contextual Implications on Diverse Coalitions 73
3.7 The Effects of Diversity on Groups ...................... 74
    3.7.1 The Effect of Diversity on Coalitions ........... 77
    3.7.2 Leadership in Coalitions ....................... 79
3.8 Beliefs and Values ......................................... 85
3.9 Personal Identity ....................................... 86
3.10 Group Knowledge ........................................ 88
3.11 External Variables ..................................... 90
3.12 Tacit Learning ........................................ 92
3.13 Summary .............................................. 93

4 Research Methods ............................................. 95
4.1 The Merits of a Case Study ............................... 95
4.2 Building a Methodology for the Case Study on FISA .... 106
4.3 Data Collection ........................................ 106
    4.3.1 Data Sources .................................. 107
4.4 Efficacy of Case Study .................................. 116
    4.4.1 Interview Consistency ......................... 120
    4.4.2 Analysis of the Interviews .................... 121
# Table of Contents

4.5 Conclusion ................................................. 122

5 Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building ................................................. 124

5.1 The Raison d’etre of FISA ........................................ 125

5.2 Group Knowledge .............................................. 128

5.2.1 Structure of the Board ....................................... 129

5.2.2 Organizational Strategies ..................................... 131

5.3 Time: The Ally of Consensus ................................. 138

5.4 Beliefs and Values ............................................. 139

5.4.1 Trust ..................................................... 141

5.4.2 Equality of Representation ............................... 144

5.4.3 Respect for Diverse Beliefs ............................... 152

5.4.4 Organizational Values ....................................... 153

5.5 Personal Identities ............................................. 157

5.5.1 Directors’ Qualifications ................................. 158

5.5.2 An Ability to Collaborate ................................. 161

5.5.3 People and the Process of Consensus ................. 162

5.5.4 Leadership ............................................... 170

5.6 External Variables ............................................. 174

5.6.1 Relationship with Government .......................... 174

5.6.2 Perceived External Threat to FISA ..................... 177

5.7 Tacit Learning ................................................ 181

6 Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools ............................................. 186
Table of Contents

6.1 Arguments For and Against Public funding of Independent Schools ........................................... 187
6.2 The FISA Approach to Government ......................................................................................... 189
6.3 FISA Political Action on Government Funding ........................................................................ 192
   6.3.1 1977, Bill 33 and the Independent School Support Act .................................................. 194
   6.3.2 Year 2000 and the NDP Government Independent School Funding Reduction .................. 204
   6.3.3 2004: 100% Special Education Funding for Moderate to Severe Learning Needs .................. 213
   6.3.4 2008: FISA Harrison Retreat Discussions on Government Funding ............................. 224
6.4 Summary .................................................................................................................................. 230

7 Summary and Conclusions .................................................................................................................. 232
   7.1 Beliefs and Values .................................................................................................................. 233
   7.2 Group Knowledge ................................................................................................................... 235
   7.3 Personal Identities .................................................................................................................... 237
   7.4 External Variables ..................................................................................................................... 238
   7.5 Tacit Learning .......................................................................................................................... 240
   7.6 Linking Theory and Practice in Relation to this Research ..................................................... 242
   7.7 Concepts that Require Further Discussion ............................................................................. 252
   7.8 Discussion ............................................................................................................................... 257
   7.9 Limitations of the Study ......................................................................................................... 260
   7.10 Implications ............................................................................................................................ 262
   7.11 Further Research .................................................................................................................... 264
# Table of Contents

7.12 Conclusion ......................................................... 267

Bibliography ............................................................... 270

Appendices

A FISA Letter of Permission ........................................ 279

B BREB Certificate of Approval ..................................... 280

C Case Study Protocol .................................................. 281

D Interview Questions .................................................. 286

E Letter to Participants ............................................... 290

F Consent Form .......................................................... 293

G Annual Enrolment of Independent and Public Schools in
British Columbia ......................................................... 295
List of Tables

3.1 Categories and Types of Diversity by Mannix and Neale, 2005 78

4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Six Sources of Evidence in Case Studies 101

4.2 Interview Representation from the Groups within FISA and the MOE Interviews Conducted. 111

5.1 Percentage of FISA Enrolment by Each Group in 1969 and 2008. 143

G.1 Annual Independent School Enrolment in British Columbia Proportional to the Provincial Student Enrolment (represented by graph in Figure 5.1). 296
List of Figures

3.1 Fields Within a Social Space. ............................. 53
3.2 Forms of Capital Within a Social Field. .................. 54
3.3 Diverse Fields are Able to Build Consensus by Consciously
    Avoiding Conflict. ........................................... 63
3.4 Five Facets Essential to Organizational Consensus-Building . 84

4.1 Convergence of Multiple Sources of Evidence ............ 102

5.1 Annual Independent School Enrolment in British Columbia
    Proportional to the Provincial Student Enrolment (See App-
    pendix H for numerical totals.) .......................... 126
5.2 Current Representation of BC Independent Schools within
    FISA .......................................................... 149

7.1 Strategies of Consensus Leading to Political Action within
    FISA BC. ...................................................... 234
7.2 Fields that Operate within the FISA Social Space. ........ 243
7.3 Fields within the Catholic Independent Schools Social Space. 244
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACSI-BC</td>
<td>Association of Christian Schools International in British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMG</td>
<td>Associate Member Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCCT</td>
<td>British Columbia College of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCSTA</td>
<td>British Columbia School Trustees Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCTF</td>
<td>British Columbia Teachers’ Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREB</td>
<td>University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Catholic Independent Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUPE</td>
<td>Canadian Union of Public Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FISA</td>
<td>Federation of Independent School Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBC</td>
<td>Hudson’s Bay Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISA</td>
<td>Independent Schools Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>New Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Government Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OIIS</td>
<td>Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools of the Ministry of Education for B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Private Schools Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCSBC</td>
<td>Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

This study was made possible through the support given by the Board of Directors of the Federation of Independent School Associations of British Columbia (FISA). They consented to full access to archival materials, Board meetings, minutes of meetings and interviews from current and past Board members and Executive Directors. I am grateful for their assistance. I am even more grateful for the support given by my dear wife, Ruth, who meticulously transcribed all the interviews, edited the manuscript, learned to enter data in LyX, and patiently encouraged me to continue with this research when I was prepared to give up. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my son, Aaron, who sacrificed precious time from his own dissertation to format the final edition. Dr. Andre Mazawi was tirelessly encouraging of this study and spent countless hours reading and rereading my numerous iterations of this dissertation. He has been an inspiration to me and I thank him for his persistence in encouraging me to apply a critical eye to the rich amount of data that was made available to me. I also thank Dr. Shauna Butterwick and Dr. Tom Sork for their recommendations that have added to the quality of this case study. Finally, I thank my son Aaron, daughter Larissa, and son-in-law Andrew for their encouragement and occasional reminders to their dad that you must always finish what you start.
Chapter 1

Seeking Consensus within Diversity

“Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.” Proverbs 17:1 (NIV Bible)

This is a case study that explores how individuals with differing perspectives can achieve consensus within groups in a complex and heterogeneous society. In order to live amicably within a multicultural social milieu, individuals need to respect and appreciate a multiplicity of perspectives; yet avoidance, misunderstanding, and prejudice can lead to open conflict. The Federation of Independent Schools Association (FISA), by contrast, is an organization composed of a cross section of people whose life experience, world views and educational perspectives encompass most of the philosophical, religious, and cultural differences found in British Columbia. Yet, this organization has not only survived, but thrived for forty years. Members demonstrate mutual regard, careful listening, and amicable interpersonal relationships within a structure which demands consensus on all policy decisions. This is a mystery worth investigating, and the purpose of this study is to discover what organizational strategies FISA employs to achieve con-
sensus within the diversity represented around its table.

In this chapter, I will examine my personal experiences with differing perspectives and how they motivated me to strive for unity in my community. I will also provide a brief history of private schools in British Columbia, leading to the formation of FISA. This coalition of independent school interest groups forms the basis of my case study that explores how consensus in the context of diversity is socially constructed, and what techniques proved successful in lobbying government for funds for independent schools when previous appeals and strategies had proven fruitless.

1.1 A Personal Journey with Conflict

The term “conflict” generally implies a negative value judgement, carried over from our earliest childhood altercations over favourite toys and the ensuing parental censure. Conflict is assumed to be bad; its opposites, such as cooperation and peacemaking, are good. Since this case study explores the procedures by which a diverse group achieves consensus, a good thing, it would be easy to assume that conflict, its opposite, is being interpreted as a bad thing. This is not the case. The term “conflict,” as it is used in this paper, refers to the differences in expectation and opinion between people in group situations, and the resulting state of instability these differences cause, both between individuals with differing opinions and within the individual, who may be torn between adhering to his or her beliefs and conforming to the group’s expectations.

The need to conform can derive from several sources, one of which is
the desire of the individual to reduce the unpleasantness of the cognitive
dissonance between his or her views and the views of the group. In some
cases, the opinions of those around us serve as a means of testing the validity
of our own opinions, and the process of assessing the relative merits of the
group opinion versus our personal opinion can lead to considerable inner
conflict (Verba, 1961, p. 23) [83]. Conflict can also arise from group pressure
exerted upon an individual in an attempt to compel him or her to change
or modify a personally held belief or opinion. Such pressure, suggests Verba
(1961), is felt most extensively when the individual experiences a strong need
to belong to the group and modifies his or her position in order to maintain
his or her acceptance by the group. Conflict is defined in this dissertation,
then, as a form of pressure that an individual experiences through his or her
own desire to conform to the expectations of the group or the pressure that
a group exerts on an individual that would bring him or her into conformity
with the group.

Being the middle in a family of eight children had its challenges. As a
son of a father who made it his life’s calling to serve as a pastor in numer-
ous Mennonite churches in Canada and Europe, I was subjected to many
expectations from both my parents and the communities in which we lived.
Carrying my father’s name included the assumption that I would follow in
my father’s footsteps, a career choice that I was not anxious to make. And
so my choice of attending university upon completing high school was on a
collision course with my father’s desire for me to attend Bible College. The
fact that his wishes were followed initially had more to do with my lack of
direction in life at that early age than with my submission to the authority
of my father, but my reluctant acquiescence resulted in a sense of tension that I did not enjoy.

I had already acknowledged the existence of God and desired to live a righteous life, although I often experienced inner conflict between my understanding of that concept and my lifestyle practices. But I did not have any motivation whatsoever to follow my father’s calling to the pastorate, because I was petrified to stand before an audience and share what was on my mind. I could not imagine spending the rest of my life dreading the prospect each week of appearing in front of a congregation with something meaningful to say. And there was no Aaron on the horizon who would step forward and speak for me, as he did for Moses before Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10-15) [88].

On the other hand, I was beginning to recognize personal qualities that I thought would be valuable to pursue. Already in my teenage years, I enjoyed helping people identify their gifts in ways that enabled them to pursue career paths suited to their talents. I also wished to become more materially affluent than my parental family had been. Much of my childhood was spent wearing hand-me-downs from my older siblings or other members of the church. I wanted the pleasure of wearing store-bought clothes like the friends I chummed with in school. So there was clearly a conflict developing in my young mind between wanting to please my father by supporting his Christian ministry and wanting to help people discover their gifts and talents while also enjoying some of life’s material pleasures. It was a huge disappointment to my parents when I left Bible College after only one year to enroll in a secular university. I think they felt they had lost a son to “the world,” since I was the only child of eight who attended post secondary
education of any kind, and I chose to do it at a university. Though we never communicated on the issue, I believe this remained a source of disappointment for my father until he attended my graduation with a Masters degree in Education twenty years later. This was the first time that he acknowledged his approval of the career path I had taken in becoming a teacher and administrator. Despite this tacit gesture, however, his graduation gift to me of Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible left no doubt in my mind as to where his hopes for me continued to tend.

My desire to work with people soon dominated over my desire to become wealthy, when I discovered the personal reward of seeing my students discover themselves and what they wanted to accomplish in life. This was confirmed several years ago when I accepted an invitation to the wedding of a student of twenty years ago; and again just recently, when I received a letter from a young lady I had taught fifteen years ago, to let me know that she had just received her teaching certification. She wrote, “I just want to thank you for the time, energy and care that you poured into my education and the education of so many others. After 17 years of school my last few years at Godson and my time in Apex stand out among the best” (personal communication, May 10, 2007).

Similar affirmations have been a blessing for me throughout my entire career in education.

I began my career as an elementary school teacher of intermediate-aged students, largely because I enjoyed the way they began to question some firmly held beliefs and traditions within the public school culture where I was teaching. Why should we obey our parents when we don’t agree with
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

them? Why study Social Studies when it will not help us prepare for what we want to do with our lives? If students didn’t have a part in making the rules, why are we required to obey them? How can we know that people evolved from an ape to the human form we have today? These questions were delightful opportunities to engage creative thinking skills in understanding theories in Science, the role of families in society, the pathways of knowledge and organizational theories. While such terms were not used, these young students were asking important questions about the purpose of life, and were working through their own life experiences toward an understanding of the good.

As my years in teaching progressed, I developed the desire to shape education from an administrative perspective. Being a member of a community of learners was rewarding, but I felt there were ways to make learning more relevant to students so that they could “own” their education and feel that both the product and the process of learning could hold richer meaning for them. Now the questions were not just from the students, but also from the teachers, who were often resistant to new ideas of teaching and learning. “But we have always taught this way.” “No one has tried this strategy before so it can’t be good.” Teachers with differing styles of instruction became pitted against one another and power structures emerged to defend one position over another. As an administrator, my role became one of valuing the individual teachers, while encouraging them to take the professional risks that might lead to a positive experience. Issues such as the pace of change, risk management, collaboration, and professional development became concepts that required my understanding and management. I discovered that
diversity within schools, involving teachers who were all engaged in delivering education but held widely differing professional and philosophical perspectives, could lead to some challenging relational and instructional issues when staff did not agree with the pace or direction of educational change. Most adapted to the expectations of the majority, but some chose to practise their profession at a new school by requesting a transfer. And, as occurred in some cases, when expectations for change were imposed on staff who had very little opportunity for input, the conflict was generally exacerbated.

After many successful years as teacher and vice-principal of several elementary schools, I was appointed principal of a small country school in my hometown, with about one hundred eighty students in Kindergarten to grade seven in one of the oldest schools in the district. This was my opportunity to really lead! I was finally in charge of a school and I could make a difference in the lives of our students and our small staff of seven teachers. Beneath all this self-righteous pride, I was also frustrated that the school district had not entrusted me with a larger school - but I was going to show them!

This meagre beginning as a school principal turned into my most enjoyable four years as an administrator. In hindsight, I recognize that many of the leadership strategies I needed to employ in this setting were essentially the same as those required in larger organizational settings. At the same time, there were essential ways in which this experience was unique. In this small school community, I got to know families as friends, and the educational issues that arose with children were handled much like a caring parent provides for his or her children. A small school provided an equally small
budget, and our staff learned to share resources and depend on one another for professional advice and lesson material that each of them produced. Student issues were handled over a cup of coffee in the staffroom, where several teachers provided input because some of them had taught that student in earlier years. Staff meetings were held monthly as per expectation, but the real agenda was covered daily over lunch as teachers shared their ideas and concerns with their colleagues and collaborated on possible solutions. My role as principal became that of facilitator of learning, where I tried to equip my staff with the tools of the profession and to affirm them in their work. I was able to use my organizational skills in acquiring numerous grants, such as Gender Equity grants, Math Numeracy grants, Gifted learning initiatives and cultural grants that affirmed our little school and provided additional resources for such things as a computer lab and current Science textbooks. We became a close-knit community of learners, in spite of the fact that our staff represented a wide range of ontological perspectives that should have led to conflict and alienation. It didn’t. Instead, we got together socially at one another’s homes to enjoy evenings of fun and entertainment. We made sushi together, visited colleagues at their cottage, helped with the haying and valued one another as professionals and friends. We worked hard at our profession, played enthusiastically when we entertained one another, and wept deeply when one of our colleagues was tragically killed in a traffic accident. This was an amazing environment in which to begin my career as a principal. In fact, I have only experienced one other situation in my professional life where the entire organization worked with a common sense of purpose amidst a wide range of diversity. This led me to wonder why
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

some organizations seem able to thrive in spite of differences, while others struggle to work together to achieve their purposes and goals.

From that first principalship, my career led me to several large elementary schools, one of which was an independent Christian school. Several of the parents from my first small public country school were involved in building an elementary school for a local evangelical Christian school organization and asked me to be the first principal. I accepted with some reticence, not because I did not agree with the values of a Christian school, but because my career had become well established in the public sector. I was involved in several district initiatives such as integrating technology into the classroom, moving Mathematics instruction from concepts and equations to problem solving, expanding performing arts opportunities for students, and developing learning outcomes for behaviourally challenged learners, and I was not anxious to leave public education. But I obeyed an inner calling to a new challenge, which provided new professional opportunities for me.

During my teacher training at university, I recall writing a paper on what my ideal school would be if I had the opportunity to create one. Never would I have expected to have the opportunity to build my vision for an ideal elementary school. I was given input on the design of the building, as well as a free hand in selecting my staff, collaborating with that staff in building a curriculum, establishing behavioural and academic expectations, and creating a caring community where students felt safe to take risks with their learning. This privilege happened again as a new Middle School was added eight years later, when I worked with staff from two schools to design a facility and philosophy for learners in the middle years. Watching these
two schools excel under new leadership has also been rewarding, as my administrative responsibilities have shifted to policy and governance as a system Superintendent.

In recent years, I have served on external evaluation teams for the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools of the Ministry of Education for British Columbia (OIIS). This collaborative evaluation experience has strengthened my leadership skills by giving me an opportunity to examine a variety of educational organizations and philosophies more analytically. I have been able to learn from both public and independent school administrators which organizational attributes contribute to effective learning in a variety of different educational environments. The key lesson for me has been awareness that there are many pedagogical strategies that provide effective instruction and learning. Recently, I have been invited to serve on evaluation teams for off-shore schools teaching the British Columbia curriculum to students in China. This, also, has been a significant opportunity for professional development, enabling me to observe student learning in another cultural setting. All of these experiences have shaped my professional career and assisted me to better enable young people to contribute positively to society as knowledgeable human beings able to think, reason, and process information for the common good.

A very great challenge for me, in transitioning from a teacher-principal role to a superintending role, has been the lack of opportunity to interact with students and observe as they learn new concepts or acquire new skills. Hearing of such experiences from teaching or administrative staff is not as fulfilling for me as interacting with students on a personal level. This change
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

in roles as I matured, from a member of the household to teacher to principal and now to superintendent has highlighted a new level of conflict in my journey as a person and an educational leader. As a family member, my conflicts centered around personal moral choices and relationships; as a superintendent, these conflicts are complicated and intensified by the necessity of making political choices designed to unify an educational system, but which have personal implications for many people on my staff who, although they may agree or disagree with my choices, are bound by the conditions of their employment to implement them.

One would expect that a system in which all members endorse a common worldview would function with greater unity than a more discrete system, but I have found that such is not necessarily the case. A further struggle in my current position has involved discovering enduring conflict where I expected commonness of purpose and great unity. The high school in my current independent school organization has been in existence for over sixty years, and I have learned from my experience with it that established school cultures are very resistant to change. To my great surprise, the egalitarian approach that brought unexpected unity to the diverse school cultures in which I worked previously has been an unwitting catalyst for conflict in this homogeneous environment. Additionally, attempting to change this school culture from long-established routines and practices to new methods of pedagogy is met with extreme resistance.

In this school culture, where the staff is hired both for their professional expertise and for their common religious beliefs and practices, I have experienced some of the most challenging leadership issues in my thirty years in
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

education. Shared beliefs and values have not always led to a shared common purpose that I would have expected from individuals who acknowledge the supremacy of God and live by Biblical principles, which include respect for and cooperation with those in positions of authority. The network of subgroups within this large organization has challenged my leadership skills as well as my understanding of what “building consensus” within groups means or implies. This encouraged me to explore new ways of building towards a common purpose. But the question remains: Why does a homogeneous group of individuals united under common beliefs and values not produce a community united under a common purpose? Should not common and deeply held beliefs serve as a foundation for consensus? Even more importantly, for someone in leadership whose responsibility it is to develop cooperation among members of one’s team, how can cooperation be fostered in an environment where the habitus is one of conflict?

A common purpose seems self-evident in religious organizations whose philosophical underpinnings acknowledge a central truth such as the Bible or the Koran. However, the same words can produce different responses in different people, possibly due to their personal life experiences, indoctrination by key people in their lives, or assumptions that they make about life itself. As these assumptions are brought into a group setting, core values tend to form deeply held beliefs that shape group thinking and discourse as group members engage with one another in their social environments. Individual interpretations of commonly held beliefs and values influence the degree of conflict within the group, thus limiting the options that individuals are prepared to consider in decision-making processes. Therefore, one might
assume that if groups formed on the basis of common beliefs encounter conflict, groups which encompass significant diversity of perspectives might find consensus-building an even greater challenge. I recognize that consensus-building is not simply linked to individual or group beliefs and values, but is also dependent on a variety of socially constructed factors that Bourdieu (1985) [11] refers to as individual or group capital. Nevertheless, one’s beliefs and values play an important role in consensus-building.

The desire to “live at peace with all men and women” in my home, school and community has been a driving force throughout my life. Differences will always be present when two or more individuals occupy the same space for any length of time, but the manner in which the participants deal with their differences determines the degree of conflict that they will encounter. Clearly, one individual in a group cannot single-handedly prevent conflict from developing, but I believe each of us can mitigate the degree of conflict present by the manner in which we conduct ourselves in relation to others. I expect there may also be organizational strategies that could enable groups of individuals to both respect each others’ differences and enable a sense of community to emerge, even if these groups come together only for professional reasons but hold beliefs and values very different from one another. It must be possible for members of such groups to respect each others’ differences and still achieve the mission and purpose of the organization.

We live in a multicultural society where differences are common and where collaborative initiatives in the workplace and within social agencies are an expectation. It is paramount, therefore, to equip individuals with strategies that enable them to respect differences and to seek ways of engag-
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

ing people with diverse beliefs and values, ethnicity, race, and social status in a manner that values their individual worth within the group and within society as a whole. Based on my experience as an educational leader, when people feel valued, not only does their self-esteem increase but their contribution to the organization also increases. Therefore, research in the area of resolving conflict within group diversity would be useful information for the field of knowledge in social systems.

1.2 Significance of the FISA Study

There are over 360 independent schools in the province of British Columbia, 70% of which are formed through the influence of a particular faith group. Other independent schools have an emphasis on post secondary education or a particular pedagogical perspective. Yet, for the past forty years, representatives of these schools have collaborated on policy issues with a high degree of cooperation. Given the wide range of ontological perspectives, one might expect a high degree of conflict in consensus-building. With so many deeply-held beliefs and values, opinions, and perspectives, one might expect a highly dysfunctional association of schools and yet, this appears not to be case.

Therefore, a fundamental question in group consensus-building is the determination of whether joint action within diversity is possible, especially within a political context. How does a “consensual” action or joint political action become possible as a social construct, given the extent of diversity of positions, values, opinions and habitus?
FISA, an organization consisting of groups of schools with a diversity of independent school leaders, appears to demonstrate an ability to collaborate, despite many pedagogical and religious differences between them. This phenomenon fascinates me and warrants further study. How is this diverse group of educators able to develop policy that has enabled the organization to achieve many of its goals, when other groups grounded on homogeneous beliefs, values, and organizational policies struggle to cooperate?

For over forty years, FISA has continued to promote its political agenda of recognition, funding, and, more recently, contributing to policy development within the broader educational community in British Columbia, by working in cooperation with a diverse group of stakeholders. From the first exploratory meeting of independent schools’ representatives on October 17, 1964 (FISA website) [86] to the present day, this group has provided a voice to government on behalf of BC independent schools. The original FISA consisted of four groups - the Roman Catholic schools (CIS), the Society of Christian Schools in B.C. (SCSBC), the Independent Schools Association (ISA), and the Associate Member Group (AMG). Three of the groups had three representatives on the Board, while the AMG had six members on the Board to better reflect the wide diversity of perspectives within the group. A fifth group, called the Association of Christian Schools International of British Columbia (ACSI-BC), was added in 2003.

A major undertaking at the meeting of inception was formulating a constitution which would be framed around recognition of associations of schools, rather than individual schools, thus giving an equal vote to each group, regardless of its size. This accommodation was a significant conces-
sion made by the Catholic schools, since they represented more than half of the students in independent schools in B.C. at that time.

Historically, independent schools were the first educational institutions in the British colony and were operated by private interests, not by the governor of the colony. The Hudson’s Bay Company recognized the importance of education in the new colony, and provided funding to assist in the cost of running the separate schools. Parents of children who attended the schools also paid a fee to attend the schools. Funding for education in what was to be known as British Columbia was already an issue in the 19th century, and continues to be so to this day. Education is the second most costly item in the provincial budget, next to health care. So, the funding of education and the type of education to be funded has been a concern since the very first schools were established in this province.

In addition to the challenge of designing an organizational structure which could achieve specific political goals of funding and recognition, it was necessary for FISA to develop a “group” dynamic among a collection of individuals who were far from united in their philosophical and ontological perspectives. A wide range of religious and nonreligious schools was represented, and this required Board members to develop strategies that promoted discourse with an appreciation of differing views, respect for all members, and a high degree of trust. How this was achieved is worthy of further study. Understanding how an alliance of diverse groups can develop a discourse that is respectful of difference and successful in achieving organizational purposes with minimal conflict can lead to knowledge that may be helpful in supporting organizations struggling with conflict due to differ-
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

ence and diversity. This would require an analysis of the structure of the organization, both objective and symbolic, as well as of the various influences and power structures that govern the interaction between the groups comprising FISA, between members within the groups, and between FISA and external influences. The manner in which issues are represented to the FISA Board and the process for seeking consensus are also of interest. As conflicting issues emerge around the table, how is the discourse framed to respect diverse views and how is the agenda of policy-making promoted within such a climate? How was the issue of funding public and non-public schools eventually resolved by the government and what part did non-public schools play in that decision?

The history of British Columbia included schools started by private interests under the watchful eye of Captain James Douglas, the first administrator of the British colony, headquartered in Victoria. Public and non-public schools quickly sprang up, one for the children of the gentlemen-officers of the Hudson’s Bay Company and another for the children of the “labouring and poorer classes” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 4) [17]. Universal education never really happened because the colony was able to fund the school only through the sale of liquor licenses, and this was barely enough to provide public buildings, roads, a church and a school. Additional operating costs had to come from the HBC and parents who could afford to educate their children (Cunningham, 2002, p. 6) [17].

While recognition of education, whether provided by public support or private interests, was not an issue in the early days of this province, the funding of the schools was. It was a constant struggle to ensure that enough
money was available to run the schools, and the cost of sending their children to school was prohibitive for the poor. Not until British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871 and public school attendance became compulsory throughout the province, did the real conflict between public and non-public schools begin. The Catholic, Anglican and British schools had been operating successfully for many years under the colony’s authority, but now they were excluded from the educational process as far as funding was concerned. There was no challenge to their right to operate, as they were doing a good job of teaching their students. It was the entitlement to public funding that instigated the struggle over the rightful place of non-public schools in British Columbia. This struggle led to the closure of many schools, both privately funded and publicly funded, that could no longer afford to operate. Funding of an improved educational program, salaries for teachers and school supplies all became issues of school sustainability.

Constant debates were held with government officials over the right of non-public or separate schools to receive the same funding as the public schools, since they were doing the same job. It was difficult to distinguish between the two types of schools, for their instructional strategies and ideologies were similar. Bible reading and prayer were a part of the public system and the beliefs and values of public teachers were similar to those of separate school teachers. However, public schools were funded and separate schools were not.

The justification of this policy became hotly debated throughout the 20th Century, leading eventually to partial funding in 1977 for separate or independent schools. This struggle was stained with political rivalry,
coalition failures, and political protests designed to amend the policy of public funding exclusion for independent schools in British Columbia.

It has been my experience that people tend to fear diversity rather than embrace it. We frequently avoid people who are different from us, have different ideas about how society should be structured, believe different things, represent different cultures, and come from different races. We prefer to associate with people who think, act and feel as we do about how we should live our lives. But even homogeneous groups with a common purpose or perspective sometimes find it difficult to reach consensus on both trivial and seminal issues, as personal wishes conflict with group dynamics. The logical corollary of this must be that widely divergent views further accentuate the challenge of finding a sense of purpose within a group or community (Karakowsky, 1995; Lau, 1998; Mullen, 1994) [52, 57, 63]. Research suggests that diversity would have a detrimental effect on a group whose members lack the perceived similarities required for cohesion. Yet FISA, wherein many widely differing worldviews are represented, appears to have maintained a high level of collaboration for over forty years.

Analysis of the principles guiding FISA’s formation and maintenance, organizational policy development, and interaction with external agencies may lead to some guiding principles or best practices that apply to the fields of education and organizational development, where having a common purpose and finding consensus within diversity is essential. FISA appears to draw strength, rather than conflict, from its diversity. Why is this so? And how will understanding this aspect of FISA add to the research on conflict resolution within a culture of group or community diversity?
Chapter 1. Seeking Consensus within Diversity

This research studied the organization of independent schools in the province of British Columbia. It attempted to determine why a diverse group of independent schools was able to form a coalition after decades of mistrust and isolated existence. I reviewed the literature on coalitions, group diversity, and relationships within a social space; and then conducted a case study of the Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia to determine what strategies for collaboration were constructed to enable groups of independent schools to build a model for political consensus, when previous attempts had failed.

In Chapter one, I have positioned myself in terms of my beliefs and values within the context of diversity. The next chapter provides an historical context for education in British Columbia, illustrating the challenges faced by both public and independent schools in getting public support for funding and, in the case of independent schools, recognition. Chapter Three provides a literature review of coalitions, group diversity and group dynamics within the context of organizational theory. I draw heavily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose perspectives on groups operating in a social space are helpful in examining the interaction among the independent school associations that are members of FISA. Chapter Four outlines the methodology used to discuss the social constructs of FISA that enable it to achieve consensus positions despite its diversity. This research is a case study that examines the strategies employed by FISA in achieving consensus and considers the specific actions of FISA in securing recognition and funding for independent schools in British Columbia.

Chapters Five and Six provide an analysis of the findings, drawn from
interviews conducted with current and past board members, as well as members of the BC Ministry of Education. These interviews are cross-referenced with archival information such as minutes of meetings, memos, government briefs, and newspaper articles. I consider four episodes of funding debates engaged in by FISA to explore how the five diverse associations within the FISA were able to achieve consensus on obtaining government funding approval for independent schools. Finally, Chapter Seven provides an interpretation of the results of the research, drawing on the scholarship cited in the literature review. Consideration is also given to areas for further study as they pertain to consensus strategies within group diversity.
Chapter 2

An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

It was as unlikely and diverse a political coalition as British Columbia had ever seen: religious groups and secularists, Christians and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, united with one clear and common cause – legal recognition for British Columbia’s independent schools. A conglomerate of erstwhile rivals, the Federation of Independent School Associations was either ‘an unholy alliance’ of political opportunists or ‘an act of faith blessed by God’ – depending entirely on the speaker’s perspective. (Cunningham, 2002, p. 2) [17]

Cunningham[17] has written a book entitled Justice Achieved, in which she chronicles the journey of the independent school movement in British Columbia. Was this coalition of independent schools successful because of political opportunism or as a result of some intricate and complex processes of social construction that led to its sustainability, or a mixture of
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

the two? Some early attempts at coalition-building with various independent schools included considerable conflict and very little consensus-building. What changed?

The first schools in the province of British Columbia were formed in 1849 at Fort Victoria, by Anglican and Catholic clergymen who were responsible to the colonial government of the day, specifically Captain James Douglas, the post’s chief Factor. These schools were what we would call ‘separate’ or independent schools. Funding for the first two schools came from the Hudson’s Bay Company, church authorities and fee-paying parents. By the 1860s, private ventures and religious schools were operating on both Vancouver Island and the mainland. One such school was administered by an Anglican clergyman for children of the Royal Engineers and received funding from the Crown Colony of British Columbia, the British War Office and parents. While funding of these first schools in the province was difficult, they did not experience the challenges evident in later debates regarding funding for public and non-public schools.

The conflict on funding of schools in British Columbia began with the enactment of the School Act of 1872, which held that public schools ought to enjoy public funding; while private, especially denominational or faith-based schools ought not to be supported by the public purse. There was no question of the legitimacy of the non-public schools, provided the funding of such schools came from private sources. Parent support for non-public schools remained strong until the 1940s and 1950s despite the lack of equitable funding. During these decades, the Catholic schools of British Columbia attempted to obtain some financial support from the government, due to the
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

rising cost of education and the increasing demand from parents for greater program diversity in Catholic schools. Their efforts gained them access to free textbooks and some limited school health services as well as property tax exemptions, but not the kind of relief that was needed to sustain rising operating costs (Sullivan, 1988, pp. 198-203) [75].

It was in this context that the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA) was born during the turbulent mid-sixties. Catholic schools were suffering under the financial burden of educating children, a double standard existed on school taxation, non-Catholic schools increased due to a post-war population boom, and European immigrants changed the proportion of ethnicity, each wanting schools to represent their values. However, the journey to forming a coalition of independent schools was far from harmonious. At the time of British Columbia joining Confederation, ‘private’ or ‘separate’ schools, as they were known, were denied any public funding because the prevailing view in the government of the day was that public funds were for public schools only. In many cases, independent schools were at risk of closing due to lack of money. The Catholic schools were most persistent in trying to correct this perceived injustice through repeated lobbying efforts to remove property taxes from schools and secure government funding for the spiraling cost of school education. Other groups, such as the British prep schools, also appealed to the government for legal recognition and financial relief, but to no avail. Also, the relationship between non-public schools was characterized by rivalry rather than cooperation (Cunningham, 2002, p. 19) [17], with the result that eight decades of protest availed the independent schools virtually nothing for their efforts.
In 1872, Bishop Charles Seghers led the Catholics in a public protest in Victoria against the new Public School Act, calling for public funding of Catholic schools (Cunningham, 2002, p. 20) [17]. He was seeking tax exemptions for Catholic parents who were paying for public schools as well as their own Catholic schools through school fees. His protests were ignored.

In 1875, the Vatican Congregation of the Propaganda Fide sent notice to all the bishops in the United States outlining the dangers of sending Catholic children to public schools. This circular was instrumental in moving Bishop Seghers to petition Premier A.C. Elliott of British Columbia again for an end to funding of public schools alone, and support for sectarian schools as well. Once again, the requests were ignored, even though there were already well-established, government approved separate school systems in eastern Canada. Unlike the rest of Canada, British Columbia was a struggling colonial outpost at the time it joined Confederation in 1871. The non-aboriginal population was just 12,000 people, with more than one third of these living in Victoria. The cost of governing such a large territory caused the province to fall into heavy debt. As a result, the government could hardly afford to maintain its own public schools, let alone subsidize additional independent schools, particularly since the public school populations burgeoned following the Free Public School Act in 1873. By 1878, public schools had increased in number from fourteen to forty-five, and the number of students attending them had quadrupled from 500 to 2000 (Cunningham, 2002, p. 23) [17].

From the very inception of education in British Columbia, the issue of school funding was endemic to both public and separate schools. The public schools were struggling due to the high cost of operating the colony
of British Columbia, and the separate schools were struggling to secure sufficient funds from corporations and parents, and to get support from the governing authority. Both public and separate schools were struggling to survive with the limited funding that they were receiving and both were in need of some form of financial assistance.

At the turn of the twentieth century, an influx of immigrants from Britain changed the nature of schools in British Columbia. At least 25,000 middle and upper class Britons arrived with the desire to recreate familiar class-based institutions such as they had had in the old country. As a result, one hundred independent girls’ and boys’ schools sprang up, with a distinct British flavour of cricket teams, blazer-and-tie uniforms, and dormitories for boarding students. These British-style schools were unique in that they provided an elite socio-economic status for their students, and also insisted on high academic standards in an educational system designed to produce leaders. Cunningham [17] reports that these schools dropped some of their British flavour but maintained their academic focus, in order to cater to those wanting a higher expression of socio-economic status in British Columbia. There were now two distinct groups of independent schools established in British Columbia: the Catholic schools and the British-style prep schools.

The issue of double taxation, namely paying taxes for public schools as well as paying property taxes on private schools when public schools were exempt, became an issue during the Depression years. The Catholics, led by “Iron Duke” Archbishop William Mark Duke, decided that province-wide action was necessary. The Catholic schools drafted a petition which they
said represented 85,000 Catholics or 40,000 votes. They had decided to cast their ballots in the next election based on funding for independent schools. The independent university prep schools faced similar tax discrimination, though their students were generally from well-to-do families. However, the Depression had caused their enrolment to drop and so the Private Schools Association (PSA), later to be known as the Independent Schools Association (ISA), decided to join the Catholics “to advance claims for freedom from the education portion of taxation” (Victoria Daily Times, 1932, p. 13) [79]. The PSA indicated that they represented 4.5% of the province’s students and, at no profit to themselves, were saving the province a substantial amount of money. This petition was also rejected by the government.

When the petition was rejected, the Catholics blamed the PSA because no one could possibly accuse a Catholic school of being in the profit-making business. They felt that their petition might have been successful without the PSA, and also saw themselves as in much greater need of financial help than the PSA, which catered to the wealthy.

Conversely, the PSA felt that their cause was hampered by their association with the Catholics. Although the government had made no provision for independent schools in legislation, there was some regulation of their operations, such as control over boarding school provisions. Since no Private Schools existed under provincial legislation, the supervision of boarding schools came under the control of the Health Ministry, whose rooming house guidelines prohibited boarding schools. Education Minister H.C.T. Perry was prepared to give legal recognition to independent boarding schools, but withdrew the bill because of government’s reluctance to give legal recogni-
tion to “denominational schools.” Some blamed the PSA’s association with
the Catholics for failure to get recognition (Cunningham, 2002, p. 33) [17].
An additional concern for the PSA was the possibility that government fund-
ing would be accompanied by governmental interference in their educational
policies.

This first informal alliance between the Catholic schools and the univer-
sity prep schools resulted in each group blaming the other for their failure to
achieve taxation relief from the government. What might have led to inde-
pendent school recognition and the potential of relief from property taxation
of schools, actually accomplished nothing and moved the two groups away
from further collaboration. Yet, just twenty years later, these same two
groups would combine with numerous other independent schools to form the
Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia (FISA)
and succeed in obtaining government recognition and funding. What fac-
tors changed in the intervening time? Were distinct group characteristics
removed from the discussion? Had the political context and the relation-
ship between public and independent schools become more inclusive? This
study will analyze how a successful working relationship among these var-
ious groups was achieved, and how government endorsement and funding
was accomplished in subsequent periods.

The early years were also characterized by political strategies that em-
ployed protests and other forms of confrontation. After the Second World
War, the cost of education had increased significantly for both public and
independent schools. At the same time, the post-war population boom
brought ethnic diversity to the province, from places where the democratic
right to educate their children in schools that upheld their own religious and cultural traditions was taken for granted. The Dutch, in particular, brought with them a belief in the state’s obligation to support such schools financially.

In 1946, the British Columbia government responded to the 1945 Cameron Report on Education by consolidating 650 public school districts to 74. This report, prepared by one man, was designed to improve the quality of education across the province and to find efficiencies in operating the public school system. Large rural areas were merged with urban centers where larger schools could offer more sophisticated programs. The new school districts often linked several townships that had formerly operated their own schools. This merger resulted in many small rural schools being closed and their students sent to larger, better-equipped schools with expanded curricula in science and technical training. The financial result of this consolidation and sophistication was a tripling of per pupil cost of public education from $100.27 in 1940 to $331.65 in 1950 (Cunningham, 2002, p. 37) [17]. To remain relevant, many independent schools tried to emulate the government model of broadening the curriculum, resulting in lower staff salaries, inadequately stocked libraries, inferior facilities, and the need to organize fund-raising projects to support programs. The university prep schools were hit hardest by these changes. Their numbers decreased from over one hundred schools to just over three dozen by the 1950s. Further attrition left only nineteen prep schools operating by 1960 (Barman, 1991, p. 14) [8]. Independent schools were being priced out of the market, due to the economic pressures exerted by improvements to the public education system in
On the other hand, consolidation of public education also produced the unintended effect of reducing the involvement of parents in the education of their children. Parents had been very involved in the “Little Red Schoolhouse” and teachers were part of the community. Now, there was a professional climate in public schools that seemed to distance parents from the classroom. They began to look outside the public system for schools that welcomed their involvement and provided their children with an education consistent with their faith values. Catholic schools proliferated throughout the province, increasing to more than sixty by the mid-1960s. Their enrolment grew from 5,000 students in the mid-1950s to 14,000 in the mid-1970s (Cunningham, 2002, p. 40) [17]. Due to the increased cost of education, however, increased growth did not lead to prosperity for these schools. Salaries for teachers were very low, and in many cases, schools were staffed by religious brothers and sisters with no expectation of financial gain.

The Catholics had been fighting the government unsuccessfully over the “double tax” being paid by citizens whose children were attending independent schools. These people were required to pay taxes for public education, as well as municipal property taxes on their independent schools. At the same time, the leadership was concerned that, should financial support be given, they would relinquish control over their schools to the government. This conflict between the crippling cost of education and the desire to retain autonomy led to a desperate move to draw the attention of the government to the inequity of the taxation system.

Two Catholic schools in Maillardville, Our Lady of Lourdes and Our
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

Lady of Fatima, closed their doors for a year and a half from April 2, 1951 to September 1952, forcing 840 students into the public system. This instantly doubled the public school population (Cunningham, 2002, p. 45) [17]. The government still did not change its position; public funds were for public schools only. The Catholic schools followed this move by refusing to pay their school property taxes, and in the end, the government relented by exempting independent schools from paying property taxes. This victory, however, proved costly. Amendment of the Municipal Act in 1957 caused division in the ranks of all political parties in the government who felt “pressured” to act on behalf of independent schools, and general feeling held that the Catholic schools were to blame. So, while a tax concession was won, sympathy for independent schools, and particularly Catholic schools, suffered.

The struggle for existence experienced by independent schools during these decades led to a renewed quest by some independent school leaders to form a common front to convince government that recognition and funding of independent schools was justified. The first move in this mission occurred on October 17, 1964, when Ned Larsen, headmaster of Shawnigan Lake School, called a meeting of independent school leaders to propose organizing all non-public schools in BC (Cunningham, 2002, p. 59) [17].

The first representatives of BC independent schools agreed that, “providing each of our schools could maintain its independence, there could be definite value in the formation of an affiliation among our schools which could promote common purposes” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 61) [17]. The points of common concern were identified as certain tax equity provisions for parents of independent school students, recognition by the Minister of Education of
teaching time in independent schools, opportunity for independent school teachers to join the BC Teachers’ Pension Scheme, representation on the provincial curriculum committee, and access to educational aids reserved at present for public schools. This first meeting led to the drafting of a constitution which was adopted on January 19, 1966, as the official organizational document for the establishment of FISA in British Columbia.

A significant decision by the Catholic schools, which represented over 70% of the independent school student enrolment in BC at that time, was to forgo its dominant role and agree to representation on the FISA Board in proportion to the number of associations in FISA rather than student enrolment in each association. This gave the Catholics 25% of the Board seats, even though they represented the majority of the independent student enrolment in the province. This generosity of spirit was commended by all groups and became a significant building block for the trust that grew between the diverse groups within FISA.

The diversity of the associations that formed FISA was also protected by the “disassociation clause” which read, “Any association or the group of Associate Members shall have the right to dissociate itself from specific decisions or actions of the Federation” (FISA Constitution, 1995, Part 15) [35]. There have been two amendments to the FISA constitution; one in March, 1995 and the second in April, 2003. The disassociation clause has not been altered since it was established in 1966.

FISA considered it important to grant associations the right to disassociate if the policy recommendations of the Board were in conflict with the values of a particular group. The choice of wording is also interesting in
that a group could “disassociate” from a decision and yet remain a part of the Federation. This enabled one or more associations to opt out of any decision that might be endorsed by the majority of the FISA membership. Ironically, this never happened over ideological issues. As far as I have been able to ascertain, this clause has been invoked only one time by any group or association in the 40 year history of FISA, when the Society of Christian Schools of British Columbia (SCSBC) did not wish to participate in the provincially mandated grade 12 exams which the government was requiring of all funded high schools in British Columbia.

FISA struggled during the late 1960s and early 1970s, posting successive deficit budgets. To cover the costs of the Federation’s activities, fees were collected from member schools on a per pupil basis, on the rationale that schools with higher enrollments would receive greater benefits from the concessions that FISA would gain from the government. The fees started at 5 cents per student in 1966, and have risen to their current level of $4.75 per pupil annually in 2009. In the early years, the Catholic bishops provided great financial support when many of the smaller schools were unable to pay, often covering the fees for all FISA schools.

It was the goal of FISA to support independent schools in the province, but the primary objective was to get legal recognition for those schools in the eyes of the public. No mention of funding was made in the constitution, but this intent was implicit in several of the resolutions passed at the founding meeting. While recognition was important to all associations in FISA, funding was still a controversial issue for the ISA schools who were concerned that funding would threaten the independence of independent
schools in BC. Nevertheless, they endorsed the constitution of FISA.

The struggle for FISA in the early years concerned the strategy that they would use to communicate their goals to the government and the public. Some “hawks” on the Board were in favour of processions, flag waving and protests in front of the legislature. The “doves” advocated moderation and diplomacy. After much debate, the FISA Board agreed that “all political action must be kept out of the public domain until all other avenues of approach have been exhausted. It is the considered opinion of the executive that organized press, radio, or television activity is most undesirable at this time” (FISA “Action Progress Report,” Nov 3, 1967) [22]. This position led to a two-tiered approach for FISA, combining political action with a public information campaign. This meant that FISA would engage the public from within the political parties of their choice. Any approach to politicians was to be non-partisan. It also meant that FISA would attempt to inform the public about the value of independent school education without using tactics that could potentially embarrass the government, but rather pursue a slow and steady approach to gaining recognition and the funding that might follow.

One strategy that FISA activated early in its attempts to gain recognition was mobilizing parents who had children in independent schools to inform the public about the value of independent school education. FISA sent constant reminders to parents about the need for letters to the newspapers, educational bodies and politicians. In this way, the Federation ensured that the MLAs heard from their constituents as well as from the FISA organization. In 1977, the government received 10,000 letters in support of legislation
to fund independent schools, far more than the government had received on any other issue, according to Education Minister Dr. Pat McGeer (Cunningham, 2002, p. 110) [17]. This letter writing strategy was repeated in 2000 when the government attempted to reduce the amount of funding to independent schools.

However, the biggest obstacle to the recognition and funding of independent schools was the premier of the province. W.A.C. Bennett was firmly entrenched in the idea that public funds were for public schools. He said, “People have the right to go to private schools if they want to, but public money is to encourage people to go to public schools. Our policy is integration, not segregation, make no mistake about it – we will never stand on the fence on these issues, never” (Province, May 29, 1972, p. 27) [80]. But this unalterable position appeared to be out of step with his party. In a poll across party lines, support for legal recognition was 84% and for financial aid was 66% (FISA polling of 214 candidates in August, 1972) [23], which constituted a dramatic shift in attitude from initial advances to government on funding and recognition of independent schools six years earlier.

In June, 1976, the Education Minister established the Non-Public School Committee to develop a plan for the financial assistance of independent schools. The committee operated on two principles, one stating that freedom of choice in education should be supported financially by the government; and the other maintaining that the province should save independent schools from financial collapse, primarily to spare the public schools from the added burden of absorbing thousands of students due to independent school closures. After considering three possible modes of implementation,
including tuition rebates for parents, extension of services to independent schools, and incentive grants, the third option was eventually refined and legislated as the Independent Schools Support Act. This Act was further refined and introduced as Bill 33 in March, 1977. FISA mobilized the supportive public to write letters to their MLAs and the media in support of the legislation. The government received a few hundred letters opposed to independent school funding, but over 10,000 letters endorsing the plan.

On September 7, 1977, Bill 33 was read for the third time in the House and put to a final vote. It passed by a tally of 25 to 11, with the NDP opposition voting against it. Cunningham (2002) wrote:

It was a momentous occasion: against all odds, employing a strategy that many said was “too slow” and would “never work,” FISA had managed to secure legal recognition and partial public funding for British Columbia’s independent schools. True, it had taken eleven years, but FISA had achieved what the Catholics and the independent university prep schools had been unable to achieve in a century of working alone (p. 210) [17].

Independent schools that met the Ministry’s qualifications for funding were given 30% of the equivalent amount in operating funds given to public schools in the same location.

Funding continued to be a contentious issue for members of FISA. One influential member of FISA, Walter van der Kamp, felt that accepting government funding put the independence of independent schools at risk. Seventh-day Adventist Schools similarly refused to accept funding because
they valued the freedom that they enjoyed without government funding and expectations. Their organization had experienced government take-over of some of their schools in Africa. Some Catholic schools felt that independent schools should receive the same funding as the public schools and were encouraging FISA to advocate for a higher operating grant. The initial committee that developed the terms for the Independent School Support Act had considered funding independent schools at 80% of the public sector. After considerable debate, FISA voted to renew their campaign for a higher percentage of operating grants. After a meeting in 1985, it was generally agreed that a maximum of about 50% funding would be desirable. A commitment was obtained from Premier Van der Zalm prior to the 1986 election, which he upheld by increasing independent school funding from 30% to 35%.

Following the Sullivan Commission in 1987, the government provided a full rewrite of the Independent Schools Support Act, resulting in a revised funding formula for independent schools of 50% for Group 1 schools, whose operating costs are less than those of a public school in the same district; and 35% for Group 2 schools, whose operating costs exceed that of public schools in the same location. The new legislation was called the Independent School Act or Bill 68. (Two other groups were specified: Group 3 schools that did not meet Ministry requirements were funded at 10%, and Group 4 schools that provided education to foreign students received no funding). It was noteworthy that the Catholics, the SCS and the AMG associations were happy to receive 50% funding, but the ISA did not want to receive any more than 35% for fear of increased regulation. Also noteworthy was “the
violent opposition to any independent schools receiving funding, evident a
decade ago, had clearly given way to acceptance of the current situation with
respect to funding” (FISA, Executive Director’s Report, Sept 13, 1989) [45].
This was also demonstrated when the opposition NDP voted in favour of
Bill 68.

It was also at this time that the relationship between the government
and FISA began to change noticeably. Legal recognition of independent
schools was formally incorporated into the School Act, the document that
governs public schools, through an acknowledgement in Section 3 that re-
quires students to enroll in an educational program, and that enrollment
in an independent school would fulfill this requirement. Legal recognition
as well as funding had become the norm, and the FISA organization had
become accepted as the voice for independent schools in British Columbia.
Government and private grants were now routinely given to independent
schools, and FISA representatives were now routinely being asked to serve
on Ministry of Education committees. As the Executive Director stated,
“Agencies are beginning to treat the Independent Schools like any other
entity” (FISA, Executive Director’s Report, Oct 23, 1991) [46].

Cunningham comments on the change in attitude and perception about
independent schools in this way:

Among charges of discrimination, elitism, and government fa-
voritism, independent schools received their fair share of nega-
tive press in the 1980s. By the end of the decade, however, there
was very little reference to the once widely touted saying, “public
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

The rapid acceptance of independent school funding by the public was probably due to a number of factors. Certainly, FISA’s unceasing public relations campaign was key. Also influential was the fact that the worst fears of funding opponents had not come to pass; religious wars had not broken out, there had been no proliferation of schools operated by “kooks,” and the public school system remained intact (p. 245) [17].

The first major challenge to independent school funding came in 1992, when the newly elected NDP government announced the elimination of supplementary special education grants for independent schools. After much discussion and protest from FISA representatives, the government relented partially by continuing to fund only special needs students who required a full-time aide. In effect, a reduction of 1 million dollars was imposed on FISA schools registering special needs students with moderate learning difficulties.

In 2000, the NDP government also changed the way the operating grants were paid to independent schools by excluding certain items from the formula that had formerly been included in the calculation of the independent school grants. Excluded was a 2% salary increase for public school teachers, district administrative costs, additional funding to non-enrolling teachers and teachers-on-call, and additional funding to decrease class sizes in kindergarten to grade three. The average increase for public school students was $227 per pupil, and independent schools should have received 50% or 35%
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

of that amount, but instead their operating grant was reduced by $2.00 per pupil. By removing items from the funding formula, the government had found a way to reduce the funding to independent schools, resulting in a loss of 5 million dollars to independent schools (FISA Briefing Notes, March 28, 2002) [34].

FISA was quick to react to this erosion in funding, perceived as the “thin edge of the wedge” that could jeopardize funding in the future. Independent school communities were mobilized to write letters to their MLAs, the newspapers, and the Minister of Education, as well as to call in to radio talk shows. Twenty thousand letters were sent to the Minister between April and June, 2000! FISA received support from the opposition BC Liberal Party, who called on Premier Dosanjh to “acknowledge his government had broken its word, and immediately withdraw this independent school funding claw-back” (Cunningham, 2002, p. 264) [17]. Newspapers, radio and television editorials also condemned the government for this attack on independent schools. Only the BCTF stood solidly by the government position, suggesting that it was high time that the government cut funding to independent schools and that private schools were taking money that was therefore not available to public schools.

The public saw the argument quite differently. BC Liberal MLA Val Roddick said, “Anyone with half a brain would realize how much pressure they take off the public system. They pay their own capital expenses. It’s a fabulous investment” (Delta Optimist, April 26, 2000, p 1) [81]. Columnists in the Vancouver Sun made similar comments.

Clearly, the struggle for independent school recognition and funding that
took place during the 1970s, when independent schools had to fight for 30% funding, had given way to popular acceptance of independent schools as recognized entities worthy of public support and funding. Thirty years later, political and media support for independent school funding and recognition was strong and without ambivalence, except for opposition from the BCTF, which continues to lobby against government funding for independent schools according to the rationale that public funding should be used exclusively for public schools, a policy position of the BCTF representative assembly.

Kuehn (2006) indicates that public schools are an integral part of democracy. Democracy requires a public space where debate and discussion can inform decision making. This debate is essential in enabling citizens to engage in critical dialogue within that public space. “If we are to achieve the democratic ideal of equity, there must be a commons, and it must be accessible for all to participate effectively” (Kuehn, 2006, p.1) [55]. Kuehn argues that the commons is not a free system, but is paid for through the collective taxation system that is part of a democracy. When the cost of education is shared by all, then it ensures that the ability to pay is not a criterion for the ability to participate. Thus, independent or private education, as the BCTF prefers to identify it, is viewed as contrary to a commons perspective because it fails to provide access to all since tuitions are required in private education.

The BCTF is also opposed to the selective enrolment of special needs students within independent schools, where some schools accept students with special needs and others do not. The organization therefore rejects
the use of taxpayers dollars to fund independent schools. Krieger and Mc-
Murphy (1998) state, “It is unacceptable for a government to starve public
schools which take in and provide services for all students, including those
with special needs while providing public tax dollars to private schools,
which often reject them. The BCTF is opposed to using taxpayer dollars to
fund private schools” (p. 17) [54].

Despite strong lobbying from the BCTF, the government acquiesced to
the public outcry and reinstituted all the items they had eliminated from
the amount on which independent school grants were calculated. The mis-
calculation in the government funding formula was attributed by Premier
Dosanjh to an “error,” and the independent schools received their 5 million
dollars.

In 2004, after several years of discussions with the government, FISA
was granted another funding increase in the form of 100% funding for Spe-
cial Needs students in independent schools. This resulted in special needs
students enrolled in independent schools receiving the same level of support
as special needs students enrolled in public schools. FISA’s rationale for
requesting this level of funding was that these services actually consisted of
health-related costs for special needs students, who deserved to have their
physical and psychological health supported, regardless of where they were
receiving their education. This is the position that the government was al-
ready taking in regard to health care in publicly funded private hospitals
and seniors care homes (FISA Brief, Select Standing Committee, October
10, 2003) [1].

In 2008, FISA was asked by one of its associations if the time was right
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

to approach government for an increase in the operating funding that is currently being provided. Many of the smaller schools in all of the divergent groups within FISA were struggling to pay teachers a competitive salary and provide the facilities and resources needed for a quality educational program. However, FISA was far from united on pursuing a funding increase, since many feared that additional operating grants would result in further government involvement in the governance of independent schools. Others cited the recent increased funding provided for independent schools by the Alberta government, and felt that the time was right to request an increase for BC independent schools (FISA Board Meeting Field Notes, January 16, 2008) [38].

This issue was debated at a strategic planning session with the FISA Board of Directors, and a committee of association members was instructed to draft a position for FISA schools. A full debate was undertaken at a FISA Board retreat at Harrison Hot Springs on January 16, 2008, and a recommendation was adopted. The Harrison recommendation stated that:

- FISA, at this time, will not seek to change the current percentages of the funding formula for Group 1 and Group 2 schools.

- FISA will thoroughly examine the elements that comprise the base, as well as variations of the base between School Districts, on which these percentages are calculated.

- FISA will strike a committee to explore the opportunities to maximize funding and equal access to educational resources and services (FISA Future Directions for Board Meetings, January 16, 2008) [38]
Chapter 2. An Historical Perspective on Independent Schools in British Columbia

In effect, the FISA Directors had decided to maintain the funding levels at the rate that was established in 1989 by the Sullivan Commission, and to pursue other areas of educational and resources support for independent schools, such as access to government bulk purchase plans and similar services to public schools.

2.1 Summary

The first schools in this province were independent schools. They have been present in British Columbia since the 1800s, but they became marginalized for more than a century as a result of the rise of the public school system, beginning in 1872. As new immigrants came to this province, more independent schools sprang up to reflect the pluralistic values of the people of British Columbia, particularly after World War II, when Jewish, Mennonite and Dutch Calvinist schools were started. By the early 1960s, 6% of the student enrollment in BC attended independent schools. Lack of government support for independent schools, and the inability to provide the same educational programs as the public schools due to rising costs, led to the formation of FISA in 1966.

The function of FISA is basically political in nature. The Federation was formed with the express purpose of obtaining some form of equitable funding and recognition for independent schools from the government. That objective was achieved in 1977 with the enactment of the Independent Schools Support Act, funding independent students at 30% of the per pupil operating costs of the local public school districts in which the independent
schools were situated. Consideration was given to dissolving FISA at that point because it had achieved its objective, but the desire to maintain political vigilance has allowed FISA to develop into a credible voice advocating for both independent schools and public education in the province of British Columbia.

FISA’s purpose, as stated in its constitution and bylaws, is to make known to the public and government the rightful place of independent schools as schools of choice within a democratic and pluralistic society (FISA Constitution and By-laws, 2003) [35]. This right to choice has been enshrined in both the School Act and the Independent School Act of 1989, resulting in increased funding levels of 35% and 50%, regular consultation with government and other provincial educational organizations such as the Provincial Education Advisory Council, the BC College of Teachers, and the Board of Examiners. Many would agree that the FISA has achieved significant goals in its tenure as a representative of independent schools and that these objectives were orchestrated by a Board of Directors that would normally not be working together because of its diversity. However, it is clear from the accomplishments of FISA that its strategies of inclusiveness and consensus have been instrumental in its growth to maturity and attainment of the influence that the Federation appears to enjoy today.

In the next chapter, I will explore theoretical frameworks which will contribute to an understanding of the specific realities found in FISA. Research includes theories concerning group membership, formation and operation of interest groups and coalitions, including the dynamics of interaction within non-governmental organizations (NGOs), operation of groups within a so-
cial space, and the effects of organizational diversity on group dynamics. Various aspects of each of these topics will be explored, which, in turn, will raise questions regarding the organizational structure of FISA.
Chapter 3

A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions

The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of unmaking and remaking it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it. (Pierre Bourdieu, 1985) [11]

3.1 Introduction

It is remarkable that the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA) has survived for more than forty years, when its membership is comprised of both religious and non-religious schools advocating a wide range of differing ontological perspectives. The Associate Member Group (AMG) alone includes schools representing First Nations, parochial Christian Churches, Jews, Mennonites, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, and
Sikhs; as well as secular Montessori, Special Education, and Waldorf schools. The other four associations, which represent university preparatory schools (ISA), Catholic schools (CIS), Christian Reformed schools (SCSBC), and evangelical Christian schools (ACSI), while more homogeneous within their individual organizations, also contribute to the overall diversity of FISA.

Each of these groups, with the exception of the Associated Member Group, has developed an identity based on a distinct ideological or pedagogical perspective. Catholic schools unite because they provide an educational perspective consistent with the beliefs and values of the Catholic Church. University prep schools (ISA) unite because they are committed to academic excellence that will prepare the majority of their students for university. Christian Reformed schools integrate a faith perspective into their curriculum that is consistent with the doctrinal position of the Christian Reformed church and its interpretation of the Bible. Each group’s distinct identity differs from that of the other groups, and such diverse organizations would not normally come together under the common umbrella of an inter-organizational coalition such as FISA.

Common logic would argue that such a coalition of secular and faith groups would provide a recipe for conflict, yet the organization has functioned – and indeed thrived – for over forty years as a policy governance body which operates on a principle of consensus-building to represent independent schools in British Columbia. This phenomenon demands an explanation, because the diversity within FISA should lead to conflict instead of consensus. How is it possible that these entities are able to unite as an inter-organizational group? What organizational strategies and policies
have been developed to achieve consensus within this diverse coalition of
independent schools known as FISA?

Although the literature on private school coalitions and alliances is lim-
ited, there is a rich collection of research on coalition and interest group
formation outside of education which illuminates the group dynamics at
work within FISA. Since FISA performs an advocacy role rather than a
governance role, and membership in the FISA is voluntary, its effectiveness
is dependent upon consensus within the group of member schools. Over
92% of the independent schools in BC choose to be members of FISA and
appear to support the overall vision and purpose of the organization, which
implies that FISA is doing an effective job of consensus-building. The re-
mainning 8% represent schools that consciously choose to remain independent
with no form of external association. The focus of this research will be on
FISA’s structure and its development of policies which strengthen coop-
eration between independent school groups whose philosophies encompass
wide diversity, and on how conflict is managed in FISA’s consensus model
of decision-making.

In a review of the literature, I will draw on the conceptualization of
group formation within a social space developed by Bourdieu, with specific
reference to his concept of groups, which he defines as fields within a social
space. These fields develop an identity known as habitus, which represents
the embodiment or determining structure of the field. I will also examine
the role of practice in shaping group identity and solidifying the habitus for
which the group has become known.

While Bourdieu’s work is crucial to an understanding of FISA, I will also
argue that organizational theory explains aspects of the formation and organizational outcomes of this unique coalition of independent school groups, by addressing issues on which Bourdieu is silent. The literature on the formation and operation of interest groups and coalitions, including the dynamics of interaction within non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the effects of diversity on group dynamics comment on aspects of FISA’s functioning. The conclusion will reflect on how this review of the literature relates to building consensus as a social construct in FISA.

3.2 Definition of Terms

FISA consists of a five-member coalition. When referring to one of these member groups, the term “the group” will be used in specific contexts. However, the term “group” will also be used in a general sense to refer to “the field of partners who are both usable, because they are spatially close, and really useful, because they are socially influential, causing each group of agents to tend to devote constant work to maintaining a privileged network of practical relationships” (Bourdieu, 1990) [12]. In other words, a group is referred to as individuals who join together to accomplish certain duties that produce privileges, which, in turn, sustain the group.

Some would argue that the membership of FISA does not consist of diverse groups, since the majority of its members are of Caucasian ethnicity and all of the groups are involved in education. However, many of the challenges society faces today are due, not to ethnicity, but rather to dissimilar religious and values beliefs. Seventy percent of the schools within FISA are
religiously based, and the Directors on the FISA Board represent a similar range of ideological beliefs. “Diversity,” in the context of this study, will confine itself to the philosophical perspective of a particular group of schools as it differs from the philosophical perspectives of other groups; and not pertain to individual gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or other individually determined characteristics. In these terms, if all individuals within FISA had similar worldviews, beliefs, and values, then the group would have zero diversity. However, heterogeneity in values and beliefs exists; thus, FISA can be considered a diverse group, even though all member groups are involved in the professional practice of education.

If we consider diversity as “any attribute people use to tell themselves that another person is different” (Williams and O’Reilly, 1998) [87], then we can conclude from the research that all dimensions of diversity have the potential to stimulate or hinder performance. Much of the current research is based on self-categorization (people define their self-concepts in terms of membership in social groups) and social-identity theory (membership in the group is an emotionally significant aspect of the individual’s self-concept and the collective good takes priority over self-interest) when considering the effects of diversity on group interaction and performance.

Heterogeneous groups often deal with difficult issues that lead to conflict and call on diplomacy and organizational policies to resolve differences. Conflict is defined as “the exertion of pressure in the struggle for or with power,” and can occur in various contexts. This study will refer to three different levels of conflict which occur within the operations of FISA. External conflict occurs between FISA and the provincial government, where discourse
is motivated by FISA’s desire for recognition and funding. Organizational conflict within FISA occurs when there are differences of opinion over goals, objectives, limited resources, or expectations between individuals or member groups. Ideological conflict “is viewed as a mental or spiritual struggle within individuals of the group, consciously or unconsciously, clashing over variances of opposing principles, statements, arguments or the simultaneous functioning of mutually exclusive impulses, desires, or tendencies” (Williams and O’Reilly, 1998) [87].

Finally, “consensus,” in the sociological context of this research, refers to collaborative problem-solving and conflict resolution where a debate has taken place and a solution is unanimously accepted, often after a long period of time for discussion and reflection, rather than the democratic model of majority rule or grudging compromise. Such solutions tend to be deep-rooted enough to stand for some time without the need to revisit the issues. Consensus in the context of FISA denotes the inclusion of input from all the participants in a discussion in order to create a response that reflects an inclusive, thoughtful outcome that has unanimous support within the coalition.

Bourdieu’s works “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups” (1985) [11] and The Logic of Practice (1990) [12] are used in this dissertation to provide a structure from which to review the policy development of FISA. This framework is instructive because it provides a theoretical explanation for how five diverse groups of independent schools are able to collaborate on contentious issues that require consensus. The FISA coalition of four groups, each with its own distinct identity, and a fifth group consisting of
Chapter 3. A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions

a wide range of different religious and pedagogical schools, appears to have functioned effectively for many years.

Bourdieu argues that the social world is represented by a space consisting of many dimensions built on principles of differentiation, and capable of conferring strength and power on people, whom he refers to as agents, within this social space. Agents are defined by their relative positions within the social space in such a way that each of them can occupy only one position in a particular class of contiguous positions, except in thought, at any one time, as shown in Figure 3.1. Agents may be part of several fields in a social space but never simultaneously. A particular social space contains an infinite number of fields proportional to the number of relationships and social structures contained therein.

![Fields within a Social Space](image)

Figure 3.1: Fields Within a Social Space.

Directors are able to represent only themselves as representatives of FISA, even though they are elected to the position from another group. Conversely, when acting for another group, they cannot simultaneously op-
erate as Directors of FISA. These positions that agents occupy within a social space are identified as fields of force, meaning “a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the agents or even to the direct interactions among the agents” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724) [11].

These multi-dimensional spaces, known as social fields, are occupied by agents according to both the amount of capital they possess and the relative weight of the different kinds of assets they possess. Bourdieu (1985) [11] argues that, contrary to Marxist philosophy, agents within a social space can possess various forms of capital. Agents can be defined by the positions they occupy in the different fields through the distribution of powers active within each of them. These forms of capital include economic capital in its various forms, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital, more commonly called prestige, reputation and renown. The extent of capital that agents possess determines the position they hold within a social field, as demonstrated in Figure 3.2.

![Diagram of Forms of Capital Within a Social Field](image)

Figure 3.2: Forms of Capital Within a Social Field.

Within FISA, therefore, Directors hold positions of power that are de-
dependent on the various forms of capital that they bring with them from their independent school group or are able to develop as members of FISA Board. If different agents possess different forms of power, one might expect to see behavioural symptoms of competitiveness or envy, resulting in conflict or disunity. How has FISA been able to balance capital ownership within the organization while maintaining its ability to achieve consensus in regard to political action?

For instance, the Catholic schools (CIS) represent the largest portion of independent school enrolment and, presumably, wield considerable influence within their own church and school communities. Since the CIS possesses the greatest proportion of economic capital within the FISA by virtue of annual per student fees, how the Directors from the Catholic schools exercise their influence might have some bearing on how FISA achieves and maintains consensus. Do the other groups grant CIS leadership privileges because of their numerical majority? Do CIS Directors expect or demand privileges? A careful review of the organizational structure and operation of FISA would determine the nature of the capital evident and the degree of influence that the various types of capital have on policy development and consensus-building within the organization.

Bourdieu also suggests that knowing which space agents occupy within a social field can determine how agents will behave towards one another within the group. “A set of agents who occupy similar positions…, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances” (Bourdieu, 1985,
What begins to emerge are two different hypotheses on the nature of groups: an organizational perspective which examines the characteristics of members within FISA, and a spatial or Bourdieuan perspective which emphasizes the relative distances between members of FISA and other groups in a social space. If one considers the FISA Directors in relation to their connectedness to other groups, such as the BCTF, then the members of FISA would appear to be much closer to each other than their diversity, as seen from an organizational perspective, would suggest. Therefore, the claim of diversity might be challenged as being relatively insignificant. However, if one considers the individual characteristics of FISA members from an organizational perspective, that is, by defining diversity in terms of their individual characteristics in relation to one another, then significant differences emerge. These two hypotheses embody important differences in understanding the dynamics at work in groups, both from an organizational and from a spatial perspective. One theory looks at differences among members within the group, while the other considers differences between members in the organization and other agents spread across a social space.

### 3.3 Spatial Relationships Within Groups

Bourdieu would argue that the independent schools have consciously joined together to support the purposes and policy development of FISA because they all have similar vested interests in the objectives of the organization, which is promoting the purposes and policy development of independent
schools. Recognition and funding have been primary goals of FISA since its inception. At the same time, both of these objectives continue to be challenged by opponents such as the BCTF and its supporters, who continually urge government to stop funding independent schools. The BCSTA (British Columbia School Trustees Association) recently added its voice to the dissenters by passing a motion to discontinue funding for independent schools (March, 2007). Does external opposition to funding and recognition provide the adhesive that holds FISA together, and are the effects of diversity minimized within the organization when conflict is applied from an external source? Does external threat unify a diverse group?

In addition to the space of positions in a social field, there also exists an objective space determined by compatibilities and incompatibilities. Agents are able to change their positions within a field by applying effort through work or time. Bourdieu argues that such space relationships are as real as geographical spaces, and are altered by agents raising themselves over others through climbing, knowledge, acquiring better marks, or skill, that is by accumulating different forms of capital. Hence, one would expect to see Directors consciously attempting to alter their positions by getting elected to the Executive Board or through nomination to various policy committees initiated by the Board of Directors. If this is the practice within FISA, there should be evidence of conflict between Directors vying for the same privilege. Does this, in fact, occur and if so, how is consensus achieved in a context of organizational competition? Groupings within fields tend to occur between agents that are closer in social space and belong to a more restricted and homogeneously constructed class, but coalitions between more dissimilar
agents is also possible. For example, it would be possible to mobilize a set of agents consisting of workers and bosses in a situation of international crisis, but it would likely not be possible to mobilize the same group for purposes of economic benefit, such as establishing a Board of Trade for workers and employers. “Groupings grounded in the structure of the space constructed in terms of capital distribution are more likely to be stable and durable, while other forms of groupings are always threatened by the splits and oppositions linked to distances in social space” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 726) [11]. If there are economic reasons for agents to form an alliance, then differences within the group have less impact on group effectiveness. Therefore, if one of the purposes of FISA is to ensure funding for independent schools, then Directors may be more willing to tolerate group diversity in order to achieve the economic purposes of the organization.

Marx makes a distinction between a “class-in-itself,” which he defines as the objective conditions that differentiate one set of agents from another, and a “class-for-itself,” which is based on subjective factors that allow movement of agents from one field to another. Such movement is based on a logic that is either totally determinist or totally voluntarist. In the former, the movement is seen as logical and mechanical, but in the latter, movement is seen as an “awakening of consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 727) [11], which develops as a result of a political action by a group in order to achieve its objectives. In considering these two differing concepts, Bourdieu attempts to develop an explanation between a deterministic structural explanation for group formation as opposed to a voluntaristic perspective based on choice. From a policy perspective, the organizational objectives of FISA appear to
be logical and mechanical; yet none of the independent school associations are forced to be part of FISA. Membership is voluntary.

This is an important distinction when considering the workings of FISA as a coalition of diverse groups. It has been argued that diversity tends to challenge consensus within groups (Mullen and Copper, 1994; Ancona and Caldwell, 1992) [4, 63], but Bourdieu would suggest that within volunteer groups, such as the FISA, one might observe a conscious discourse that would facilitate discussion of those issues around which the groups could agree or achieve consensus, while limiting discourse on those that might challenge the group’s ability to achieve consensus. By directly or indirectly regulating the discourse within FISA to a narrow focus such as government relations, it is more likely that consensus will be achieved among the different groups within FISA, and in so doing, provide a sustainable framework of consensus-building within a voluntaristic coalition.

3.4 Symbolic Structuring of Groups

In making sense of the world, Weber (1947; cited in Bourdieu, 1985) [85] suggests that the concept of Staende (pronounced Shten-dae) is instructive when considering social differences, in that socially known and recognized differences between groups exist only for agents capable of both perceiving differences and recognizing them as significant or interesting. Thus, groups within a social space operate on a symbolic system organized according to a logic of difference which delineates significant distinctions between groups or agents. Weber’s concept of Staende can be defined as life-styles of various
groups within the social system. This distinction between groups is the symbolic capital referred to earlier, where agents have internalized a certain category of Staende, so that it is known and recognized as self-evident. How would symbolic capital be used to create a system of distinction within FISA?

Part of the symbolic struggle over legitimacy involves naming or objectifying the qualifications of the group as a legitimate entity to serve the educational needs of the community. Bourdieu identifies two extremes when granting legitimacy to the group: that of an idios logos, or insult, where the individual tries to impose his or her point of view on society at the risk of reciprocity; or an official nomination, where an act of symbolic imposition is provided by a delegated authority such as the State, which carries with it the strength of consensus and common sense. While both can result in recognition, the latter is more likely to provide an entitlement that is likely to be sustained over time.

The official nomination, or title, provides a social perception which converts symbolic capital into legal or institutionalized legitimacy, securing all sorts of symbolic profit beyond simply financial benefits, reduced taxation, or social benefits. Title also provides rewards that will be given despite changes in the work and its relative value. Once a title becomes institutionalized, the value resides in the title and is no longer dependent upon the quality of the work. In other words, the bearer of the title no longer has to justify the entitlement of the financial benefits that come with institutional legitimacy. This is an important question regarding the status of independent schools with the British Columbia government. If FISA is able
to establish legitimacy with the province, funding becomes an entitlement, and the necessity of proving that independent schools deserve public funding because they are contributing to the good of society becomes unnecessary. Once the people of British Columbia accept the legitimacy of public funding for independent schools based on a proven track record, then funding may become an entitlement for independent schools just as it currently exists for public schools. Since the debate over independent school funding continues, are the members of FISA not more strongly motivated towards consensus-building due to the insecurity over public funding for independent schools?

The social space is a multi-dimensional space consisting of relatively autonomous open fields. Within each of these fields, the dominant agents are constantly engaged in struggles of different forms involving all types of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. A feature of this struggle between the dominant and the dominated is the opportunity to form coalitions which can be lasting if they are based on what Bourdieu calls a “conscious misunderstanding.” Coalitions between two or more diverse fields develop a “conscious misunderstanding” or a constructed discourse that consciously restricts conversation to issues that emphasize coalition unity and not individual field uniqueness. Marx refers to this process as the “awakening of consciousness.”

Conscious misunderstandings are those attributes within individual fields that are unique to a single group and would not be accepted by other fields if imposed on them. Of the five distinct groups within FISA, there are philosophical and faith-based values in some groups that may not be ac-
cepted by other groups. Non-denominational schools may support same-sex relationships, whereas most faith-based schools might consider same-sex relationships unacceptable. Groups would recognize and respect the right of one group to hold a value that is different from other groups, and the coalition would exercise a “conscious misunderstanding” in keeping divisive issues from entering the discourse. Therefore, homology of group, that is, having a common relationship or position, can be achieved when the constructed discourse builds on issues that the groups have in common, or on which they can achieve consensus. By restricting the discourse to issues of agreement and avoiding dialogue on issues that could lead to conflict and division, coalitions can be sustained despite diversity within the membership.

This concept of “conscious misunderstanding” appears to be central in understanding how FISA is able to develop a common position on issues important to independent schools. If the five groups that form FISA are able to avoid dialogue on issues that accentuate group differences, then the potential for consensus appears much stronger. However, with 70% of the schools within FISA representing some religious conviction, there is a strong likelihood that differences in world view and lifestyle would challenge the organization’s ability to achieve consensus on certain issues, especially those related to ontological perspectives. Therefore, based on the past history of consensus within the various groups of FISA, the organizational policies must provide a framework for dealing with group or member conflict. The “conscious misunderstanding” within FISA appears to be embedded in a socially constructed model for acknowledging differences and diversity and how to deal with them. Two questions emerge in this regard: Has FISA
developed policy and practices that limit dialogue to issues on which the Board can achieve agreement? How is this implemented in practice? Bourdieu suggests that sustainable coalitions are those that keep their ontological perspectives outside of the general discourse of the coalition, as shown in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Diverse Fields are Able to Build Consensus by Consciously Avoiding Conflict.

Bourdieu provides a useful conceptual framework with which to analyze the organizational structure of FISA. Within the five groups that comprise FISA, what are the factors that sustain the coalition? How do the inter-organizational entities within FISA affect the ability of the coalition to achieve consensus on policy issues? Does the status of individual Directors influence the ability of the organization to achieve its purposes? What policies and practices have been established to attract 92% of the province’s independent schools to FISA when membership is voluntary? Has FISA consciously developed a representation of itself that is “learned” by the Directors and that limits discourse to issues of agreement, instead of accentuating differences? Are Directors “equal” in terms of the forms of capital they bring to their organizational positions? These are questions that merit
further investigation as they may lead to an understanding of how consensus may be achieved within diversity through a socially constructed framework such as that which appears to be successful in FISA.

### 3.5 The Relationship Between Habitus and Field in Practice

An agent’s perception of the social world is a reflection of the agent’s representation of the social world and the way in which he constructs the social space. Bourdieu suggests that it is by means of the work of representation that agents constantly impose their view of the world or their view of their position in the world, commonly referred to as their social identity. This is not a clearly defined process, because representation is developed over time and, as a result, is subject to variations in meaning.

This element of play, of uncertainty, is what provides a basis for the plurality of the world views, itself linked to the plurality of the points of view, and to all the symbolic struggles for the power to produce and impose the legitimate world-view and, more precisely, to all the cognitive “filling-in” strategies that produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going beyond the directly visible attributes by reference to the future or the past (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 728) [11].

It is through our experience in the social world and through the act of constructing meaning in our practice that we engage in the process of
making sense of our place in the world. We acquire an embodied knowledge of who we are in relation to fields we occupy within a social space. Bourdieu refers to this self-perception as “habitus.”

This concept of habitus is foundational to Bourdieu’s theory of social space. His focus on practice and habitus suggests that they are neither objectively determined nor products of free will. Habitus is a cultural structure that exists in people’s bodies and minds. Fields are sets of agent relations in the world. Through practice, fields condition habitus and habitus informs fields. Practices mediate between the inside and outside; however, habitus are conditioned structures which cannot be directly observed.

The habitus is the principle of a selective perception of the indices tending to confirm and reinforce it rather than transform it, a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical to or homologous with the (past) conditions of its production; it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world, the only one it can ever know (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64) [12].

Habitus is a determining structure that serves as a compass for the individual and organization through the embodied knowledge that confirms its existence.

The homogenizing of group habitus results from similar conditions of existence in what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious reference to a norm. “The practices of members
of the same group or class are always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish because by following his or her own intuitions, each agree with the other” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 59) [12]. Each agent develops similar behaviours to the other by expressing with one voice the embodiment of the group. Personal style, which is a means of identifying individual agency, does not deviate in relation to the style and period of the class, resulting in conformity to the common “manner” of the group.

Habitus enables a group to maintain its coherence through conscious or unconscious avoidance of information that could be harmful to group cohesion. As suggested earlier, the “conscious misunderstanding” of group discourse becomes a characteristic of the habitus and group sustainability and stability. “It is the most paradoxical property of the habitus, the unchosen principle of all ‘choices,’ that yields the solution to the paradox of the information needed in order to avoid information” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 61) [12]. Just as people tend to talk to other people who are likely to share the same opinion on issues, so does the systematic choice of group habitus tend to protect itself from crisis and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as preadapted as possible, thereby reinforcing itself in ways that are most favourable to itself.

In the context of this research, the emergence of an organizational habitus may provide an explanation for the stability that FISA has enjoyed for four decades. If the organization is successful in three critical aspects of representation, this would explain its cohesion and unity. First, the groups that form a part of FISA are themselves a representation of their own determining structure or habitus. Second, within a voluntary framework, there
must be some means by which these determining structures are reinforced through the routines and practices within FISA. The university prep schools bring a habitus that is different from the evangelical schools of ACSI, who structure their habitus on values such as integrating faith with the British Columbia curriculum. The Catholic schools and Christian Reformed schools each provide further differences, yet FISA provides policy structures that appear to be supported by all the member groups. Third, FISA needs to avoid information that could be harmful to its own purposes or the purposes of any of its member groups. Five distinct groups, each with its own determining structure, are forming a coalition that must develop a common structure acceptable to each of the distinct groups; and in so doing, must develop policies that avoid alienating any of the independent schools of the Federation. These socially constructed policies form the habitus of what other agencies come to understand as FISA. They serve two purposes, bringing consensus within the groups that form FISA, and shaping its external representation. Understanding the nature of habitus and its impact on organizational and intra-organizational policy could provide a partial explanation for the unity evident within FISA. What socially constructed adaptations has FISA made to legitimize the habitus of the various groups within FISA, while at the same time preserving its own?

Within coalitions, one would expect to see agents reinforcing the policies of the organization collectively and individually and thus, consciously or unconsciously, defining habitus. Also present would be the “choice” to avoid those issues that could be divisive to the favorable functioning of the group. A type of self-regulating mechanism would allow new agents to “learn” the
strategic intention of the group through the conditions that had previously been consciously or unconsciously developed in the habits governing the group. This is the purpose of practice within groups.

In order to observe the real conditions in which practice is exercised, one must examine the group actions and goals and the means used to achieve them. This requires that the rites and rituals of practice must be examined for their raison d’etre to better understand the relationships between the various types of capital that influence a field and the symbolic practices employed to fulfill their function. In other words, an analysis of a field or group of fields, otherwise known as a coalition, requires a careful review of both the technical aspects of practice, that is, the observable functions in which the field is engaged; and the ritual or symbolic practices that relate to issues of perception and operational sustainability.

Bachelard (1969) refers to the principle of “mythopoetic practice,” which can reveal the duality of technical and symbolic construction underlying the unity of an object or field. One has to move from ergon to energeia, from objects or actions to the principles of their production, or, more precisely, from the fait accompli and dead letter of already effected analogy or metaphor that objectivist hermeneutics considers, to analogical practice understood as a transfer of schemes that the habitus performs on the basis of acquired equivalences, facilitating the substitutability of one reaction for another and enabling the agent to master all problems in a similar form that may arise in new situations,
by a kind of practical generalization (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 94) [12].

We must reconstruct the socially constituted system of cognitive and evaluative structures that reflect our perception of the world and our actions in the world. If rituals and representations are present, such representations function in the practical state without explanation and are therefore outside the control of logic. Yet, they are part of the habitus of the group and need to be understood in order to fully comprehend the structural efficacy of groups within a social system. What are the rituals and representations present within the FISA that shape the practice of the organization and are considered essential to representing itself to society and to conducting its affairs with the agencies upon which FISA depends?

This conceptual framework provides a foundation from which to construct an understanding of how consensus is achieved within FISA. Within the social space of independent school education in British Columbia, FISA’s Policy Board represents five separate and distinct fields or groups within the association of independent schools. Each field encompasses a range of diversity that should challenge the ability of the Board to reach consensus in decision-making, and yet, after forty years of organized existence we still see a Board united in its goals. We need to examine the exchange of capital between member groups, and between FISA and its member groups, in order to understand the nature of consensus-building. Bourdieu would suggest that consensus is achieved through the “conscious misunderstanding” that groups exercise within the FISA. Is the diversity of the coalition mitigated by the conscious or unconscious avoidance of issues that could divide the
collaboration that appears to exist? How is this diversity mobilized in ways that facilitate the construction of goals perceived as common to all FISA members? What rhetoric and practices of FISA define its representation or habitus to independent schools, government and other educational agencies?

### 3.6 Understanding NGOs and Networks

FISA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) engaged in the pursuit of funding, recognition and educational policy development. Ward (2005) [84] states that society has experienced a sweeping change in the form of an “NGO revolution,” whereby non-government agencies now affect the policies, delivery of services, and legislative agendas of governments, particularly in northern countries. Some refer to the proliferation of NGOs as a social movement because society has lost confidence in the political process as an effective way to build a civil and just society. Edelman (2005) found that the public surveyed believe that NGOs are the closest organizational form to their own personal social networks and offer more reliable information than leaders, experts, the media, governments and corporations (p. 13) [20]. The public expectation of accountability appears to relate to the direct services that NGOs are providing to various beneficiaries.

NGOs represent the third sector of community action, the first two being government and the business sector. They are seen as a movement that takes the moral high ground in advocating for their cause. They differ from government and business in that their commitment to values appears to be their most important “commodity.” Their existence is dependent entirely
on a social and economic climate that believes in their causes and supports their efforts. Tilly (1979) defines NGOs as a sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support (p. 306) [76]. While they tend to be nonprofit and nongovernmental, they tend to be active in both politics and economics. Their constituencies include interest groups, the media, political parties, and the legislative branch of government, as their key motivation is to change public policy on issues important to their cause. FISA appears to fit this description as it speaks on behalf of independent schools that are less likely to be able to represent themselves, and its purpose is to ensure recognition and public funding for BC’s independent schools. As Tilly (1979) [76] described, FISA operates as a third sector entity within the frame of civic society to provide a political advocacy role for independent schools.

Diani (1992) [19] has suggested that there are three typologies of social movements within NGOs: pragmatic, institutional, and transformationalist. The first, known as a pragmatic approach, builds on a liberal or social democratic outlook and emphasizes formal organization with the purpose of interfacing between state and non-state organizations. A pragmatic approach focuses on the arena of democracy by effecting social change through the shaping of public policy. A second approach follows Marxist traditions and could be labeled institutional. It is characterized by an assumption that the outcomes of movement activism are shaped by deeper social struc-
Chapter 3. A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions

tures, processes and institutions; and consequently, this approach tends to focus primarily on those structures, processes and institutions as sources for change. The third, transformationalist approach takes a more polarized position with a revolutionary challenge or engagement. Transformationists emphasize the emancipatory potential of a coalition by drawing attention to cultural norms, values and lifestyles, seeking to change attitudes and practices within society.

It occurs to me that contextual factors might play a significant role in determining which typology would best describe a group’s actions. Depending upon the time and context, all three typologies could apply. In assessing the context, it is necessary to consider the motivation of the coalition in the context of its advocacy role. And as contextual circumstances enter the discourse, it becomes more difficult to categorize a group as any one of the three typologies identified by Diani, because they are not mutually exclusive. Depending upon its location in the field of power, there may be situations in which FISA would take a pragmatic approach to funding, as was the case when FISA focused its attention on changing public policy on government funding for independent schools. FISA might also consider an institutional approach in advocating for special needs funding through shifts in organizational structures within the Ministries of Health and Education. FISA’s challenge to government funding reductions in 2000 might be considered transformationalist, since it engaged in efforts to polarize public opinion against this policy position of the government. The question, then, moves beyond group identification to determining which approach is used by FISA to achieve its purposes. How does FISA move across the differ-
ent typologies for the benefit of independent schools? Does its response to government depend largely on the power it is able to establish within the political landscape in British Columbia?

Coalitions of interest groups are seen as examples of informal networks of collective action. Agents or groups try to maximize their outcomes by establishing alliances with other agents or groups. However, “in contrast to what happens in social movements, interaction in coalitions does not foster the emergence of collective identities, nor does it imply any sort of continuity beyond the limits of the specific conflictual situation” (Diani, 1992, p. 145) [19]. It is, therefore, of interest that FISA continues to thrive as a coalition of independent schools, when its original objectives of funding and recognition were achieved many years ago. Does FISA deal with conflictual situations within the political context in a pragmatic, institutional, or transformationalist perspective, depending upon its location within the field of power?

3.6.1 Contextual Implications on Diverse Coalitions

I now turn my discussion to the organizational aspects of FISA’s action. Bourdieu provides this research with a useful framework for considering agents in groups within a social space. However, his analysis is spatial, focusing on the relationship of agents within groups, and of groups within a social space. Flyvbjerg (2001) suggests that social science is context-dependent and cannot be understood from a purely context-neutral or spatial perspective. We need to consider both the particular, the context-dependent, and the ideal, the context-independent. “To amputate one side in these pairs
of phenomena into a dualistic ‘either-or’ is to amputate our understanding. Rather than an ‘either-or,’ we should develop a non-dualistic and pluralistic ‘both-and’ ” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 49) [40]. It is context that enables us to understand the behaviour of human nature in social situations, which requires a link to organizational theories. Metaphorically speaking, I will be observing FISA through a pair of bifocal lenses, one from a Bourdieuan spatial perspective and the other from an organizational perspective. The aim is to address the following questions identified in the previous section:

What motivates members of FISA to join and sustain their association over time? Is there an inherent benefit to membership that extends beyond those directly serving on the FISA Board, or is FISA simply a struggle over ideological principles involving the right to choose an education consistent with one’s values and the responsibility of the state to recognize and fund independent school education?

### 3.7 The Effects of Diversity on Groups

Research on the effects of individual diversity on group performance indicates that, while some kinds of diversity can hamper group effectiveness, certain aspects of diversity among group members can actually enhance creativity of solutions in problem-solving behaviour.

According to Shaw (1983) [74], increasing the diversity of the group might enhance or hinder performance, depending upon the nature of the attributes being considered. Diverse abilities relevant to the task might enhance performance. Some evidence indicates that heterogeneity of per-
sonality also enhances performance (Hoffman, 1959, cited in Cox, Lobel and McLeod, 1991) [16] argue that diversity enhances value and benefit for group outcomes, even as it creates challenges for group interaction processes. This opinion is based on the work of Hoffman, who suggests that diverse coalitions can expect to have a broader range of knowledge, expertise, and perspectives than homogeneous groups. These factors facilitate more effective group performance when the task is cognitively complex or requires multiple perspectives. Hoffman’s findings indicate that heterogeneous groups produce higher-quality solutions than homogeneous groups for complex decision-making problems. He suggests that conflict is the key mediating variable between heterogeneity and performance. In other words, when a heterogeneous group encounters conflict, it is more likely to produce higher quality solutions than a homogeneous group. Others have adopted Hoffman’s ideas by arguing that diversity enhances problem-solving through the presence of cognitive conflict or divergent viewpoints (Levine and Resnick, 1993) [58]. This has been demonstrated in controlled laboratory settings for diverse groups on a variety of dimensions, including expertise, though one wonders how diversity of groups can be researched with any degree of effectiveness or accuracy in a laboratory setting, when context is an important variable. Theoretically, diversity should enhance decision-making and bring broader perspectives, more creative solutions, and a wider variety of criteria with which to evaluate solutions (Knouse and Chretian, 1996) [53]. Diversity should create greater synergy as dissimilar members interact and build on each others’ ideas.

Conversely, diversity may have a detrimental effect on group perfor-
Chapter 3. A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions

...formance, because group members may perceive that they lack the similarities required for cohesion (Mullen and Copper, 1994) [63]. There may also be a tendency to focus on subgroup identities or to be involved in exclusionary communication that leads to biases within the group. Diversity may create confusing expectations among members, distorting group effectiveness and contributing to differential power distributions and intra-group conflict (Karakowsky and Siegel, 1995) [52]. Pressure may also build along fault lines that may break the coalition into subgroups aligned along diversity fault lines (Lau and Murnighan, 1998) [57].

Ancona and Caldwell (1992) [4] consider tenure diversity, that is, diversity in employee length of service, as having a significant benefit to workgroup processes. Tenure diversity improved a group’s ability to define goals, prioritize work, and develop workable plans. This raises an important feature on diversity of tenure that is applicable to FISA. In the past forty years, there have been only two executive Directors, and many of the current Board members have had a long tenure with the organization, while only a few are recent additions.

A key factor in examining the effects of various types of diversity on a group is the extent of diversity present in the group. That is, what percentage of diversity exists within the group? Some research suggests that diversity should not exceed 20% of the group membership. This proportion has been labeled the psychological minority phenomenon (Davis, 1980) [18] or critical mass (Kanter, 1977) [51]. The percentage of diversity may influence how the individual relates to both the group and the minority subgroup (Brewer, 1995) [13]. Given the diverse background, is the composition
of FISA Board members a factor in dealing in a collaborative manner with conflict situations?

3.7.1 The Effect of Diversity on Coalitions

As seen from the research already cited in this review, it is clear that contradictory results on the effects of diversity in groups have been obtained from different studies. Some studies show positive results within diverse work groups (Horrman, 1959; Jehn et al, 1999) [47, 50], while a larger number of studies demonstrate negative effects of diversity on performance (Ancona and Caldwell, 1992; O’Reilly et al, 1989) [4, 66]. The evidence is contradictory because diversity on one variable seems to interact with a variety of other group and organizational factors (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998) [87].

By isolating specific aspects of group dynamics, scholars are able to identify features of human interaction in a controlled setting. However, these findings often do not correspond to social engagement within a specific context.

Mannix and Neale (2005) [59] have created a classification on group diversity by considering much of the research that has been done on group diversity. Their categories of group diversity are listed in Table 3.1.

A careful review of the categories posed by Mannix and Neale (2005) [59] suggest that social categories are influential in cohesiveness of a diverse coalition. We know that religion will have an impact on the collaboration of FISA, given that 70% of BC’s independent schools are faith-based. The implications of gender, age and ethnicity may also play a role in consensus-building strategies. At the same time, differences in beliefs and values have historically played a role in national conflicts around the world, and thus
could be viewed as an impediment to coalition cohesion. What about the personalities of individuals on the FISA Board, or their length of service to independent school education? Are these stabilizing qualities in consensus-building?

Categorization of diversity traits has proven helpful to researchers in that different types of work-group diversity produces different effects on group processes and outcomes (Jehn, Northcraft and Neale, 1999) [50]. For example, information diversity as measured by differences in education and functional information increase group conflict on point of view for a given task. Conversely, social category diversity, as measured by heterogeneity in sex and age, exhibits a positive effect on group members’ morale. Pelled (1996) [68] argues that as job-related diversity within a work group increases, task-related conflict should also be expected to increase. Pelled’s work was
conducted on work groups and not on voluntary Boards of Directors.

A more prevalent and pessimistic view suggests that diversity fosters social divisions and poor social cohesion, resulting in negative outcomes for the group. Pfeffer (1983) [69] argues that demographic composition of organizations can determine processes such as absenteeism, turnover, communication, innovation and performance. As a result, homogeneity is emphasized as a strong predictor of successful group outcomes.

Diverse groups in people-oriented cultures will cultivate a sense of cooperation and teamwork which will reduce inter-group bias arising from demographic differences (Tsui et al, 2002) [78]. This finding is significant in an analysis of FISA in that the Board’s activities are centered on people-oriented activities, namely education.

### 3.7.2 Leadership in Coalitions

Excellent leadership is an essential ingredient for the long-term success of a coalition. As Truman (1971) has said, “Without a measure of effectiveness either the leadership must change or the group must cease to exist” [77]. Hrebenar and Scott (1990) [48] suggest several attributes of leadership that are important in the success of coalitions, the first of which is that leadership is situational. No universal set of leadership skills can be applied to all organizational situations. A charismatic leader may be effective in sparking a newly emergent movement, but may be dysfunctional as a leader of a more established organization. The literature suggests that relatively few groups in Canada and the USA are led by charismatic leaders.

Successful coalitions consider all individuals in the group as valuable and
view their contributions as essential to the well-being of the organization. El Ansari and Phillips (2001) [5] confirm that when coalitions are not able to deliver on their promises to members in terms of information sharing, access to resources, participation in decision making, receiving recognition, or experiencing a sense of accomplishment, then the members become dissatisfied and conflicts arise. Successful coalitions feature a shared social vision and mission among their members (Butterfoss, 2004) [15]. They also have a strong infrastructure that empowers their leadership and provides effective management, encourages diverse participation and builds collaborative networks within and outside of the organization (El Ansari and Phillips, 2001) [5]. This requires that members give up some of their own individual autonomy and yield their own goals to the coalition (Provan et al, 2004) [70]. Coalition leadership is also instrumental in securing community support through positive relationships (Butterfoss, 2004) [15].

The studies discussed above have several implications for the case under consideration. FISA consists of approximately 285 independent schools represented by a Board of eighteen Directors. Olson’s (1974) [65] rational action theory might suggest that the coalition is functioning due to the collective benefits that membership brings. Ladd and Hadley (1975) [56] suggest that affluence may be a factor. Truman (1971) [77] postulates that FISA may be drawn by policy, economic and social objectives that impact public policy. The question of whether the FISA Board is serving its own interests or the general public also needs further discussion. Therefore, how would one expect the differing characteristics of Board members within FISA to affect collaboration within the group? Is it possible that both FISA’s apparent in-
ternal cohesiveness and its effectiveness in presenting compelling arguments for its requests to government lie in the multiple viewpoints that come from Directors around the FISA table, to surround and bombard any given issue from every conceivable angle? Or, conversely, to what extent do the sources of conflict in a work group or a voluntary body appear to be influenced by diversity characteristics similar to those observed by Mannix and Neale?

Again, I draw attention to the need to consider diverse group interaction within the context of its environment or immediate surroundings. Clinical studies of group dynamics are instructive in understanding the socially constructed practices of group interaction, but the effects of context are significant in shaping individual and group behaviour. We must be able to bring our practical knowledge to bear on our understanding of group dynamics. Jarvis (1998) suggests that the knowledge of practice is a “combination of process knowledge and content knowledge, which includes relevant knowledge of the academic discipline that underlies practice” (p. 46) [49]. Our best understanding of groups is likely to be achieved when we combine the knowledge of research and practice into a meaningful study of the specific.

This case study seeks to examine the organizational strategies and policies of FISA which enable this non-governmental, voluntary coalition of independent schools in British Columbia to achieve consensus in its policies and practices. After a review of the literature and a preliminary review of the data collected, I recognized the need for a conceptual paradigm with which to review, in particular, the interview data that had been collected. In order to interpret the rich amount of data that has been collected in this research, I have drawn on Jarvis’ (1998) [49] analysis of the nature of
practical knowledge. He provides some insight into the role of a practitioner-researcher operating within his or her practice. This is significant, as I am both researching the dynamics of organizational structure within the diversity of FISA and serving as a Director of the FISA Board. Some might argue that such a close relationship might lead to bias on the part of the researcher, but Jarvis suggests that the role of a practitioner-researcher enables him or her to acquire more practical knowledge and more skill. “Practice is both a site and an opportunity for learning; a reflective practice is a necessary approach to learning how to become an expert practitioner. The results of reflection can then be used in planning for future action – what management consultants call ‘action planning’” (Jarvis, 1998, p. 70) [49]. It is from this perspective that I approach the analysis of this research, using reflective practice to examine the functions of FISA in the hope of understanding its practices and using this knowledge to support the future direction of the organization. This is what Schön (1983) refers to as “research on the process of reflection in action” (Jarvis, 1998, p. 71) [49]. It seeks to understand the practices of FISA with the possibility of the Directors, as practitioners, considering strategies for restructuring the organization if the need arises.

Jarvis suggests that a practitioner’s knowledge is based on four distinct types of knowledge: beliefs and values, tacit knowledge, process knowledge and content knowledge. Beliefs and values define the ideological values that the researcher holds, based on deeply held values that define his character. Tacit knowledge is learned from experience, either consciously or unconsciously, and is applied because it has proven effective in the past. Tacit knowledge is seen in the matter-of-fact manner in which we act in certain
Chapter 3. A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions

situations without necessarily being able to articulate the reasons for our actions. Bourdieu (1985) [11] has referred to this as our habitus. Process knowledge is experienced through the application of prior learning applied to new situations. It is pragmatic learning that is discovered as we determine what works for us. Content knowledge is information acquired from a variety of sources, and represents the work of others that we adopt as our own through study, memorization and instruction.

While this paradigm is helpful in considering the nature of practical knowledge, I find it limiting when understanding the working relationship of volunteer organizations as they interact with their environment. Jarvis’s process learning provides some insight but does not fully engage the organization with the external variables that affect it. Argyris (1999) elaborates on this concept by suggesting that organizations themselves “learn” when the individuals or agents interact with one another both within and outside of the group and they are positioning themselves as representatives “on behalf of the organization” (p 9) [6]. What does this mean within the context of FISA, particularly in the context of intra-organizational diversity, where the coalition consistently represents itself to government on issues of funding and independent school policy? How is consensus constructed?

I have identified five facets which I believe are instrumental in defining how and why organizations such as NGOs collaborate in achieving their goals. The goal of consensus cannot be achieved through one or two strategies but must reflect multi-faceted aspects of group dynamics. These facets include beliefs and values, personal identities, group knowledge, external variables and tacit learning. I will argue that the way in which these five
facets are positioned within the organization will determine the degree to
which the organization will function effectively. If any one of these elements
comes in conflict with the purpose, or raison d’etre, of the organization, then
the organization will experience considerable dysfunction or dissolution un-
less it can reposition all five facets. Figure 3.4 provides an illustration of the
relationships among the five facets.

This multi-faceted model represents the tensions that exist within the
organization in achieving its raison d’etre. In the context of this research,
the raison d’etre is identified as the political action initiated by FISA to-
wards achieving its stated purposes. Remove any one of these facets and
the organization no longer retains its original identity. Take the nucleus,
or purpose for existence, away and all that will be left is a completely dys-
functional entity which must either redefine itself or dissolve into history.
Each segment interlocks with all the others, and each helps define the oth-
ers within the organization. How do these facets allow an organization to
Chapter 3. A Conceptual Framework and Literature Review on Groups and Coalitions

manage its purposes?

Intra-organizational group diversity within a coalition heightens the complexity of group dynamics. In many cases, depending upon the nature of the decisions being made, diversity may have a detrimental effect on group performance, because group members may perceive that they lack the similarities required for cohesion (Mullen and Copper, 1994) [63]. Some research, on the other hand, suggests that diversity enhances performance (Cox, Lobel and McLeod, 1991) [16]. In either case, the complexity of the group dynamics tends to generate conflict which must be processed collaboratively in order to achieve consensus.

3.8 Beliefs and Values

People will migrate towards other people who think and act as they do. Part of this ‘liking’ has to do with the deeply ingrained beliefs held by each of us. Many of these values are found in religious beliefs, but environmentalism or materialism (or any other “ism”) can function at the same level of esteem as belief in a deity. Beliefs and values define our words, actions and character, which, in turn, affect our ability to collaborate as a group (Mannix and Neale, 2005) [59]. If conflicting beliefs and values interfere with the purpose of the group, these differences will have an impact on the effectiveness of the group. In a work environment, conflicting individual beliefs and values can be managed by moving a worker to another physical location or by dismissing the individual. In a voluntary organization, dismissal is not a suitable option if sustainability of the group is important, so the group must find a means
of addressing the conflicting values.

### 3.9 Personal Identity

Each individual has a desire to feel valued as a member of a group. We enter into relationships with other people, as in marriage, for example, because we find value in our experiences with that individual. The same is true in an organizational sense. Leaders must identify ways to enable people to feel valued through the contributions they are making to the organization, most commonly through salaries and/or benefits, or the organization must deal with morale issues and potential staff or group attrition. Volunteer organizations experience an even greater challenge when a member feels that his or her personal worth is not being recognized or valued, because it becomes very easy for an individual who perceives him or herself to be undervalued to simply disassociate from the group. If the group has established itself as a credible organization and individual members like to belong simply because belonging confers status, and therefore individuals reap a personal benefit from belonging, this can go a long way toward ensuring the continuation of the organization. Fullan (2001) found that “most people want to be a part of an organization; they want to know the organization’s purpose; they want to make a difference” (p. 52) [42].

There are any number of types of personal identities that may be considered, such as individual identities, national identities, organizational identities and cultural identities. For this study, I will restrict myself to individual and organizational identities. Within the context of FISA, the question of
personal identity is intriguing because of the diversity represented within the coalition. Under normal circumstances, it would be highly unlikely to have a Jewish rabbi and a Mennonite as members of the same group. Add to those representatives of Montessori and Waldorf schools, special needs schools, First Nations and university prep schools, and include a few more religions such as Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist, and it would be logical to conclude that such a group membership would be a recipe for conflict. Seventy per cent of FISA schools represent different religious beliefs and all of the schools represent divergent values. And yet this widely diverse present day FISA Board continues to achieve its purposes through consensus decision-making. This is contrary to the narrative that one would find in most organizations. Davis (1980) and Kanter (1977) argue that the proportion of diversity or critical mass should not exceed 20% and yet, the FISA Board encompasses a much higher percentage of diversity within its members (Davis, 1980; Kanter, 1977) [18, 51]. One need only consider global diversity in places such as Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe, the former Czechoslovakia and Kosovo to understand how different identities produce different epistemologies that often lead to violent conflict. I am not trying to suggest that the same potential for violent conflict exists within FISA; in fact, the exact opposite appears to be evident. The question is, “Why?”

Personal identities within a context of diversity can be closely linked to individual beliefs and values, which often conflict with a group’s raison d’etre. Conflicts between individual goals and coalition goals require exceptional leadership skills and a high degree of respect and trust between members with differing beliefs and values, if the organization is to achieve
consensus on policy issues. In such circumstances, groups may need much more dialogue to find the common ground when processing policy issues. An equally important concept here is Bourdieu’s “conscious misunderstanding,” where individuals and groups “learn” which issues can be brought to the table of a diverse group, and which issues are best dealt with by individuals or with intra-organizational groups that are members of the coalition (Bourdieu, 1990) [12]. So, if FISA has built an identity for itself, how did this occur?

3.10 Group Knowledge

Group knowledge refers to both the constitution and the bylaws that have been written to define an organization’s purpose, and the unwritten expectations that a group defines for itself. These expectations can be subtle or overt, but they are necessary for each member in the group to understand if he or she is to “know” how to interact with members of the group and how to represent the group to the external community. Both responsibilities are essential for sustainability of the group. In a school setting, one of the ways in which teachers are expected to learn their roles is through the policies that define their teaching responsibilities. A job description is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of just how well the teacher is meeting the expectations. By knowing these expectations, a teacher can have some control over his or her success in the profession by understanding what is important to the leadership of the school and the governing authority, and ensuring that his or her performance is consistent with the expectations.
Volunteer organizations also have expectations of their members. Members need to understand how the organization functions, especially if they are interested in improving or validating their position in the group. Group knowledge leads to an understanding of the power structure that is at work within the group.

Olson (1974) [65] has argued that individuals join organizations for the benefits that are received as a result. This is true also of volunteer organizations such as FISA, since most independent schools are receiving some government funding due to the work of the FISA leading up to 1977 and beyond. And because there are benefits that are derived from association, one must also conclude that the membership is political in nature and, by extension, potentially highly volatile. Since membership is voluntary, individuals or groups can disassociate if they find that their interests are not being adequately met. If the various members have conflicting purposes, the result can be a powerful interplay of competing values that may prove volatile. Consider the initial attempts by the university prep schools and the Catholic schools to lobby the government for tax exemptions, described in Chapter Two, where both groups ended up blaming each other for the failure to achieve tax relief from the government. But for the past forty years, the diversity within FISA appears to have been ‘managed’ through socially constructed strategies leading to consensus. How was this achieved?
3.11 External Variables

It is not possible for any group to function without being influenced to some degree by external variables in the context in which it operates. Jarvis (1998) [49] ignores external knowledge in his model for practical knowledge, but I believe it is an essential aspect in understanding the context of organizational dynamics. Argyris (1999) suggests that:

a key concept of inquiry is the intertwining of thought and action carried out by individuals in interaction with one another on behalf of the organization to which they belong in ways that change the organization’s theories of action and become embedded in organizational artifacts such as maps, memories and programs. We argue that it is possible for individuals to think and act on behalf of an organization because organizations are political entities, in a fundamental sense of that term. (p. 9) [6]

When an organization makes collective decisions, delegates authority for action to an individual in the name of the collectivity, and is able to say who is and who is not a member of the collectivity, then the organization has a function that is representative of the collectivity to external agencies. It becomes the responsibility of the leadership to monitor the performance of the group to ensure that it is operating within the expectations established for the group, generally within the policies and bylaws, and including those unwritten expectations that form the habitus for the organization. This external representation is an essential part of organizational knowledge.
and is important to understand when reflecting on the strategies that guide organizational practices.

External variables generally include financial and material resources. Groups cannot function in separate fields within a social space without there being interaction between fields in that same social space. In many cases, this relationship is a positive experience where the group is contributing to the good of the whole, or benefiting individuals outside of the organization. Political parties would see themselves as groups that contribute to the good of society, with different political parties appealing to different individuals and groups within society. At the same time, external influences may affect the direction political parties take. The recent federal election in Canada in 2008 resulted in the opposition parties deciding to form a coalition in an effort to remove the governing minority party. This action forced the governing party to appeal to the Governor General to prorogue parliament so that the government could redefine a budget that would appeal to the opposition parties and presumably stimulate an economy in recession.

Many NGO’s are active because they are fulfilling a role that government has not assumed. In this capacity, they may be recipients of public funds which could be removed if the government is not in agreement with the direction in which the group is moving. The government, on the other hand, may be influenced by multiple external agencies which are in conflict with one another to limit funding to potential rivals, such as the public school Teachers Federation’s desire to remove all public funding for independent schools. The result of this pressure is that public funding for independent schools in BC is potentially at risk. As members learn to engage with the
context within the social space where they operate, they also engage in tacit learning which enables them to represent themselves in a similar manner when representing the coalition.

### 3.12 Tacit Learning

Tacit learning is the ‘taken-for-granted’ behaviour that an organization elicits from its members which becomes the defining character of the organization to external agencies. It includes the symbolic or ritual behaviours that enable new members of a group to determine group expectations. Bourdieu (1985) [11] would refer to this as habitus, and Mauss defines it as

> those aspects of culture (or a group) that are anchored in the body; or daily practices of individuals, groups, societies or nations. It includes the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes and other non-discursive knowledges that might be said to “go without saying” for a specific group (Mauss, 1934, p. 2) [60].

All of the five variables identified above are important to an organization, and are therefore important to a researcher-practitioner when attempting to provide an explanation of the functioning of an organization such as FISA. In reviewing the research questions for this case study, I will be examining the themes that have emerged in the interviews, documents and media clips that have been collected, as they pertain to the five facets of organizational consensus-building, and in particular, volunteer organizations.
3.13 Summary

A review of the literature has highlighted numerous aspects of the effects of diversity on achieving consensus within groups. Bourdieu’s framework is helpful in examining FISA from a spatial perspective. Varying degrees of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital are invested by the agents or Directors to achieve consensus. This is accomplished through a process of conscious misunderstanding, or an acknowledgement that some issues unique to a group or agent cannot be processed if consensus is to be achieved. Organizational theory provides further conclusions on coalitions and NGOs, the effects of diversity, a typology of group diversity and the effect that context, leadership and behavioral qualities have on diverse groups.

This research is a case study of FISA, a coalition of independent schools within British Columbia. I will use interviews of current and former Directors of FISA, interviews with members of the government, a review of the FISA minutes, documents, news releases and press coverage, attendance at FISA Board meetings to observe the dynamics of Board meetings, and my own experiences as an educator. The central question seeks to determine how consensus is socially constructed within the diversity of FISA, a volunteer, non-governmental coalition of independent school groups in British Columbia. The second question will consider the effect of the external context on FISA, particularly as it relates to government funding.

- What organizational strategies and policies have been developed to achieve consensus within FISA, a diverse coalition of independent schools in British Columbia?
The potential for conflict is heightened within diverse organizations, simply because diversity brings tension to a group. When the diversity entails deeply-held beliefs and values, the challenge of forming positions of consensus seems formidable. Yet, within the diverse independent schools of British Columbia, consensus appears to occur through the FISA. What are the socially constructed strategies that the organization has instituted to enable diversity to be embraced in establishing policies for independent schools?

- What consensus strategies were applied when dealing with government in relation to issues of public funding?

To the tension of dealing with ideological and pedagogical differences with independent school organizations across British Columbia was added the tension of convincing the public, and by extension, the government, that independent schools played an important educational role in the province. FISA faced opposing ideological views concerning the merits of public funding for non-public schools. How was FISA able to achieve this goal, when numerous attempts by various independent school organizations had failed in the past?
Chapter 4

Research Methods

More discoveries have arisen from intense observation of very limited material than from statistics applied to large groups.

(W.I.B. Beveridge, 1951) [9]

4.1 The Merits of a Case Study

The problem in social science is that every attempt at a context-free definition for an action, or an action based on some abstract rule or law, may not necessarily line up with what was intended by the actors in a concrete social situation. Therefore, context is central in discovering meaning for an action in a particular situation. FISA is an unique union of diverse independent school organizations developed under a specific philosophy for each group of schools. The organizational dynamics of each group is fully meaningful within the context of each particular group. Further, the collaboration of five distinct groups in a voluntary alliance known as FISA must be understood within the context of a political climate in British Columbia that regulates independent schools through an Independent School Act and partial government funding. Funding and recognition have been the main emphases of FISA since its inception in 1966. Few political jurisdictions in Canada
and beyond offer similar legislation to that in British Columbia, which could have a direct effect on how FISA collaborates despite its diversity.

Bourdieu’s work, cited earlier in this report, examines the functioning of agents within a field located in a social space. Responses to the context form the habitus of how group members perceive their representation of themselves and their group within society, thus providing Aristotle’s “particular” within a context. Bourdieu attributes the habitus concept to Aristotle, and considers the practical knowledge that habitus procures as analogous to Aristotle’s phronesis (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 60) [40]. In order to consider the practical within a social space, the context of the individual or group must be investigated in detail. Thus, a case study is a powerful method of learning and understanding the experiences of agents within organizations.

The Dictionary of Sociology limits the scope of influence provided by a case study to the generative stages of an inquiry, saying that as “a detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide information about a broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 66) [40]. This implies that case studies are useful only as initiating tools, and fails to recognize that the specific understandings gleaned from a case study can add to the field of knowledge by examining “contextual conditions - believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (Yin, 2003, p. 13) [89].

Some researchers in the natural sciences have suggested that case studies are flawed as investigative tools because they are context-dependent, making
them less valuable than context-independent studies. They are also said to contain biases towards verification; that is, they tend to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions. Neither are they conducive to developing propositions and theories within the social sciences. At issue is the very status of the case study as a scientific method, which some argue lacks theory, reliability and validity.

Yin (2003) presents five compelling reasons for using a carefully chosen single-case study. If the case is critical in testing a theory, extreme or unique, representative or typical, revelatory, or longitudinal, there may be good reason to believe it capable of yielding significant information (pp. 40-42) [89]. The FISA case study satisfies three, and possibly four, of these conditions. It is highly illustrative of Bourdieu’s social space theory, it represents a unique situation in which groups of widely varying philosophical views have come together in a common cause, and the focus on funding issues in 1977 and 2004 provide a longitudinal comparison of strategies within the group and responses to those strategies by external agencies. Yin (1994) argues that a single case study can often be used to pursue an explanatory, and not merely an exploratory, purpose by posing competing explanations for the same set of events and indicating how such events could apply to other situations [89].

Flyvbjerg (2001) [40] suggests that a case study produces precisely the type of context-dependent knowledge which makes it possible to move from basic learning processes to more advanced synthesis. As a research and teaching method, case study is ideal. One of the easiest ways for students in a classroom to extrapolate universal principles is to contemplate stories
Chapter 4. Research Methods

of the real experiences of others, extract the meaning which can be applied to other situations, and then apply those principles to their own praxis. In the same way, a researcher attempts to examine real-life experiences closely in order to understand the meanings of relationships and behaviours within a context. This cannot be accomplished in a controlled laboratory environment. Additionally, while a real-life experience may not generate a predictive theory in the natural sciences, it can provide wide-ranging illumination about human interaction and behaviour. “Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 73) [40].

A case study asks the questions “how” and “why” in relation to what is already known through previous research in the social sciences. In this case study, both Bourdieu’s work on fields, social space, habitus and practice; and research on human dynamics within organizations will contribute to a theoretical framework for a study of the FISA. Case studies also consider a wide range of evidence such as documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations, thus investigating a group from various angles. Using more than one strategy validates any patterns that appear when identical data is encountered in multiple sources, and those patterns can then be analyzed for their general applications. Such use of the case study is just as beneficial to the understanding of human behaviour as the experiment is to the understanding of molecular or cellular behaviour in the natural sciences. “Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin, 2003, p. 10) [89].
Since context is important to understanding the working of FISA, Yin’s definition of a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13) [89], seems applicable. The situations and relationships that define its practice are crucial to understanding how and why FISA continues to operate so successfully. A case study cannot be exclusively quantitative in its approach, and including qualitative material does not necessarily compromise its scientific orientation or application. Encompassing multiple methods and sources of information in arriving at its conclusions actually strengthens the veracity of the study.

Different from statistical generalization, where an inference about a population is made on the basis of empirical data from a limited sample, analytical generalization compares the results of a case study to a previously developed theory. “In analytical generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory” (Yin, 2003, p. 37) [89]. Numerous conceptual frameworks have been discussed in Chapter Two, with the primary focus on Bourdieu’s theory of social space and the development of groups and alliances within that space. If two or more case studies support the same theory, then replication can be claimed. Empirical results are even more potent if two or more case studies support the same theory but do not support a rival theory. The use of theory is an important aid in defining the appropriate research design and data collection, and it becomes the main vehicle for transferability of the results in the case study. Table 4.1 shows the strengths and weaknesses of a case study methodology.
as drawn from Yin (2003, p. 86) [89].

What we observe from Table 4.1 is that documentation and archival records are seen as a stable and unobtrusive method for researching organizations. Interviews provide insightful information when they focus directly on the case study topic. Direct observations also provide a real time context for the events of a study. On the other hand, a researcher must be aware of the biases that could result from poorly worded questions and reflexivity in the interview process, eliciting from the interviewee what the interviewer wants to hear.

This research draws on multiple sources of evidence in a review of FISA. Archival documents will consider the question of how funding was achieved for independent schools in British Columbia. The specifics of the study will focus more on the interactions between members of the Board than on the arguments used to achieve funding and recognition. Thus, interviews and direct observations will become important in understanding how FISA moves to consensus on issues that challenge the common purpose of the Board. Figure 4.1 shows the various sources of evidence which comment on the workings of FISA.

Two problems emerge in this investigation: investigator bias may influence the way in which data is interpreted, and additionally, this researcher has had a close association with FISA over the past ten years, providing valuable information as a participant observer. In addition to being the principal researcher, I am also an elected member of the FISA Board, acting as a representative of the ACSI-BC group for the past five years and as a representative of the AMG group for the previous five years. Therefore,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Document-ation** | 1. stable - can be reviewed repeatedly  
2. unobtrusive - not created as a result of the case study  
3. exact - contains exact names, references, and details of events  
4. broad coverage - long span of time, many events, and many settings | 1. retrievability - can be low  
2. biased selectivity, if collection is incomplete  
3. reporting bias - reflects (unknown) bias of author  
4. access - may be deliberately blocked | proposals, letters, memoranda, meeting minutes, written reports |
| **Archival Records** | 1. (same as above for documentation)  
2. precise and interpretive | 1. (same as above for documentation)  
2. accessibility due to privacy reasons  
3. bias due to poorly constructed questions | briefs, annual reports, Hansard, newspaper clippings, |
| **Interviews** | 1. targeted - focuses directly on case study topic  
2. insightful - provides perceived casual inferences | 1. response bias  
2. inaccuracies due to poor recall  
3. reflexivity - interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear | directed interviews open-ended interviews |
| **Direct Observations** | 1. reality - covers events in real time  
2. contextual - covers context of event | 1. time consuming  
2. selectivity - unless broad coverage  
3. reflexivity event may proceed differently because it is being observed  
4. cost - hours needed by human observers | attend Board meetings, attend committee meetings |
| **Participant Observation** | 1. (same as above for direct observations)  
2. insightful into interpersonal behavior and motives | 1. (same as above for direct observations)  
2. bias due to investigator’s manipulation of events | Director on the Board, member of a committee |
| **Physical Artifacts** | 1. insightful into cultural features  
2. insightful into technical operations | 1. selectivity  
2. availability | published position paper, organization newsletters |

Table 4.1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Six Sources of Evidence in Case Studies
objectivity is an issue that will require careful attention.

Banks (1998) [7] argues that the biographical journeys of the researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct. This knowledge generally mirrors their life experiences and their values. Researchers in the social sciences have a mind and a heart that has been influenced by the instruction they have received, the values they have been taught, and the life experiences that they have encountered. Therefore, objectivity may be difficult to achieve, especially for someone who is directly connected with the organization being researched.

Merton (1972) [61] has developed a typology based on the assumption that, in a diverse pluralistic society such as Canada and the United States, individuals are socialized within ethnic, racial, and cultural communities in which they internalize localized values, perspectives, ways of knowing, behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge. These values may differ in significant ways
Chapter 4. Research Methods

from the values of other individuals who have been socialized in other micro-
cultures in the same society. The question therefore arises whether research
into a particular microculture is done most accurately and objectively by a
member of that microculture or by an outsider who may be unfamiliar with
the subtleties of the microculture under study.

Merton suggests there are four types of researchers: an indigenous-insider
who endorses the values of the community and is seen by the community
as one capable of speaking with authority about it; an indigenous-outsider
who was socialized in the community values but has assimilated oppositional
values and who is viewed by the community as an outsider; an external-
insider who has adopted the values of the community after having been
raised in a different community; and an external-outsider who is socialized
outside the community and is interpreting the community’s values from a
different social perspective.

Harding (1998) takes the position that only through making the values of
researchers explicit are we able to attain research that draws closer to “strong
objectivity.” She suggests that our attempts to provide good research in the
social sciences “is dependent on a recognition that the cultural beliefs and
behaviours of researchers shape the results of their analysis” (Harding, 1998,
p. 9) [43]. Her point is that we need to avoid the “objectivist” stance that at-
ttempts to make the researchers cultural beliefs and practices invisible while
simultaneously holding the research objects, beliefs and practices up to pub-
lic scrutiny. Research must also produce understandings and explanations
which are free of distortion from the unexamined beliefs and behaviors of
social scientists themselves. Exposing this subjective element of the analysis
actually increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the objectivism which hides this kind of evidence from the public. Harding refers to this transparency in social research as “reflexivity.” Hence, “Strong objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge. Thus, strong objectivity requires what we can think of as “strong reflexivity” (Harding, 2002, p. 372) [44].

I have been involved in FISA for the past ten years, but previously to that involvement, I was involved in public school education for over twenty years, both in British Columbia and overseas with the Department of National Defence. I believe that my experience in both independent and public school spheres, as well as my involvement in a wide range of organized groups, has provided me with the ability to reflect upon the parameters and dynamics of a given group from a flexible perspective, whether I am operating as an active member of the group or simply observing the group as an outsider.

My position in relation to this research is that I believe it is a primary responsibility of the State to ensure that education is provided to all children. I also believe that parents are ultimately responsible for the education of their own children, and should therefore have the right to choose an alternative to public education if they wish. I support partial funding by the State for independent school education if it meets or exceeds the learning outcomes required of professionals in public schools.

I think that members of FISA would view me as an external-insider, since my involvement with independent schools is a recent experience, but I endorse the values of FISA. The FISA Board would accept that I could speak with both authority and objectivity about the values, policies, and
objectives of independent schools in British Columbia. I view myself as a participant-research-practitioner as Jarvis (1998) defines the term, because I believe I am an educator with the privilege of having taught and administered educational programs in the public, independent, post-secondary, and overseas environments. In addition, I am fully engaged in the organizational policy development of FISA as a representative of BC independent schools. Each of these experiences has shaped my values, and my goal of objectivity in this research will be coloured by the numerous educational communities that I have served. Each reader will determine for himself or herself whether my lens of interpretation meets the test of strong objectivity.

This case study of FISA is intended to provide a better understanding of the effectiveness with which this diverse group of school communities, collaborating under the umbrella of the FISA, has achieved useful purposes. While the results are context-dependent to this specific group and space, there may be transferability of the findings to similar groups and social settings where divergency of group has led to conflict and a lack of consensus.

An executive summary of the results will be prepared in order to report back to each of the study participants and to inform FISA of the observations made from this research. All interviewees demonstrated a strong willingness to participate and an equally strong interest in the findings.
4.2 Building a Methodology for the Case Study on FISA

This case study examines the interactions of agents of the Federation of Independent Schools (FISA) in British Columbia. Appropriate measures are required to authenticate the trustworthiness and credibility of the case study. To this end, illumination, understanding, extrapolation, and transferability will be applied to the data that has been collected.

4.3 Data Collection

Three principles of data collection were followed in completing this research. First, data was obtained from multiple sources such as interviews, minutes of meetings, newspaper reports, and FISA memos. This allowed me to consider many different pieces of information to verify consistency in the findings. Figure 4.1, cited earlier provides a description of the various sources used in this report.

Second, a database of investigative notes, observations, list of audio tapes, Board meeting notes, and relevant FISA documents was developed which form the evidence from which I developed my conclusions. The database protocol is included in Appendix C.

Third, through the development of many different sources of data, I was able to cross-reference or triangulate information by comparing interviews with Board minutes, or FISA memos with newspaper reports, for example, to insure the accuracy of the information provided in the research.
4.3.1 Data Sources

Interviews

The primary source of data for this study consists of open-ended interviews with the current and past Executive Directors of FISA, and guided interviews with other FISA members and Ministry of Education representatives. Reliability measures have been provided through the use of a case study protocol, which contains the instrument used for the collection of interview data and defines the procedures followed in this study. The results of the interviews are correlated with supporting paper documentation to confirm that the themes identified by interviewees had indeed appeared in discussions around the FISA table. Appendix D contains the interview questions.

Interviews with participants are at the heart of this study of the organizational and educational policies of FISA, so it was important to allow my subjects to express their opinions without guiding bias from me. My primary interest was to hear “the interviewee’s point of view” (Bryman, 2004) [14]. Therefore, this research used an unstructured interviewing technique with my first two subjects to avoid any influence from preconceived notions I may have held. Rather than predetermining the questions for the two initial interviews with the past and present Executive Directors of FISA, qualitative interviewing as described by Rubin and Rubin (1995) [72] provided a flexible, iterative and continuous design, and allowed themes to emerge unbidden. This technique was essential for gaining a preliminary understanding of the underpinnings that support the organizational policies of FISA.
Since human subjects were involved in the research, appropriate approvals were obtained from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) in July, 2006. The application for ethical review was reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects. A copy of the BREB Certificate of Approval is in Appendix B.

Each of the two Executive Directors of FISA has held this position for approximately twenty years. They were asked to reflect on the history of FISA by using narratives to describe the growth and functioning of this organization since its inception in 1966. Certain themes which emerged from a careful analysis of the interviews highlighted specific attributes that enabled such a diverse group of independent educators to collaborate on a variety of issues, and in particular, the funding of independent schools by the provincial government.

Each Director was contacted by telephone and told about the dissertation project that was being undertaken. Upon agreement to participate, each person was given a consent form documenting the purpose of the study and was informed that their comments would be confidential in the research. Both individuals signed the consent and the interview then proceeded. One interview was conducted in the office of FISA and the other was conducted in the boardroom for the Society of Christian Schools at Trinity Western University. Each interview was recorded and notes were taken by the interviewer. Both Executive Directors were given the freedom to engage in discussion of any operational aspect of the FISA, and prompts were provided to facilitate the discussion. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.
Chapter 4. Research Methods

At the conclusion of the interviews, the tape recordings were transcribed verbatim, followed by an analysis of the conversation by the researcher. This analysis provided the basis for the structured interviews that were given to the remainder of the participants in the study.

The specific themes identified by the past and present Executive Directors were used to develop questions for confidential directed interviews of elected Board members from the five groups within FISA (CIS, ISA, SCSBC, ACSIBC, and AMG) and representatives of the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools in the Ministry of Education in Victoria (OIPS), in order to identify convergent and divergent views on the role, function, and effectiveness of the FISA in BC. These interviews were approximately 90 minutes long, and were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of recall and consistency of the interview process. Each subject was invited to make additional comments on any topic relevant to the organizational and educational policy development of FISA. The transcriptions were analyzed for similarities and differences, and follow-up telephone calls were initiated as needed, to clarify comments that were unclear or required further information, and to elicit opinions on issues raised by subsequent interviewees.

Interviewees were selected because of their current or historical relationship to the organization, and because they enjoy a first-hand understanding of the political and social realities that influence the interactions of the diverse group of Directors who comprise the FISA Board, which represents 92% of the independent schools in British Columbia.

Directors are Board members who are either appointed or elected by each of the five associations that comprise FISA. The Executive Board is elected
by all the Board members, who collectively vote for the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Member at Large, with the restriction that only one person from each of the five associations may serve on the Executive Board at any one time. This ensures equal representation from all the associations within the FISA at the highest decision-making level. The Executive Director is the chief executive officer of FISA, hired by the FISA directors to oversee the organization and to represent FISA to external agencies.

Four of the five groups that comprise the FISA Board are represented by three Board members. Due to its diversity, the Associate Member Group has six members, to give voice to all components of that group, but these six hold only three votes among them. Interviews were conducted with only two representatives from each of the groups, rather than with all members of the current Board. An effort was made to include both long-standing and new members of the FISA Board to determine if perspectives have changed, especially in the development of the organizational structure, or in the way in which the Board represents itself to other educational agencies in British Columbia. A representative sampling of previous executive members from each of the groups within FISA was also interviewed. Gender was taken into consideration in selecting interviewees for this study. Table 4.2 identifies the distribution of interviews from groups within FISA as well as from the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools in British Columbia, a branch within the Ministry of Education. Ministry representatives are not on the FISA Board; one individual is still involved with the Ministry, and by extension FISA; and one person has left the Ministry. The selection of the
Chapter 4. Research Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews Conducted</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Present Board</th>
<th>Past Board</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Directors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Christian Schools International (ACSIBC)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Member Group (AMG)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Independent Schools (CIS)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Schools Association</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society of Christian Schools in BC (SCSBC)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools (MOE)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of interviews</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Interview Representation from the Groups within FISA and the MOE Interviews Conducted.

representatives was based on availability for an interview, although specific effort was made to provide a gender balance representative of the current structure of the FISA Board.

All of the participants consented to participate in the interviews and each of the interviews was conducted at a location convenient to the participant, generally at the person’s place of work. One interview was conducted at the interviewer’s place of work.

Each person was given the same group of questions, listed in Appendix D, and prompts were provided by the interviewer when a response required further clarification or if the response led to a further thought that needed clarification. All interviews were conducted by the same interviewer and the
same interview process was used in each interview. Each person signed a
consent form prior to the interview, and these forms, along with the tape
recordings, have been retained by the researcher. Transcriptions were made
of each interview to be included in the analysis of themes that were evident
in the conversations. Interviewees were offered copies of their interview
transcripts, but only one interviewee requested such a copy, and this was
provided.

Of the 14 interviews that were conducted, two were with women on the
Board and the rest of the interviews were with men. This distribution was
chosen because it reflects the current composition of the FISA Board, where
2 of the current 18 Directors are women. The representative sample con-
sisted of Directors from each of the groups within FISA and the total number
of interviews represented 66% (N=12) of the Directors serving on the FISA
Board. One of the women interviewed was on the Executive Board until she
stepped down due to illness. Four of the interviews were with serving mem-
ers of the FISA Executive Board or 22% (N=4) of the people interviewed.
Interviewees from the FISA Board comprise 28% (N=5) of the FISA Board
of Directors. There was no attempt at random sampling or possibility of
generalization, and as such the sample suffers from additional limitations.
First, those who consented to an interview may have responded differently
from Directors not asked to participate. Second, some of the prompts that
were given by the researcher may have elicited responses that were offered
out of respect for the researcher, who is also a FISA Director. There may
have been an attempt to “please” the researcher in giving responses that
would be seen as favourable to the research. There is no way of verifying
Chapter 4. Research Methods

this possibility. Thirdly, the researcher was known to all of the people interviewed, except for one, and this may have influenced the responses that were generated as they might have seen the researcher as “sympathetic” to independent schools. Finally, the research questions were constructed by the researcher and may have elicited responses favourable to the thesis.

Several interviews were held with present and past administrators of the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools (OIIS) in order to gain their perspectives on the workings of FISA. In total, 12 interviews were conducted with representatives of FISA and 2 interviews took place with representatives of the Ministry of Education and the OIIS. There is a link between the representatives from the Ministry of Education and FISA in that one of the OIIS representatives interviewed had also served on the FISA Board in the past.

Prior to the commencement of this study, a presentation was made to the FISA Executive Board requesting permission to conduct the study. A letter of permission was obtained and is included in Appendix A. As well, ethics approval was obtained from BREB, and the lead investigator completed the on-line short-course on ethics responsibilities. A copy of the BREB approval is included in Appendix B.

Each interviewee was contacted prior to his or her interview to explain the purpose of his or her voluntary participation and to express the obligations of this investigation to the participants, including confidentiality of identity and security of transcripts and audio tapes. A copy of the letter of information is in Appendix E, the letter of consent is in Appendix F, and the interview questions are included in Appendix D.
Chapter 4. Research Methods

Interview Questions

Fifteen questions were prepared for the members of the FISA Board and OIIS representatives. The questions were developed by the researcher to probe the Directors’ thoughts on the following themes:

1. The nature of the Directors’ association with FISA.
2. Their perception of the success and reputation of the organization.
3. The nature of the working relationship among members of the FISA Board.
4. The process used by FISA in achieving consensus on policy issues, particularly funding and recognition.
5. An assessment of the degree of diversity on the FISA Board.
6. The degree of privilege and/or marginalization that occurs on the Board.
7. The Directors’ opinions concerning past and present policies that govern the operations of the Board, and the impact these might have on the Board’s ability to collaborate on policy issues.
8. The Directors’ opinion on how and why FISA continues to function after 40 years.
9. The Directors’ assessment of the major purpose or role of FISA.
10. Challenges that could threaten the ability of FISA to collaborate in the future.
Chapter 4. Research Methods

As indicated earlier, these themes were identified from the preliminary interviews conducted with the two Executive Directors for FISA. The researcher attempted to use language that was clear and understandable for the interviewees. Comments from many of the Directors, both during and after the interview, suggested that the process had caused them to reflect on what “makes FISA tick.” This suggests that the purpose of conducting a critical analysis of the workings of FISA appears to have been met.

Direct and Participant Observations

In addition, the lead investigator observed meetings of the FISA Board to gain a better understanding of the working relationship between members of the Board in their capacity as public policy makers, a process known as participant-observation. As a Director of FISA, I was given permission to observe meetings from the perspective of an investigator, pursuant to the terms granted by FISA. This privilege offered many advantages in that I was given generous access to meetings, as well as to documents that I needed to complete my research. Meetings were conducted on a monthly basis and lasted approximately three hours. Executive meetings were conducted prior to each Board meeting, and I was able to attend four of these as a representative of the ACSIBC group.

I also recognize the limitations of my role as a participant-research-practitioner due to the potential for bias to influence my results. A participant-research-practitioner may be less able to work as an external observer and may assume positions of advocacy which could compromise the objectivity of the research. I am aware of this risk and have consciously worked at
remaining objective in my assessment of the data and its interpretation. In order to address this concern, additional data has been included documenting how decisions on organizational and educational policy are made.

**Documentation and Archival Records**

All archival information and government briefs from FISA, dating back to 1966, were made available to me. Minutes of FISA Board meetings from the years leading up to, and including, 1977 and 2005 have been reviewed to determine the level of collaboration that occurred on the issue of funding independent schools, and this has been related to the themes that emerged in the interviews with current and past Directors of FISA. Prepared briefs, newspaper documents and committee reports on the topic of funding for the period noted above have also been examined.

### 4.4 Efficacy of Case Study

Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13) [89]. Accordingly, it is useful to use case study methodology in a situation in which the phenomena to be observed would not operate in the same way if removed from their societal context to a laboratory setting. Case study brings the researcher directly into the heart of a particular set of contextual conditions that no other situation could provide, recognizing that social situations are dependent on the conditions that exist at the time.
and place of an investigation and that these conditions are all important to any interpretation that may be derived from the outcome.

The case study inquiry “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points” and as a result, “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion,” and “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2003, p. 14) [89]. Because the data collection is fluid rather than routine, the demand on the researcher is much greater than in quantitative research. Collecting data through an interview process requires constant alertness to new opportunities and intellectual flexibility to respond to unexpected findings. Triangulation of multiple sources of information provides a degree of dependability that the research has provided some understanding of the specific circumstances under review and combines different methods to produce more insightful conclusions (Packard, 1999, p. 501) [67]. It adds levels of support or credibility to any interpretations that a researcher identifies in a given context. And finally, the configuration of FISA and the individual groups of which the Federation is comprised provides an excellent illustration of Bourdieu’s theory of the exercise of power in a social space.

The trustworthiness of the case study must also be scrutinized. Does the case reflect a reasonable set of contextual circumstances that enables a researcher to draw certain conclusions that provide a better interpretation for a particular understanding of a social phenomenon? A better interpretation demonstrates that a previous interpretation is merely an interpretation and the better interpretation remains valid until another still better interpretatio-
tion is produced (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 131).

The credibility of this case study is developed from a systematic process of analysis of a particular social structure or interaction that is valid for this case. The research represents this situation and this point in time because we know that this research exemplifies at least one actual and authentic situation, that being interaction of directors within FISA. The contextual description has validity for this situation and may provide historical illustrations of theoretical arguments made by previous scholars, or may add to these arguments through new perspectives. There may also be some selective insights that may be transferable to similar social situations, but that is not the intent of this case study. Rather, my purpose is to frame FISA within the context of independent schools in British Columbia, as a non-government organization, engaged in policy development through an engagement of diverse independent school associations and the provincial government. This case study attempts to analyze the nature of this engagement through a socially constructed mechanism of consensus.

Quality and rigor have been achieved through increasing the trustworthiness of the researcher in his ability to assess this particular social phenomenon by use of triangulation, or the search for convergences among multiple sources of information of various types, to form themes or categories in the research. In this case, meeting observations, minutes, newspaper documents, internal notes, interviews, and policy documents augment interview information to determine congruence of specific themes that have been identified.

This study also applies theoretical triangulation in an attempt to find
meaningful conclusions that are validated by two or more theories, or that are contrary to existing research. Numerous studies have been cited in Chapter Three that reference how diversity affects groups and how individuals within diverse groups deal with conflict. Are the interpersonal dynamics of individuals within the FISA and the organizational policies typical of the research, or are there new conclusions to be identified?

Because of the 40 year history of FISA, this research has been narrowed to focus on the manner in which FISA achieves consensus on policy issues, and in particular, funding issues that pertain to two distinct periods in FISA’s history. Efforts were made to analyze the data representing different periods in the history of FISA. Consistency was assured through examination of similar events separated over time; in this case, securing initial recognition and funding for independent schools by FISA in 1977, and obtaining special needs funding in 2004. In other words, the same analysis of data was applied to both periods where funding was provided to independent schools. Interviews, Board minutes, archival documents, newspaper releases, and direct observations were the data sources. Credibility was attained by using multiple sources of information to produce convergent lines of inquiry, establishing a chain of evidence, and having the case study draft document critiqued by the current Executive Director of FISA. The issue of consistency was also addressed by using multiple measures of the same phenomenon.
4.4.1 Interview Consistency

To diminish threats to consistency in the interview process, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees was kept friendly and yet professional. Because the circumstances of an interview can affect the type of information revealed, attempts were made to hold interviews in familiar settings to the interviewees, and not at the FISA offices.

Attention was paid to the interview schedule to ensure that each participant was asked the same questions and that probes were used to generate full answers. As mentioned earlier, interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Copies of the transcripts were made available to all those interviewed, but only one person asked for and was provided with a copy.

To discourage interviewees from providing the response they suspected the interviewer wanted, indirect prompting questions, such as, “Could I ask you to elaborate on what you mean by that?” and “Could you explain what you mean by that comment?” were used. However, to avoid leading the interviewee, the questions were strictly adhered to, although the order occasionally varied when an interviewee’s comments addressed a question that was coming later in the interview. All questions were asked of all persons interviewed. To limit coaching bias, the interviewer allowed the participants to take as much time as they needed to formulate their responses, occasionally by waiting for a response or allowing the participant to reflect on their response for awhile and then coming back to the question. Only one participant requested the questions ahead of the interview, and they were duly provided.
4.4.2 Analysis of the Interviews

The interviews were analyzed using the ATLAS.ti V5.0 qualitative data analysis and knowledge software, which allows the researcher to analyze interviews and related data by searching for themes that were identified in the interviews. These themes centered on the primary questions of this research, namely, what organizational strategies and policies have been developed by FISA in order to achieve consensus within the diversity of the groups of independent schools in British Columbia. A secondary question examined FISAs strategies towards gaining government funding. Key words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs were identified through the coding process which allowed the researcher to identify a list of themes that emerged from the interviews. The questions asked in the interviews provided the foundation for the themes that were identified, such as consensus strategies, leadership, habitus, government interaction, values and beliefs, diversity, internal conflict, government funding, board structure, collaboration, threats to FISA, equality, respect for differences, conscious misunderstanding, and member privileges, to name a few. These themes were then clustered into families in order to focus the data into manageable concepts. Some examples of family clusters included characteristics of consensus, conscious misunderstanding, benefits of member groups, funding and recognition, government relations, individual autonomy, organizational strategies, leadership and policy development. Finally, using the five facets of organizational consensus-building, developed from the work of Jarvis (1998), themes, family clusters and interview comments were used to illustrate the way in which FISA deals with
group knowledge, beliefs and values, personal identities, external variables and tacit learning.

Each interviewee was assured that his or her comments would be confidential, so interviewees were simply identified by the letter “P”, followed by a number. For example, P3:4 would signify the interview with an individual identified as P3, followed by the quote reference 4, in the ATLAS.ti software. In order to protect the confidentiality of all interviewees, I did not differentiate whether interviews were done by Ministry representatives, FISA Executive Directors, or other FISA Directors. Quotations from interviews in the following chapters have the “P” replaced by the word “Interview” in order to clarify the source of the comment for the reader, but FISA Directors, Executive Directors, and OIIS personnel, as listed in Table 4.2 are all designated similarly to protect their anonymity.

4.5 Conclusion

A case study on FISA can provide useful information to the field of organizational research. However, as a single case study, conclusions can be drawn only for this specific context-dependent situation. A broader application for the research would require a study of similar examples to demonstrate replicability. Thus, the limitations of this study suggest that the conclusions drawn may not be applicable to other organizational settings.

In addition to the policy development practices of FISA, the study focuses on two specific time periods when funding was requested and given by the provincial government. Many other policy decisions have been made
by FISA which have not been directly researched in this case study. Interviews with various Directors did, however, reflect on a broader range of topics than merely funding, and those comments will apply to the organizational characteristics of the FISA Directors. Thus, the scope of this review of FISA is primarily limited to the question of how consensus is achieved, particularly as it relates to funding, when considering diversity as a social construct within FISA.

This research is concerned exclusively with the public workings of FISA and pertains to the development of organizational and educational policy. As a result, the potential risk to each subject is negligible. The topics being researched pertain to educational policy making, which is made public through the publications from FISA and disseminated through various means to its members and the public upon request.
Chapter 5

Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

Because FISA must be collaborative, people who come to the Board understand that, and they do not feel that they can somehow control it, and therefore, it is an organization of collaboration and persuasion, rather than one of politics and enforcement.

Interview 10, 2007

In this chapter I will analyze the contents of interviews with fourteen FISA and government representatives who commented on the operations of FISA, focusing on the strategies that FISA uses in achieving consensus on policy issues and political action pertaining to independent schools in British Columbia. The next chapter will focus on how the FISA has applied these strategies in its relations with government, particularly on issues of funding and recognition.

FISA represents schools which adhere to virtually every major religion in the province, non-religious schools, pedagogical schools based on Montessori
or Waldorf philosophies, First Nations and special needs schools. Approximately 70% of BC’s independent schools are faith-based, which is in itself a recipe for conflict, as articles of belief held by one group can be seen as heresies by another. Yet, this is an organization that has functioned effectively, indeed flourished, for over 40 years. All of the associations which joined FISA in 1966 continue to be active members. The clause in the FISA constitution which allows for any individual member group to disassociate from a particular decision of the FISA Board has been enacted only once in the history of the organization. An increasing percentage of independent schools in the province choose to belong to FISA, which currently represents 92% of the total enrollment of BC students in independent schools. Enrollment in independent schools has increased consistently over the past 38 years, while the public schools have shown two decade-long periods of enrollment decline, from 1974-1987 and 1998-2009, as shown in Figure 5.1.

5.1 The Raison d’etre of FISA

Chapter 2 provided a brief historical summary of the political struggles that independent schools experienced in attempting to gain recognition and funding from the British Columbia government. The Catholic schools lobbied to remove the cost of double taxation from families that were sending their children to non-public schools. This struggle was joined by the Independent Schools Association in an unsuccessful bid to change the legislation in favour of non-public schools. It was only after Ned Larsen, headmaster of Shawnigan Lake School, realized that non-public schools would need to work
together in any effective lobby with the government, that a new strategy of collaboration was developed. Representatives from the Catholic, British prep, Christian Reformed and several non-aligned schools met to formulate a constitution with which all four groups could agree. This was no small feat!

The revised constitution of FISA, last amended April 23, 2003, articulates five purposes of the Society. These include:

- to make known to the public and government the rightful place and responsibility of independent schools within a democratic and pluralistic
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

society;

• to strengthen understanding and cooperation between independent schools and other educational institutions in general, and between independent schools and government in general;

• to support and encourage high standards in the independent schools of British Columbia;

• to administer funds, including the distribution and investment of such funds, received by the Society from government or any other source for any purpose;

• to engage in such other related services and activities as the Board of Directors may decide.

The first two articles express the main priorities of FISA, which have been enshrined in the constitution since 1966. As evidenced by the long struggle to obtain recognition and funding for independent schools in BC, FISA continues to defend itself against external critics who argue that public funding is for public schools and that, if independent schools choose to exist, they should do so without public funds. FISA counters that position by arguing that independent schools are a reflection of the pluralistic society in this province, and by referencing Article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Canada has endorsed, that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that will be given to their child. FISA maintains that it becomes the responsibility of the state to ensure that parental choice is provided to families in this province through equal opportunity for
all students. An extension of this position is that independent schools in the province are to be protected in legislation and with some public funding if they are operating in compliance with provincial guidelines for curriculum and instruction. These two issues, recognition and funding, serve as the raison-d’etre for FISA, with any additional purposes assuming a secondary role.

An analysis of the interviews provides information regarding the strategies that FISA employs when dealing with independent schools, government and other educational agencies. The information has been reviewed through the five-faceted lens described in Chapter 3 and illustrated in Figure 3.4.

5.2 Group Knowledge

The beliefs and values of diverse member groups must be reconciled before the five groups within FISA are able to develop policies that serve all independent schools in the province. This requires an understanding of the diversity within FISA and an ability to structure the policies and agenda around issues that will benefit most of the groups in the coalition. When individual groups bring items to the table that could be divisive for group unity, a strategy that will eventually lead to consensus is necessary. This strategy is strongly supported in the structure of the Board itself and the manner in which committees are formed.
5.2.1 Structure of the Board

From FISA’s inception in 1966, when a team of individuals representing various independent schools got together to develop policy for collaboration, it became apparent that it was necessary to develop an organizational model that would allow many groups a voice on a Board that was representative of the diversity of the coalition. The following three strategies were instituted to provide a valid voice for each group:

• Under bylaw 6.4 of FISA, each group within the organization is entitled to appoint 3 Directors of its own choosing, to represent the values and priorities of the group. The AMG group, which is a collection of independent schools with a broad range of authority structures, is entitled to have 3 additional Directors to attend meetings, but without any additional voting power. Thus, each group enjoys equal representation on the Board of Directors.

• The officers for FISA consist of the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. Each officer represents a different group within FISA, unless one group is unable to table a candidate. According to Bylaw 7.11, if there are more than four groups, then an ex-officio officer is added to the officers. There are currently five groups within FISA and one Director from each of the groups sits on the Executive Board. Each group has equal representation on the Executive Board, as well as on the general Board.

• When issues that require further study are tabled at the FISA Board,
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

the Board’s unofficial policy provides for subcommittees to be formed to study the issues and bring back a recommendation to the full Board. Consistent with the bylaw provisions for Board and officer representation, each subcommittee contains a representative from each of the five groups within FISA. These representatives may be from the Board itself, or may be drawn in from each of the association groups that are members of FISA.

“That philosophy stemmed from the original starting of FISA in 1966, when they met at Corpus Christi School in the library” Interview 4:26.

FISA is a collection of organizations, and it serves those organizations. Those organizations determine who serves on the FISA Board, and because there is no dominance, there must be collaboration. Words become dysfunctional when power relations within organizations create Boards which are not representative and do not have to collaborate with minority partners. Because FISA must be in collaboration, people who come to the Board understand that, do not feel that they can somehow control them, and therefore, it is an organization of collaboration and persuasion, rather than one of politics and enforcement. And the very structure of the Board may be what causes such collaboration Interview 10:29.

The structure of the Board provides a model that allows for each of the groups to be represented on any issue that is being discussed by FISA. It also
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

ensures that no recommendations are tabled that might be in conflict with some of the values of individual groups. In such situations, FISA instituted a type of not-withstanding clause called a “disassociation clause,” which allows a group that does not endorse a particular position of the Board, “the right to disassociate itself from specific policy decisions of the Society provided it submits such dissent in writing with stated reasons to the Directors” (FISA Bylaws, Part 15, 15.3) [35]. Notably, there is only one instance to date where a group has exercised its right under the disassociation clause. One association was opposed to provincial exams being required of all BC schools, including independent schools. They were given an opportunity to make a separate brief to the Minister of Education stating their concerns. There are no other recorded examples of any group using the disassociation clause in the 40-year history of FISA.

A strategy of consensus based on equal representation by all member groups on all policy decisions of the Board and on all executive positions of the Board contributes significantly to the cohesive operation of FISA. It is at the executive level where much of the preliminary dialogue occurs to determine what issues will be brought to the Board for consideration.

5.2.2 Organizational Strategies

Both conscious and unconscious strategies are employed in the development of consensus on the FISA Board. The Directors confirm that the structure of FISA is itself a protection against debate initiatives that could be divisive for the members. Many contentious issues are processed in committee or by the Executive Director beforehand, to determine if a resolution can be
achieved. The members of each group also process their own priorities within their own associations, and if they feel that the other member groups within FISA cannot support their particular concern, then they deal with the issue within their own association and do not bring it to the FISA table. For example, one member group could have an issue with the BC High School Sports Association, but may decide that it is inappropriate to involve the other groups within FISA. Therefore, the issue is processed by the individual association and does not come up for discussion at the Board. However, much of the orchestration on the agenda for the Board is guided by the Executive Director and the Executive Board.

So, you have a wealth of experience in the Executive Director... who understands that in a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, so he liaises first with the President, then he liaises with the executive, and by the time it gets to the Board table, it’s already been through various phases. Interview 7:11

Our individual accountability to our own organizations is critical to the functioning of FISA. That is, it is important for FISA to be able to say to an organization, we need a Director who understands independent schools. So, I think the point we do there, and one of the roles of the Executive Director is the third thing, and that is, group processing. How are we doing as a group on this issue? And you will notice that we have an Executive Director who would say, “Well, we’re beginning to really split on this. Maybe we should take this off stream and consider it.” “Well,
I’m noticing that people aren’t agreeing. Maybe there’s some work to do here.” He actually calls attention to how the group is interacting, and intervenes to ensure there’s a smooth interaction. So in social psychological terms, that’s working. The fourth thing that they speak of is social skills. That is, we have the skill not to look at someone and say, “Well, that’s idiotic.” We understand enough to contain messages from people, to value the person. Those critical attributes of cooperative learning function at our Board. But, possibly, when I think about FISA, I also want to bring to mind the relationship between the individual Directors, separate from organizations, okay, and their role on that Board. When I look around there, I don’t see people who have chosen the easy path. I don’t see people who’ve said, “Well, everybody thinks like this, so I should think like that.” In their own individual lives, they have led lives of constant choice to perhaps be different than a mainstream. Interview 10:40

In practical terms, the process taking place involves individuals from the various associations representing the ideological perspectives of their associations. They are accountable to their associations, as indicated by the interview quote cited. And yet, during the discourse on the FISA Board, a shift takes place as individuals develop accountability to a “Federation” perspective. The views of the associations become modified as individual Directors debate policies through the lens of the diversity on the FISA Board, enabling them to take the perspectives of other associations into consideration. This
process can be described as a “conscious adaptation of perspective,” where Directors from one association modify their positions to include the perspectives of other associations that are part of the coalition. In an effort to reach consensus, Directors alter their positions through a transformational process that enables group consensus to emerge, while still maintaining the integrity of each individual group’s stance. It is through listening to the priorities of others that individual Directors are able to transform their own ideology to a consensus strategy that meets the needs of the diversity within FISA. Each Director maintains accountability to his or her own association, and yet learns to adapt to the priorities of others in the coalition.

New members of the Board “learn” to develop this organizational perspective that generally represents a broader view of policy issues than they would hold within their own associations. In the words of one Director, “We want what is best not just for ourselves but for all the independent schools” Interview 7:40.

It is equally important that the Executive Director and the Board President have a good working relationship and a good understanding of the culture of independent schools. Without an understanding of the needs of individual groups, the discourse at the Board level could quickly deteriorate to disagreement if unique issues were constantly tabled that either were specific to the needs of one group or would lead to philosophical difference between groups. Through effective leadership this vulnerability to group cohesion is circumvented through careful planning before an issue is tabled at the Board. Therefore, according to the interviews, the FISA agenda must be limited to issues that are common to all groups within this voluntary mem-
Consensus Strategies within Group Diversity

Due to the diversity among the groups of associations within FISA, developing policy that leads to agreement among all five associations can be accomplished only through an understanding of these differences. Directors appear to be cognizant of the differences and respectful of each association’s right to maintain its independence within its ideological values.

We don’t have discussions at the FISA Board table, like, you know, where we really get into discussion on how we are different. But there is just a real, genuine desire to respect the other. I want you to respect my independence; I will respect your independence in return. Interview 7:6

At the same time, Directors understand that respect for the views of others provides them the freedom to hold their own unique values. This appears to be the strategy employed by each group within FISA and it also serves as an escape clause for contentious issues; when agreement cannot be reached, the Board refers the matter back to an individual group for resolution at the association level. It could, therefore, be argued that consensus is not always successfully achieved on the Board, because divisive issues are referred back...
to the individual associations rather than debated further until consensus is achieved. This is confirmed in the comments made by a member of the FISA leadership:

That early Board understood intuitively, and continues to be understood to this day, that because we are so diverse, we could pull ourselves apart very quickly by focusing on our differences. So desiring to remain together means that we focus on the common ground as a beginning basis for our discussion. And any solutions that need to be sought to a particular issue that is being addressed seek to find the common ground in that issue around which we can all coalesce.... On occasion, there have been issues that we knew we could not do that with, and so we deferred the issue back to the individual member associations for their action. And that, by the way, is an area that we haven’t talked about, and that is a very, very convenient mechanism, particularly for... an issue comes up, like assessment, for example.

Interview 6:77

An example of sensitivity to the differing views of the FISA associations surfaced during the Coren and Coren debate over inclusion of same sex issues in the curriculum for BC schools. FISA was considering taking intervener status in this case, which was before the Human Rights Commission. The issue was discussed fully at a Board meeting on September 28, 2005, at which time it became clear that one association had a different view than the faith-based associations. During this debate, it was evident that the opinions were
deeply entrenched on both sides and resolution appeared remote. It was only after the dissenting association drew on the Independent School Act, Section 1, appealing to the mandate that independent schools had to protect against racial or ethnic superiority or persecution, religious intolerance or persecution, social change through violent action or sedition, that agreement was reached. None of these rights were violated by either side taking a different stand on same sex relationships. In the end, intervener status was not sought and independent schools were protected by their legislated right to teach students in each association from their own ideological perspective. This is expressed in the following dialogue:

We were certainly very sensitive to where that other association was coming from, and the ultimate resolution, I believe, was a nice balance of allowing FISA to achieve what the consensus group wanted, which was the ability to teach from a faith-based perspective, and if you think of the wording of that, it has absolutely no impact on the non-faith-based organization, which meant that they could do what they wanted to do. And in that particular case, that was very deliberate, because the dissenting group... not dissent; that’s a bad word... the group that had voiced its perspective on the issue which was different to the perspective of the majority of the members certainly were able to maintain their perspective and what they wished to do in their association. Interview 4:32
5.3 Time: The Ally of Consensus

The majority of issues discussed at the FISA Board have to do with political matters of policy and funding. Independent schools are generally in agreement with funding for their schools if this funding is not at the expense of school governance and independence. In fact, the recognition and independence of schools is the primary concern for Board members as they debate issues, not the funding of independent schools. Occasionally, issues arise that become a challenge for groups within FISA. For example, the question of whether to establish an ombudsperson role for FISA, or whether to have the independent school complaints handled by the provincial ombudsman, resulted in considerable debate. The Board could not achieve consensus on how a single FISA ombudsperson could adjudicate for each of the five associations in FISA. The consequence was to establish a representative committee that developed an ombudsperson role for each of the five associations under a single policy. However, this process took a number of months to complete before the five groups could agree on the language of the policy.

We don’t rush decisions. We take time, and we put things to committee. As well as that, because there is an ingrained respect for difference, and in fact, that’s the point, where difference occurs, it is not personalized, and it is viewed as an opportunity to learn, and perhaps to understand, that there must be a point of resolution regarding the difference. Interview 10:19

So, we speak for 92% of the [independent] schools, as opposed to just a number of them. And I think what typically happened
was...or, at least, it’s been my experience, that those issues just got hashed out over and over again, and if you could avoid, in some circumstances, having to take a position, or make a decision on that, because there was a bit too much dissension in the group, and you didn’t really have to, you might not. You might delay and put it off for six months, or come back to it again, or have a sub-committee study it, or try to understand the other perspectives a little bit more. Interview 2:65

Knowing the groups that are part of the coalition is important in enabling FISA to develop policy and initiate political action in support of independent schools. Recognition of different ideologies, respect for differing views, and a desire to build a common position where consensus can be achieved within the diversity of the five groups are important to group dynamics. Leaving specific issues to individual associations, referring contentious issues to sub committees for further study, discussing all angles of all issues thoroughly, and allowing for the passage of time all contribute to the development of consensus.

5.4 Beliefs and Values

The challenge for FISA was to bring the diverse independent schools together as a single entity in the province. Each group has its own set of purposes that are quite different from that of each other group. The ISA schools are committed to providing an education that will prepare students for university. The Catholic schools wish to ensure that their students are
provided with faith instruction from the Catholic Church. The Seventh-day Adventists desire no government intervention in their schools, assuming that such intervention might compromise the integration of faith issues into the educational program. The challenge was for FISA to reconcile these deeply held beliefs, the imperatives of which often led to widely diverging points of view, while developing strategies for achieving consensus within the organization.

The first challenge was to recognize and value each others’ philosophical and pedagogical differences. FISA members had to accept and value the uniqueness of its membership; without that recognition, there would be conflict between groups and individual members. FISA has succeeded in promoting that mutual respect through its policy of inclusion. As several members commented:

Everybody was always very respectful about each other’s philosophical privileges and pedagogical differences...I guess an accurate way to describe it is people celebrated those differences rather than focused on them...rather than it being the negative, it was seen as a positive. Interview 2:28

We don’t even have those discussions at the FISA Board table, where we really get into discussion how we’re different. But there’s just a real, genuine desire to feel, “I respect you. I want you to respect our independence; I will respect your independence in return.” Interview 7:6

Where there is a difference that arises from ideology, it tends to
be recognized, articulated, valued, and then it is interrogated as to what the governing principle might be that brings resolution.

Interview 10:21

Differences are not overlooked; they are recognized as such and the entitlement to hold particular views is protected, while the organization focuses on finding ways to encompass the essential elements of all members’ perspectives in a unified position.

5.4.1 Trust

Developing policies that encompass the diversity of the Board requires a high degree of trust. Five distinct associations of independent schools are represented on the FISA Board, each with its own particular set of beliefs and values. Trust was likely the most difficult aspect of group cohesiveness to achieve when FISA formed in 1966. However, a single act by the Catholic schools is considered to have been instrumental in uniting the independent schools in BC in a relationship of trust.

The Catholic schools represented the largest group of independent schools in the province. At the time FISA was formed, Catholic students comprised almost 70% of the total independent school enrollment in the province. Today, the Catholic schools represent 32% due to the greater proportion of growth in independent school enrolment in each of the non-Catholic associations within FISA. However, in the formation of the operating policies for FISA, the Catholics volunteered to weight their majority voice equally to the other, much smaller, associations. This concession is still seen by
current members of the Board as a model of gracious generosity which engendered trust, and is viewed by the other associations in FISA as one of the key factors that led to their willingness to collaborate. This meant that the Catholics were willing to accept the inequity of a membership fee based on enrolment and an association voice on the FISA Board based on equal standing for each group within FISA. As a result, the Catholic schools bore the greatest cost of operating the Federation while sharing equal representation with much smaller groups, though all groups recognized that the important issue was having a voice at the table, and that the eventual benefits of receiving partial government grants on a per pupil basis would address the inequity of membership fees, since groups with higher enrollment would receive more grants.

It has been told to me many times that when the Catholics did that and said, you know, equal votes, not by population,... that has been remembered, and that memory has been transmitted through the different generations that have been involved in FISA. And particularly, I hear that from the Christian groups, who say, “You know, ... when the Catholics did that, to them that was a sign that we can trust you.” Interview 4:73

And it was that particular move of the Catholics that, I think, more than anything else, engendered the level of trust that was needed by these various groups to really work together. Interview 6:46

This act at the formation of FISA brought cohesion to the group dynamic.
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AMG</th>
<th>CIS</th>
<th>ISA</th>
<th>SCS</th>
<th>ACSI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>14,905</td>
<td>3,159</td>
<td>1,665</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>12,783</td>
<td>20,944</td>
<td>10,919</td>
<td>10,062</td>
<td>9,544</td>
<td>64,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Percentage of FISA Enrolment by Each Group in 1969 and 2008.

The Catholics demonstrated what it meant to work collaboratively within diversity by forfeiting their right to a stronger voice on the Board, even though they had, and continue to have, the largest number of students in independent schools. This allowed all the groups within FISA an equal voice in the development of policy and practice for independent schools, and instantly created an atmosphere of trust, which still exists. Table 5.1 shows the initial distribution of FISA members at the formation of the Federation and the distribution in 2008-09. Enrolment numbers were drawn from the FISA website, April 2009. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The AMG group is comprised of all independent schools that do not have a provincial affiliation and are grouped together under one group as the Associate Member Group. At the founding of FISA, they represented only 4% of the total FISA membership, but that has changed over time. The AMG now represents 19% of the total FISA membership with 108 schools in the province. The largest group within the AMG is the Seventh-day Adventist group that currently has 20 schools and 1185 students in BC. This group is unable to form a new association because they do not yet meet the requirement of having 10% of the total enrolment within FISA,
as is required under the FISA bylaws. They currently hold 2% of the total enrolment within FISA. The founding Directors were aware of the diversity within the AMG group and provided an additional three Directors so that the diversity within the AMG could be better represented on the FISA Board.

5.4.2 Equality of Representation

An equal voice meant that larger groups would be given the same privileges as other groups that represented much smaller organizations. This principle of equality of representation continues to be practiced on the Board through an unwritten policy that calls for a representative from each of the five associations to sit on sub-committees of the Board. Each of the five associations is represented on the FISA Executive, and each association is represented on ad hoc sub-committees that develop FISA policy as specific issues arise. For example, when the FISA developed policy on procedural fairness for independent schools, representatives from each of the five groups worked together to draft the policy that was later adopted by the Board and subsequently implemented by independent schools in BC.

Bourdieu (1985) argues that there are real geographical spaces between members of a group, and some attempt by members to raise themselves above the others (p. 725) [11]. Hence, one should see evidence of members or groups attempting to take advantage of the economic or social capital that they bring to the table. This was not the case with the Catholic group. Instead, they chose to provide themselves only with the same amount of authority and representation granted to each other group in FISA.
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

The historical political activity of the Catholic schools in British Columbia includes confrontational political action with the government when the Catholics closed two schools in Maillardville in the 1950s, forcing 840 students into the public system, followed by a refusal to pay property taxes on school facilities, which resulted in an Amendment to the Municipal Act in 1957. The government felt pressured to make the policy change, which it blamed on the Catholic schools. In this context, it might be argued that the Catholic schools’ magnanimous gesture of taking an equal voice was as much an act of self-preservation in their attempt to gain funding and recognition, as it was an act of generosity leading to an effective strategy for consensus within the diverse independent school groups. On the other hand, the forfeiting of their majority rights within the group has been instrumental in closing the social space between members of the group, contributing to positive outcomes in group functioning as well as providing strength to move effectively in the social space between FISA and the government.

While equality of representation on the FISA Board appears to be ensured through socially constructed policies in the bylaws, there are two areas where equal representation may be called into question. The first is seen in the organizational policies for group formation and the second is observed in the frequency with which some associations appear to hold influential leadership positions within FISA.

The five associations are given equal representation on the Board, executive and sub-committees of the Board. However, if we examine the representation of the AMG group, only 7% of the total enrolment of FISA in 1969 was not aligned with a provincial association and therefore belonged to the
AMG. This grew to 19% in 2008, and the AMG now has the largest number of independent schools of the five associations, though not the largest total student enrolment.

Some Directors have suggested that the other four groups are advantaged over the fifth or AMG group:

I would say that we are disadvantaged, but only in the sense that we are very diverse as an AMG group. The SCS, for example, they can come, and... or the CIS, they come and they represent their whole big group, you know, with the policy direction that they would like to push on FISA, or whatever. Whereas AMG, we’re all different, and I think that... my personal opinion, is that we should have brought to the forefront, what was it five years ago, when your own association used to be part of the AMG, and had the constitution changed so that it would become its own member group. Because there are advantages, I think, of being your own member group, to just being a part of the Associate Member Group. So only in that way, can I say that there are advantages. Interview 17:5

The Associate Member Group, or AMG, is composed of independent schools that do not have the enrolment capacity to form their own group within FISA. Under FISA by-laws, a group must have a minimum of 10% of the total enrolment of FISA schools before it may form an independent group. New groups are formed at the discretion of the FISA Board under Bylaw 2.19. The schools within the AMG represent a broad range of ideological and
pedagogical perspectives and likely would not be able to develop a common position to be elevated to the FISA Board. Because of this, the members of the AMG group can be perceived as disadvantaged over the other groups of FISA and, by extension, the other groups may enjoy certain privileges denied to the AMG. Thus, equality of representation appears not to be occurring among the groups that comprise the AMG.

Some Directors have suggested that key leadership positions within FISA tend to be given to some groups more consistently than to others, which is a form of privilege. Despite the fact that the Catholic group voluntarily chose a membership structure that provided it with an equal voice regardless of its much larger enrolment, the number of times that the CIS has had a sitting President might suggest that benefits are extended to larger groups. Of the 11 Presidents that have served since 1966, 5 were from CIS (Catholic schools), 3 were from SCSBC (Christian Reformed), 2 were from ISA (university prep) and 1 was from AMG (various independent schools). An equally strong argument could be made that the presidency is filled by the most competent individual serving on the Board, since the position is elected through a democratic vote by members of the Board from all five associations. It is often the larger, well-organized independent school associations that have personnel who are able to include FISA as part of their duties; smaller schools are often too involved in their own administration to free up representatives for the FISA Board.

The concept of power was not raised directly during the interviews with FISA Directors, other than through the perception of the Seventh-day Adventist group that felt disadvantaged because their 20 schools were part
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

of a larger group of non-aligned schools, while other groups had their own provincial association. This suggests that there is a two-tiered structure within FISA. One tier involves the four provincially organized associations within FISA and the other tier involves all the rest of the independent schools in BC. The greatest degree of diversity falls within the AMG group which represents Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Montessori and Waldorf schools, special needs, first nations, and other faith-based schools. Under this paradigm, we see a structure that has equal representation by four independent school associations and an equivalent representation for those schools that appear marginalized due to their smaller size within a catch-all association of AMG.

To address this obvious disparity, FISA, under Policy 6.4, provided three additional Directors for the AMG so that the diversity of perspectives encompassed in the AMG group could be adequately represented on the FISA Board.

Of interest to this researcher is the fact that since the AMG group does not have its own association, comprised, as it is, of many disparate entities, FISA provides the AMG group with the services of the Executive Director of FISA as secretariat for the AMG group. A benefit of this strategy is that each AMG school is provided with a separate mailing of all FISA business, sent directly from the FISA office, while the other four groups are expected to disseminate the information through their own association leadership. This researcher has been associated with FISA through both the AMG and the ACSI groups, and has found the FISA communication to be more consistent while a member of AMG than as a member of one of the so-called advantaged groups.
Figure 5.2 shows the current FISA groups along with the percentage of students within each association. The AMG includes all independent schools that are not part of a provincially affiliated group and have an enrolment that is less than 10% of the total FISA enrolment.

Bourdieu’s thesis that agents within an organization tend to hold positions of authority according to the economic and social capital they possess is only partially supported by FISA’s operations. The more powerful and well organized independent school groups are given an equal representation on the Board to the smaller ones, and while historically they tend to hold positions of influence for greater periods of time than less organized independent school groups, the reasons for this phenomenon are likely more prosaic.
than Bourdieu would suggest.

On the other hand, all groups at some time derive a benefit from their association with FISA, and this may be one of the unintended serendipities of consensus. Just because a particular group does not enjoy exactly the same representation as another group, one cannot necessarily assume that FISA membership is more advantageous to one group than to another. Each group derives benefits consistent with the enrolment of its schools, which gives larger groups more resources than smaller groups. What is important is that all the groups working together ensure advantages for each group that they would not be able to attain or defend if they each had to work separately.

So, one might be tempted to say the Catholics get the greatest benefit. Then, you look at the schools in the ISABC, the prep schools, the ones where it costs $12,000 or $15,000 or $18,000 to attend, and where they would be subject to huge political pressure publicly....So one would be tempted to say that they get the most benefit. The Christian schools, with their evangelical sense, sometimes can attract attention for their beliefs regarding homosexuality, premarital sex, some of them have ministries which are perceived in the current climate as somewhat unusual, and again, they’re normalized. So perhaps they get the most benefit. So what I have concluded is that when everyone is getting some form of benefit, it becomes very difficult to argue that anyone is benefiting more than anyone else. Interview 10:15
By virtue of their association with FISA, individual schools or groups with unpopular ideological or socio-economic positions are protected against attacks from the public which might be hard for them to defend as separate entities. It is through the common representation by FISA that each group benefits from its membership in FISA. Public funding and special education grants are two examples of coalition benefits.

However, on an individual member basis, there is no evidence that one member is a beneficiary of some form of economic, social or cultural capital that is denied to another. Some have suggested that the lower representation of women on the Board would make men beneficiaries. The two women who were interviewed felt that members were treated equally and the lower representation of women was a reflection of the various choices made by the five associations comprising FISA and not the Board itself. The Board does not choose the members from the five associations; these are chosen by the independent schools within each association.

One benefit of having individual groups represented collectively is protection from attack in times of political action. When the government was considering redefining the way in which the grant was being given to independent schools, in effect reducing the grant by 3%, FISA collectively was able to use public and political pressure to have the decision reversed. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Political action instigated by a broad range of independent schools and associations makes it more difficult to attack an individual independent school’s values, such as university prep schools, where the public might not support public funding for families that can afford expensive independent school education. A combined effort
by all independent schools of all ideologies under the FISA umbrella reduces attacks on one specific independent school or group. Equality of representation ensures that association voices are heard and that the collective good of independent schools is protected through joint political action.

5.4.3 Respect for Diverse Beliefs

The diversity of FISA is largely a consequence of the many different value and faith-based independent schools that comprise the organization. Catholic, Christian Reformed, Mennonite, and Pentecostal faiths are present around the FISA table along with university prep schools, and Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, special needs, Montessori, and Waldorf schools are represented within the AMG group. It requires a significant amount of respect and tolerance for different value and faith groups to collaborate on the same Board. Bourdieu (1985) suggests an explanation for why these diverse groups may succeed in collaborating as they do, saying that diverse groups exercise a “conscious misunderstanding” by keeping issues that would lead to disagreement from emerging in the discourse [11]. Constructing the discourse on issues that the group has in common builds a stronger basis for consensus.

I think we had the right mix of people around the table. They were sent by their groups, of course, for what they believed in and how they expressed themselves, and so on, but they were very committed people. They may have had differences in religion, but they respected one another and said, “Well, what we have for ourselves we want for everybody. So this freedom of choice
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

that we are able to afford for our kids, we want for others…”

Interview 11:60

Independent schools exist because of a common belief that parents have the right to educate their children according to the values that they hold. In order to have someone of a different belief and value perspective support your own diversity, there must be an acceptance of reciprocity whereby the freedom that you expect for yourself must be defended for others. The FISA Directors understand that a respect for the beliefs and values of others encourages reciprocal responses, enabling the diversity of the various groups within FISA to collaborate on issues that they have in common. Respect for diversity may not be a value that most individuals bring to FISA; it is a value that is learned in the process of association and through the understanding that independence and diversity are sustained by the collective action of many who believe that independent school education within a democratic and pluralistic society is an essential element of the public good.

5.4.4 Organizational Values

As the representative of most BC independent schools, FISA has adopted some fundamental values or operating principles to guide its deliberations with external agencies. They begin with the right of parents to have the first right and responsibility for their children’s education. Connected to that value is the parents’ prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their child, as articulated in Article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These two values have been foundational
in the discourse with the government over public funding and recognition for independent schools from FISA’s inception. As one Executive Director stated:

That particular statement that you read (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights) is, in fact, one of the fundamental principles that FISA has adopted as its position around which we can coalesce, and to which we come back time and again in discussions on a variety of issues. Interview 6:28

In discussions with government representatives over funding and recognition leading to the initial support from the BC government in 1977, as well as in discussions that have occurred more recently, FISA has adopted a non-confrontational approach in dealing with government and other educational agencies. It is their belief that more can be accomplished through respectful dialogue than through aggressive lobbying against another organization. FISA was capable of aggressively defending itself against a potential funding loss when the government attempted to reduce funding by 5 million dollars in 2000. However, there were no protests or demonstrations, such as had been attempted by the Catholic schools organization prior to the formation of FISA. In addition, the FISA pursues a policy of transparency when dealing with political parties and government agencies. Any presentation or brief to government is shared with the governing party and opposition parties alike, in a calm and quiet manner.

We were open, which again, BCTF is not. Both the years, whenever we made a presentation, a political presentation to someone
in power, we made exactly the same brief; we presented exactly
the same brief to the opposition parties in the house. In fact,
the brief would be addressed to the government, but we brought
copies to the official opposition and said, “This is what we have
just presented to the government.” This is what they said to
us in response. We just kept them totally advised of what was
happening, when, and how, so that they would never say to us,
“Well, you know, you’re not keeping us informed, and so we’re
caught off guard…” Interview 11:32

But you know, I hope you know that these are all good peo-
ple. [The Executive Director], of course, I think is a very good
Director for FISA. I think we’ve been very careful when we’ve
had issues with government agencies, been extremely careful to
be respectful and follow appropriate processes and procedures
when addressing those issues with various government civil ser-
vants. We have been careful not to put them on the spot. We’ve
been careful not to embarrass them in front of their Ministers.
You know, things like that. And of course, from the schools’ per-
spective, I think the schools see results. You know, the special
education funding comes to mind as one of the big things that
was very helpful recently. Interview 17:14

The FISA strategy of protecting the integrity of bureaucrats in front of
their Ministers is important in its policy for political action. By developing
a relationship with members of the provincial bureaucracy, FISA is able to
gain support for its proposals to support independent schools. The policy of building relationships extends to the Minister of Education as well, where FISA was thoroughly prepared for meetings, recognizing that the Minister had other educationally important issues to address. If the response was unfavourable, FISA accepted the response and was prepared to wait for a time when the government might be able to address the concern. Special needs funding is an example where FISA waited for four years to get 100% funding for special needs children.

I have personally been at a number of meetings where, afterwards, after the FISA reps leave, the comment of the Minister is to say, “This is the first delegation this month that a group has had the decency to express appreciation to me for things which the Ministry has done.” Here’s another one. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all of the groups who came were this prepared and could present things so clearly with the arguments.” There have been Ministers that have said to FISA delegations, “I look forward to meeting with you again.” Not politely, like you might say, but genuinely, just because there hasn’t been the antagonism that a number of groups come in to speak to government with. Interview 19:3

A consistent strategy of non-partisan political action has enabled FISA to establish a good working relationship with different political parties that have formed government in the province at various times. This strategy has been applied during provincial elections, when the FISA has worked
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

with all candidates and political parties to determine their position on independent school education, and then communicated this information to the school communities throughout BC. FISA has never supported one party over another, or one candidate over another, on the basis of their political affiliation; only on the basis of their support, or lack of support, for independent schools.

5.5 Personal Identities

Groups are not able to accomplish tasks without the actions of individuals who are part of the group. Argyris (1999) has argued that organizational learning occurs when individuals speak and act for the organization, and when this action is a representation of the purpose of the group [6]. This logic can be applied to FISA, where representation of the five diverse associations is made to external agencies by one or two people, usually the Executive Director and the Board President. It has been FISA’s practice to include a representative from each of the associations when presenting a brief to government on behalf of FISA.

Before FISA is ready to take a policy position to an external agency, a considerable amount of debate occurs in committees and around the FISA Board table. It is often at this level that the personal identities of FISA Directors emerge, generally as a means of strengthening the FISA policy position, but occasionally as a dissenting voice on policy recommendations. How does FISA deal with the unique personal identities on the FISA Board? To explore this aspect of consensus building, I will examine Directors’ qual-
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

ifications, the process of consensus, privileges of members, and leadership.

5.5.1 Directors’ Qualifications

The interviews indicate that the Directors consider the individuals around the Board table who are representing their particular association to be highly professional and highly qualified people. Some suggested that the strength of character typical of Board members was as a result of constantly having to define marginalized positions as independent school leaders, which caused them to become highly outspoken and articulate for a cause. Others suggested that associations select their best leaders to represent their cause on the FISA Board. In any event, it was recognized that strong voices were evident on the FISA Board.

It was also suggested that all the Directors representing associations have in common the desire to protect parental choice in education and to defend the place of independent education in this province. This common belief serves as a stabilizing force when building a strategy for consensus. As well, the leadership of FISA is acknowledged as being skilled in guiding the conversations at the FISA table to ensure that the discussions do not deviate into divisive issues.

But you have to have people that are willing to focus on the issues at hand in a way that puts their egos in their back pocket. You cannot have people who have to win the debate for the sake of winning the debate because that is necessary to their ego. Those kinds of people will destroy your organization. Interview
We understand enough to contain messages from people, to value the person. Those critical attributes of cooperative learning function at our Board. But, possibly, when I think about FISA, I also want to bring to mind the relationship between the individual Directors, separate from organizations, okay, and their role on that Board. When I look around there, I don’t see people who have chosen the easy path. I don’t see people who’ve said, “Well, everybody thinks like this, so I should think like that.” In their own individual lives, they have led lives of constant choice to perhaps be different than a mainstream. When we come together, the recognition of kindred spirits, the recognition that someone believes something strongly enough that they have retained their independence, I believe is a strong contributor to how the Board functions. Interview 10:41

There have been very strong characters from different groups represented around that table. Very strong. Very outspoken individuals. Very powerful within their own organizations that have been representatives to FISA. But somehow, here we come again, the leadership in FISA, even with those strong voices, has been able to channel the discussion, the end result of the meeting, back to the core purposes of the existence of FISA, and to kind of marginalize the strong characters, but also the strong expressions, or promotions, even at that meeting, to kind
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

of marginalize those issues that don’t fit under the main objective of FISA. Interview 19:16

The Directors bring a large amount of social and cultural capital with them from the group of schools that they represent. Bourdieu (1985) suggests that this should translate into varying degrees of power within FISA [11], but this does not appear to be the case. Evidence of competitiveness, envy and disunity are not present. It appears that the common values that have been adopted by all the FISA member organizations, centering on parental choice in education, independent education, and government recognition appear to stabilize the different forms of power that could be present. It also appears that the leadership of FISA consciously works towards mitigating situations where conflict could occur, by limiting the agenda to issues of common concern.

Gender also does not appear to be a factor in members feeling inclusive in their role as Directors. One of the five Directors on the executive is a woman and there are two women currently on the Board. The 40 year history of FISA has seen representation from both genders, including senior positions within the organization. Molly Boucher was named the first President of the Federation of Independent Schools in Canada in 1980, and also served as FISA President in 1980, Vice-President in 1978-79 and again in 1981-83 (Cunningham, 2002, p. 239) [17].
5.5.2 An Ability to Collaborate

Collaboration is an expectation of each Director on FISA. It is difficult to explain this understanding in any other way than to read the expressions from the members themselves. There is a ‘buy-in’ that the purpose of FISA takes a higher priority than any other issue that individual groups may be experiencing. I referred to this earlier as a “conscious adaptation of perspective.” It appears to be a deeply-held value of the members of the organization which has developed over time and is actively defended at the expense of personal freedoms. The following quotations give credence to this suggestion:

People around the table, the Board table, would always ask themselves, “What’s best for independent schools generally, in the province of British Columbia?” as opposed to just, “What’s best for my particular organization?” Interview 2:13

And there’s a certain calmness around this table, where we listen carefully to people, you’re respected, and your bottom line, we’re going to be here to protect the independence of each stakeholder around this table. Interview 7:2

It’s just an unbelievable working relationship. You know, when you sit on a Board, you sit on a committee, you’re giving of your time, and quite often we’re busy. But you always come back from these meetings, at least, I should say the vast majority - you come back and you say, you know, it’s been a professional development opportunity. You know, I’ve rubbed shoulders with
professionals, they provide me with perspective, and you realize that some of the issues of your own community are not unique, you know, that we have so much in common, and to share, and to encourage others with, that the differences just fade into the background. Interview 7:5

Directors appear to understand that consensus would not be possible without an acknowledgement that each person has to work together with the other if the purposes of FISA are to be achieved. The overall purpose of independent schools forms the basis of collaboration and this is achieved through a desire to meet the needs of each stakeholder on the Board. Some consider the meetings as an ideal place to network with other professionals who are encountering similar challenges in independent school education.

5.5.3 People and the Process of Consensus

Despite the strong personalities on the FISA Board, there is a conscious effort, on the part of the leadership and on the part of the members themselves, to find a solution with which all can agree. The leadership controls which issues are brought for discussion according to criteria of inclusiveness, and the desire to come to a mutually agreeable solution is a deeply-held value that allows individuals to find common ground on issues. All of this is done with a deep respect for differences and an acknowledgement that the views of one’s own association may need to be defended by FISA colleagues in the future. The ultimate goal which keeps members at this table is the protection of the right of independent schools to remain independent within
a free and democratic society.

I think FISA prides itself on being able to achieve consensus. I think they work hard to do that. I think any group wanting to dissociate themselves would be a little bit hypocritical if they thought that they wanted FISA to continue lobbying for them, so they would be reluctant to disassociate themselves and yet want FISA to support them in other areas. Interview 18:18

It is important to understand the process of consensus in the context of FISA. The final position adopted by the organization is not the dominant view that is held by the Director with the most persuasive argument. It is not the position endorsed by the majority of Directors. Nor is it a position driven by fear, such as loss of funding. It is a position that is developed through the active participation of each group voicing their suggestions and concerns. All individual positions are heard, and the consensus position is a distillation of all the aspects of the various positions of the individual groups upon which all the groups of the Federation can agree. Conscious misunderstanding is exercised so that the points of difference are respected and excluded from the common position. Individual parties or groups are not required to abandon their respective beliefs and values. Rather, all participants engage in discourse until a consolidated position that is inclusive of the perspectives of all those associations that have an opinion on the issue can be reached.

The first is, this is such a tremendously cohesive group with common interests and they have such wonderful discussions at
the table that everyone comes alongside and understands the greater good; or they never take a position that’s controversial to the membership. The positions they take are at such a high level, nobody can really sign off. Interview 9:26

Mouffe (2005) argues that there are dangers in the consensus model. She suggests that, within domestic politics, the established parties fail to put forward significant alternatives that reflect the different perspectives in society, resulting in the centrist position common in the context of consensus politics so prevalent today. The blurring of the frontiers between the left and the right, and the absence of an agonistic debate among democratic parties deprives voters of the possibility of identifying with a differentiated range of democratic political identities. This, according to Mouffe, creates a void that is filled by other forms of identification which could become problematic within the democratic process. The elimination of individual identities leads to other forms of identity, often in the form of extreme left or right views. “There is no consensus without exclusion, no ‘we’ without a ‘they’ and no politics is possible without the drawing of a frontier” (p. 73) [62].

Bickford (1996) advocates for active listening where we focus on the speaker. “It involves an active willingness to construct certain relations of attention, to form an ‘auditory Gestalt’ in which neither of us, as parts of the whole structure, has meaning without the other” (p. 24) [10]. Listening involves a commitment to playing an active role in the process of finding a solution to a conflict. Her concern that the marginalized in society are not
given a voice to be heard in a democratic process that tends to represent only the powerful is similar to Mouffe’s in that the perspectives of some people in any given group are not considered or included in the decisions of the group.

Experience suggests that active listening is a rare commodity, and we tend to ‘hear’ only what is consistent with the position we already endorse. Also, individuals who express themselves fluently and frequently tend to exercise more power in a group than those who are more reticent or inchoate in communicating their opinions because the former can more easily persuade others to agree with their positions. I have experienced a considerable quantity of active listening within FISA and have observed a sincere respect for the views and values of others; but there is also a conscious effort to remove from the table items that fall outside of the organizational purpose of FISA: that is, its political agenda, its goal to strengthen understanding and cooperation between independent schools, its efforts to promote high standards in independent schools and to act in an administrative capacity for independent schools in BC (See discussion in Ch 5.1). Outside of this mandate, there is a conscious misunderstanding on issues that are unique to a particular group and a respective resolve to move such issues to those groups for resolution.

I think you’ve accurately portrayed that situation where strong personalities tended to put their views forward, but what I was very aware of, was at the end of the day there was an attempt in all of the discussion to find resolution. There was not an...
organizational strategies and policies of consensus-building

Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

attempt to place people on opposite sides of an issue. There was an attempt at finding resolution. Okay, I may not agree with you on your side of the table, okay, so how do we bring this to some form of consensus? Which I was extremely impressed with.

Interview 7:13

Mouffe and Bickford make compelling arguments that reflect the politics of the democratic process in a democracy. However, FISA is not a political party, but an advocacy group acting on behalf of several diverse independent schools. As a non government organization, FISA recognizes the individual identities of the different groups within the coalition and does not silence their voices. Inclusive strategies to ensure that the perspectives of all associations are considered and that policy development reflects the needs of all groups are employed. There is therefore no need for individual groups to emphasize their individual values. This need is fulfilled in the independent associations to which the Directors belong.

Voluntary organizations operate differently than political processes in a democratic society. Bourdieu (1985) [11] refers to the distinction made by Marx between a “class-in-itself” and a “class-for-itself”. The former is seen as a deterministic process where agents move from one field to another based on subjective factors determined by themselves and their location. To illustrate, we may be defined as citizens of British Columbia, or of Vancouver, or of the UBC community, depending upon which sector of society is the reference point for identification. The latter is seen as a political action by a group in order to achieve its purposes. Its agents tend to be voluntarists
who choose to be a part of the group. Political action groups, NGOs, service clubs and church organizations are some examples of class-for-itself entities.

The distinction between class-in-itself and class-for-itself is important when considering the operations of FISA. It could be argued that differences are not recognized within the FISA Board since there is a conscious limiting of issues that are brought for discussion. It might appear that marginalized voices are being silenced as opposed to being heard. However, by limiting the agenda to issues around which the different groups of independent schools can agree and focusing the group’s attention on a limited number of major themes which affect everyone in the group, the likelihood of keeping this diverse group together increases. The overarching goal of defending each group’s right to exercise its individual differences is the common attribute shared by all members of FISA, even though there may be little social contact among them outside of the political action involving independent schools. FISA supports the principle of right to diversity for independent schools and encourages specific issues that are unique to a particular group or school to be processed within that community. To ask the collective diverse group of independent schools to adopt policies that are unique and important to individual groups or schools would create a dysfunctional coalition. There must be a limiting of issues to those upon which diverse groups can agree. Bourdieu (1985) [11] suggests that, within volunteer groups, one might observe a conscious discourse that would facilitate discussion of those issues around which the groups can agree or achieve consensus while limiting discourse on those that might challenge the groups ability to achieve consensus. (see discussion in Chapter 3.3).
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

An analogy to how a family interacts might illustrate this principle. Each member of the family spends his or her day in different pursuits. The children go to school, the father goes to his job, and the mother to hers. In the evening, when they gather around the dinner table, each member of the family might choose an anecdote or two of general interest to share with the others, or solicit opinions concerning a problem he or she needs to solve, but at least 90% of what each individual has experienced during the course of the day never makes it to the dinner table. The presence or absence of conflict in family discussions is a matter of style, not of comprehensiveness, in communication. Family members instinctively filter out those items of conversation which will not be of general interest, which are of no particular importance, or which they do not wish other family members to know about, according to criteria which often have nothing to do with stimulating conflict or harmony.

The original Directors of FISA were cognizant of the necessity for cooperation and goodwill, and developed specific policies and purposes around which all the different independent school groups could agree. These purposes are documented in the Constitution of FISA. In my view, it is doubtful if FISA would be in existence today without these organizational policies. Bickford (1996) refers to John Rawls’s theory that “we need a public identity that is constituted by what enables us to agree: our capacity for reasoning our way to the principles of justice that ensure we can cooperate socially and yet pursue our divergent conceptions of the good” (p. 8) [10]. Rawls suggests that concepts of the good are connected to one’s community and that conflicts about these conceptions are often precluded from politics, not
because they are unimportant, but because they are too important and they are not likely to be resolved politically. This would reflect the views of FISA, where the purpose of limiting the agenda is specifically intended both to protect the independence of the groups and schools that are members of the Federation, and to ensure that communication around the table is not disrupted by territorial issues.

In effect, FISA is recognizing the right of independent schools to reflect their unique values and is respectful of them. It recognizes the importance of these values to individual school associations and encourages issues that are unique to one association to be dealt with by that association. Consensus becomes possible within FISA by narrowing the agenda to issues such as relations between independent schools and government, where there is a strong likelihood of a common position within the independent school associations. In so doing, FISA has developed a sustainable framework for consensus within a voluntary coalition of independent school associations.

Policy development becomes a collaborative effort by the five associations through the discourse that begins from an idea or concern, advances to the executive committee representing the five associations, extends to subcommittee study groups if needed, and ends with a position of consensus at the Board level. This position is then brought back to each association for adoption in its own policy structure. This powerful strategy of inclusiveness appears to stabilize any dissent from diverse groups within FISA, and forms the core of all operating principles that guide FISA in political action and policy development. The strategy of inclusiveness is critical in inducing collaboration among a diverse coalition of associations. When combined
with a narrowing of the issues discussed to those that affect all five groups, consensus is achievable on virtually all issues.

But, I think, with FISA leadership continually narrowing the discussion and decisions to come back to the heart purpose of FISA to retain the independency of the independent schools and to promote independent schools and their voice in the province, it’s that narrowing of focus that there have been very few issues, that there could not then be the consensus of the differing member groups. Interview 19:12

This last comment cannot be ignored. Not just any issue can be brought to the Board for discussion. Given the diversity of values and philosophical perspectives, it would be very difficult to give free rein to any topic of interest. It is the narrowing of focus around the principles on which FISA is founded that contributes to achieving consensus within the diversity of the coalition.

5.5.4 Leadership

Leadership is also cited by the majority of Directors interviewed as an important factor in achieving consensus. It takes a specific skill to guide discussions of professional, independent educators towards agreement on policy or political action. Hrebener and Scott (1990) [48] suggest that leadership is important in the success of interest groups, and Truman (1971) [77] confirms that diverse groups would not exist if the effectiveness of the leadership is not evident. Two factors are significant here, the first of which is the con-
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

tinuity of leadership provided by both Directors and Executive Directors during the past 40 years, which has provided a stable environment for discussions among the diverse BC independent schools. While new schools are being added regularly and others are closing, FISA has provided a consistent voice on behalf of independent schools, particularly in representation to the government. Despite changes in leadership within independent schools and the FISA groups, the government connection to FISA has remained constant through a stable Executive Directorship within a changing independent school landscape and through various governments of different political ideologies.

I think that the Executive Director of FISA has had a remarkably significant role, and the various Executive Directors have had a significant role, in keeping this as a stable organization, focused on its mission. Therefore, one threat I see, is one of continuity and transition. Our current Executive Director, while he may not retire for four or five or six or seven or eight years, will retire.

Interview 10:36

The second factor is that effective leadership of a diverse group is required to engage each member in the discourse so that all feel valued and feel they are making a contribution to a worthy cause. Given the strong nature of the Directors represented by the five groups, it takes a considerable amount of skill to guide discussion on contentious issues, such as membership of non-conforming independent schools within FISA, to a productive recommendation that all can endorse. The roles of the President and the
Executive Director, and to a lesser degree the FISA officers, are instrumental in keeping the agenda of FISA focused on the primary purpose of the organization.

This is unusual for an organization, and I think, when you look at the leadership, when I speak about an organization being able to stay focused, you know, presenting its [positions] calmly, giving good rationale for the arguments, it’s also kind of the leadership style. Those that have been leaders of the organization, so that’s very interesting, that you have a personal leadership style that has been uninterrupted for a number of years, and that’s also a contributing factor, I’m sure, in FISA being able to stay that focused as an organization with that kind of diverse group.

Interview 19:21

Several aspects of leadership appear to influence the cohesiveness of FISA. Interviews suggest that the Directors who are elected by their associations to represent the group’s cause on the FISA Board are themselves very strong leaders. They, in turn, must learn to understand the nature and purpose of FISA in order to be effective contributing members. (This aspect of leadership will be discussed later under tacit learning.) In the process, they must determine what issues are appropriate for discussion within the diversity of the FISA membership, and be able to show leadership in evaluating the role of FISA and the role of the individual associations or groups. The coalition is dependent on a narrowing of concepts in order for consensus to be achieved.
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

When issues are discussed, the leadership of FISA must guide the discussion of a strong leadership group towards consensus by ensuring that all five groups have contributed to the policy or position being discussed. This is accomplished by narrowing the issues or conscious misunderstanding that occurs between the Executive Director and the Board President, and by processing with the Executive Board what should be included in each Board meeting. At this level, the Executive Board considers the potential challenges that might come from certain Board Directors and prepares a leadership response in anticipation of any challenge. Most of this is done informally, but on highly charged topics such as the inclusion of same sex relationship issues into the BC curriculum, a formal strategy is developed.

Finally, the meeting itself is “managed” by a skilled President and Executive Director who have a strong system knowledge due to the length of their time in leadership and their own personal ability to guide the discussion. They have the skill to allow freedom in discussion, but are able to keep the conversation centred on the issue as it relates to independent schools, and not allow it to degenerate into defending personal opinions.

The primary goals of FISA are paramount when determining what is acceptable for further debate and what needs to go back to the individual associations for resolution. Therefore, consensus strategies are achieved through a narrowing of ideas, or conscious misunderstanding, as Bourdieu suggests, that is guided by the four purposes established in the FISA Constitution.
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

5.6 External Variables

There are both internal and external issues that can challenge the cohesion of a diverse group. I have discussed how the philosophies and ideologies that form the five groups within FISA could limit the ability of the organization to collaborate. The impact of external variables can be just as divisive in certain circumstances, yet highly unifying in others. I will consider several aspects of FISA’s interaction with external agencies that impact its consensus strategies.

5.6.1 Relationship with Government

Loss of public funding would have a devastating effect on the ability of independent schools to survive. Independent school funding is potentially at risk at any time should the government decide to change its policy on funding, and this tension serves as a homogenizing force for independent schools. But the need to belong extends beyond funding to supporting a community that believes in the same values of choice within education. Independent schools believe in choice, but they themselves must make a choice on protecting their independence and the right to choose, or forfeiting that right to the government in exchange for greater funding. While there may be a common enemy in government, there may be an equally common enemy within the independent school movement itself on just what school authorities have already given up in the form of accountability to government through the monitoring of instructional programs and what they are prepared to give up for additional funding.
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

What I’m trying to say is if the threat, real or perceived, disappears, then some of the reasons for the cohesiveness is gone. So if there was a generally perceived notion that, you know, the government is not a threat. There are no regulatory things to worry about. There are no funding things to push for. Then, why would I belong to FISA? As long as government’s out there, that common enemy that all independent schools share, FISA will be successful. And FISA, the reason why FISA, in my opinion, is also successful in being reasonably cohesive is because, if I allow government to take a shot at you, then that sets a precedent for government taking a shot at me. Interview 9:34

On the other hand, if funding of independent schools became generally accepted and taken for granted, there is a risk that apathy might infiltrate the independent school movement, which has depended heavily on parental support for the cost of tuition, land and buildings. When the struggle diminishes, the need for involvement by parents in independent schools also diminishes, and commitment to independent education diminishes correspondingly. Independent schools were built by communities who felt that education and families’ values should be taught to children by teachers who believed in the same values. This desire involved sacrifice for communities that pooled their resources in order to build a school. If funding were to become guaranteed, the deep commitment that brought independent schools into existence would itself be at risk. Willingness to support the cause of independent schools is an important external factor in maintaining indepen-
dent school education.

When parents are increasingly taking the position that, you could say, as consumers, rather than a deep commitment, which is not only about tuition dollars, but participation in the organization, volunteering, capital drives, and so on. Building an independent school, a strong independent school, is about building a community, certainly as much as it is about what happens inside the classroom. Interview 5:22

More funding would create more access to independent schools and all of those things would be good. The nagging question is that, in getting more funding, will we lose some of that grassroots support from our current and future families in terms of willingness to still support the cause? Interview 8:6

It is unlikely that government funding to independent schools will ever cease, due to the staggering cost of integrating 11% of BC students into the public system. Therefore, while the threat of losing public funding serves as an effective strategy for consensus within FISA, the services that the FISA schools provide for the children of the province are of significant benefit to the public purse and confer upon FISA a considerable amount of economic capital in its interactions with government agencies. Attractive as this power position seems, complacency can be as strong a threat to an organization as external attack. If the necessity of uniting against a common external enemy to defend independent schools’ right to exist, be recognized, and be funded from the public purse were to disappear, the removal of that external threat
could result in concomitant loss of commitment and support from within the independent school movement, as per the comments cited above in Interview 8:6 and Interview 5:22.

5.6.2 Perceived External Threat to FISA

External challenges to an organization’s right to public funding and recognition are an effective motivator towards collaboration within a diverse group. The challenges to public funds for independent schools, while not addressing the issue of the legitimacy of independent schools within a democratic, pluralistic society, do unite the organization. The stronger the threat, the more determined will be the resistance or political action from FISA. The strongest resistance to independent school funding has come from some unions, the BC Teacher’s Federation and the NDP. Formally, some of the unions, particularly CUPE, have opposed us. But it would be interesting to see which members of CUPE send their children to independent schools, but formally, as organizations, CUPE opposes us fairly strongly. They just, a year or so ago, just prior to the last election, they put out an extensive booklet arguing against support for independent schools. The BC Teacher’s Federation is philosophically opposed to our existence. In terms of funding, they will claim that they have no problem with our right to exist. But they vehemently oppose any funding. I don’t know quite how you could disentangle the two. But that’s another philosophical argument. The official stance of
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

the NDP party, - as opposed to the stance that the leaders take during elections, in which case the leaders say that they would continue to support the funding of independent schools, - while the official party resolutions that come out of their annual conventions oppose the funding of independent schools. Interview 6:88

Because there is this common enemy called government, and because government has such amazingly sweeping powers to change the face of independent education in the province in a heartbeat, and because governments - even governments that are ostensibly for independent schools still have interests that are different from necessarily the interests of independent schools, FISA is successful because it is an organization that represents the interests of independent schools against government. And as long as government’s out there, that common enemy that all independent schools share, FISA will be successful. Interview 9:3

In focusing on its goals of choice in education, funding and recognition, FISA encounters organizations in the same social space that oppose independent schools. The political landscape is shared by organizations that support some aspects of independent schools (the right to exist) but not others (public funding). Independent schools are seen as organizations that are taking students out of the public sector into parochial and denominational or segregated schools where the government has no control over how the curriculum is taught. They argue that independent schools have the right
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

to exist but not with the support of public funds. At the same time, they say that the public system is value neutral and that all citizens, including those who send their children to independent schools, have the responsibility to fund the public educational system. This conflict through political antagonism requires FISA to be aware of the political landscape and to be prepared to respond to such challenges. There are many fields, according to Bourdieu (1985) [11], within a same social space that operate, in many cases with the same agents, and political prudence mandates that FISA recognize the challenges through reasoned responses that defend its right to exist.

As long as public funding is being directed to independent schools, the threat exists that it can be taken away. At the same time, if the funding were to increase beyond the 35% and 50% levels, there is also the risk that government could rightfully demand greater involvement in the governance of independent schools and in the accountability to the public for the way in which education is being delivered. The autonomy of independent schools is particularly important to several groups within FISA.

My sense is they would want to make sure we were not on a road to losing our autonomy, and when I look at the Coren and Coren stuff, you know that, that obviously do not affect us, but it has raised some ripples in my community, and you know, what are we going to have to do governance-wise if we’re going to continue to accept money. And the 50% seems to me as a...you know, I can fully justify doing something according to our beliefs and values, because 50% of the money is our own money. But once
our money is only 30%, or 20%, I can see problems with that.

Interview 17:25

When faith values and individual rights come in conflict with one another, then faith-based independent schools have some challenging issues to resolve. Had faith-based schools been required to include same-sex issues in the curriculum, many of them would have seen their faith values threatened and a legislated mandate to include same-sex issues in the curriculum would have resulted in a loss of autonomy that would have “raised ripples in many communities.”

Finally, the risk of a challenge under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms looms over independent schools that hold to faith and values that appear to be in conflict with legal rights provided in Canadian law. Same sex marriages are legal in Canada, but many faith-based groups are unable to endorse this view on religious grounds. If funding were dependent on a school’s endorsement of an individual right that was contradictory to its beliefs, how would that affect the unity of independent schools, especially when there are independent school groups that support same sex marriages? This issue could be one of the most challenging for FISA in the future in its practice of consensus building.

But I think some of the greater issues that will attack independent schools will be issues around charter decisions that will be outside of our jurisdiction. Will there ever come a day when FISA would take a case to the Supreme Court of Canada? Interview 8:3
These perceived external threats serve as a catalyst for consensus in that they provide the rationale for FISA to remain united and to work collaboratively as a coalition of independent schools. The manner in which FISA deals with external agencies is equally important to its consensus strategies.

5.7 Tacit Learning

Bourdieu (1985) [11] suggests that it is by means of the work of representation that agents constantly impose their views of the world or their view of their position in the world, commonly called their social identity. This acquired knowledge of who we are in relation to other organizations within our community is what Bourdieu refers to as a self-perception or habitus. It is the compass that we use to guide our direction and representation to the broader community.

The definition of a member of FISA, and by extension, a member of an independent school association, was formulated in the initial policies adopted by the founding Directors in 1966. This document, called the Constitution and By-laws of FISA, defines what it means to be a member of the coalition, as well as what the coalition stands for. FISA maintains the position that independent school education has a place in a democratic, pluralistic society. The principles of FISA’s existence center on a parent’s right to the kind of education of their choice (Article 26, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights) [64] and the belief that government has the obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, whether in the public or independent system.
Chapter 5. Organizational Strategies and Policies of Consensus-Building

These values were adopted unanimously in 1966 and they still serve as the foundation for FISA’s existence. It is also apparent that these values are being learned by incoming Directors as the old guard is replaced with new members. The tenure of most Board members extends for many years, making it relatively easy for new members to incorporate the values of the organization simply by listening to the discourse.

I think it all goes back to the process of acculturation, where, in ’66, those five people came together, and they came to an unwritten agreement, and said, “We are all this together...we’re in this together, and we’re in this equally together.” And then, as they replaced people, you know, the founding fathers left, new people came in, they fit into the culture that was there. And now, 2007, 41 years later, the culture still prevails. It is something that is created from within. It’s conscious...it’s both conscious and unconscious, but yet, it happens. And in some cases, it’s deliberately taught, as you just described in the case of the Catholic schools. In other cases, it’s learned. As new people join the association, they start to understand the dynamics of the group, and they understand what is acceptable, and what is not acceptable. Interview 4:56

The “conscious adaptation of perspective” serves as a means of transforming one Director’s perspective as he or she adopts the views of another, and is the same process that occurs in the acculturation process. New members learn to represent the organization in the same manner as did previous Directors.
Group dynamics, philosophies, and shared values become common to all Directors on the Board.

It takes a tremendous amount of trust to be able to work collaboratively with groups of people with whom one might not normally associate. For the Catholics and the Calvinists to be able to set their differences aside in the interests of independent school education requires trust and a willingness to accept differences. There is a delightful story documented by Cunningham (2002) in regard to the relationship between Father J.V. O’Reilly, an Irish priest, and Walter van der Kamp, the Dutch principal of William of Orange Christian School, who became two of the Federation’s strongest personalities. At one early meeting, Father O’Reilly motioned towards van der Kamp and said with a twinkle in his eye, “Excuse me, but would you mind if I wring the neck of that Orangeman?” (p. 82) [17]. This was a cheeky reference to the anti-Catholic Orangemen of Ireland and not at all a reference to van der Kamp. In fact, despite their diverse backgrounds, the Irish priest and the “Orangeman” became good friends. The students of William of Orange School ran bottle and paper drives to raise much-needed funds to support a Catholic mission in Africa operated by Father O’Reilly’s sister.

Such stories emerged again and again as Directors from different faith groups and pedagogical perspectives set their differences aside for the good of independent schools and for the personal and corporate friendships that developed. This collegiality, respect and trust are as evident today as they were at the inception of FISA.

I think the personalities, in some ways, become the identity of
FISA, and you can’t separate FISA from the people that sit around that table, and I think because there’s a genuine sense of wanting to work together and collegiality that has developed over the years as new people come onto the Board. Interview 8:1

FISA was formed of all these varying groups and they had a common purpose, which was to get funding and to deal with a government that was aggressively opposed to funding, etc., right? Everyone was willing to put aside their differences for that common fight. And they got used to putting aside their differences. And that became the culture of the group. And as long as the group continues with having some kind of corporate culture, if you will, and memory of that culture, that’s fine. The biggest threat might well be to have a holus-bolus change of Directors where no one remembers from where FISA came. Interview 9:38

Is this corporate memory taught consciously? Most would say not, but some Directors have suggested that the executive of FISA is fully aware of the history of FISA and of the need to limit the discourse to issues around which the Directors can agree. Without this conscious control or some other effective approach to achieving consensus, the discourse could quickly degenerate into issues that would divide rather than unify.

This socially constructed discourse built around the issues that the diverse groups of FISA have in common, results in agreement on those policies around which the groups can agree. At the same time, by limiting
the dialogue to issues of funding, parental choice and independent school recognition and policy development, excellence in education and publicity, the five groups are able to achieve consensus on the vast majority of issues debated. Through effective leadership, the agenda is protected by the Executive Board from raising issues that could be contentious and lead to group segregation on these issues. On such occasions, the Executive Director is very careful to bring the focus back to the mandate of FISA as articulated in the founding policies. Should issues reach an impasse, the Board moves the item to sub-committees made of members from each of the five groups to arrive at an acceptable recommendation that can then be brought back to the full Board.

That early Board understood intuitively, and continues to be understood to this day, that because we are so diverse, we could pull ourselves apart very quickly by focusing on our differences.

Interview 6:74

Thus we see that the equal representation of the five associations within FISA has led to a model for consensus that provides inclusiveness for each group at every level of discourse, including Board and Executive representation, sub-committee participation, external agency presentation and member equality. In the next chapter, I will explore how the strategies of consensus led to political action with the government on issues of funding and recognition of independent school education in British Columbia.
Chapter 6

Political Action on
Government Funding for
Independent Schools

...we need a public identity that is constituted by what enables
us to agree – our capacity for reasoning our way to the principles
of justice that ensure we can cooperate socially and yet pursue
our divergent conceptions of the good. (Susan Bickford, 1996)

In the previous chapter, the interviews of past and present Directors of
FISA and several government bureaucrats were analyzed, to determine what
strategies FISA uses in achieving consensus among the diverse groups of
independent schools that comprise the Federation. This chapter will explore
four distinct periods in the history of FISA when the organization applied
its strategies of consensus to political action for the purpose of procuring
public funding for independent schools. I will begin this chapter by reflecting
on the work of Shapiro (1986) regarding the arguments for and against the
public funding of independent schools. An historical context will then be
provided for each of the four funding periods, followed by an analysis of each episode. The question addressed in this chapter is: What strategies of political action does FISA employ when attempting to procure or maintain government funding?

6.1 Arguments For and Against Public funding of Independent Schools

Shapiro (1986) provides a critical analysis on the question of whether public funds should be used to fund private or independent schools in the province of Ontario. Shapiro argues that there is no absolute answer to how much, if any, public monies should be used to support education of students attending schools not owned by government bodies. However, there are compelling moral and legislative arguments in favour of funding, as well as against funding, non-public schools.

According to Shapiro (1986), the most common argument in support of public funding of independent schools is that parents should be able to choose the school environment that affirms and extends their values, and parents also have the prior right to select the kind of education that they believe is appropriate for their children. Under this view, it becomes the state’s responsibility “to enable parents to choose, free of financial constraints constraints which now threaten, through the economics of schooling, the right of parents to choose a private school” (p. 266) [73).

Parents who choose to send their children to independent schools should not have to bear the burden of “double taxation,” of paying both school
tuition and their share of the education taxes in support of public schools. Diverse communities should be entitled to education that reflects the values of their community and it should be the responsibility of the state to finance education. It should not require that the organizational model which delivers the program be provided through a near-monopoly that reduces competition, raises costs, lowers efficiency and degrades the quality of the product delivered.

Shapiro argues that the relatively permissive nature of Section 93 of the British North America Act specifies that schools must be funded, and does not specify which types of schools should or should not be funded. When the concept of universal educational funding is considered in conjunction with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a strong argument can be made for the extension of public funds to independent schools. Public funds are, in fact, provided for Catholic schools, as well as public schools, in other jurisdictions in Canada.

Counter-arguments to funding of independent schools suggest that there are already significant financial constraints on the public purse, and extending funding to independent schools simply increases the burden on government. As well, by granting funding to independent schools, a segregated program that falls along religious and class distinctions is being created. It would be unwise to sanction the isolation of students into homogeneous groups from which they would learn to view other people as outsiders. This would be an invitation to prejudice and intolerance.

In addition, support for independent schools would erode the financial and ideological support for public schools. It would deny equality of educa-
tion to large groups of students and create a two-tier system of schooling. This could potentially result in a substantial shift in enrolment away from public schools to independent schools. Society should strive to realize some common socialization experience, and public schools are the best way to achieve this goal. Since we live in a multicultural society, tolerance could be considered a supreme civic virtue. A possibly unsubstantiated assumption behind this argument is that the mere presence of various groups in the same location will breed tolerance among the students. Nevertheless, says Shapiro (1986), it does seem plausible that tolerance and understanding will be more likely in settings where various groups are interacting, as opposed to being segmented and segregated.

Regardless of the weight of the arguments on either side of the issue, Shapiro suggests that commitment to both public schools and independent schools starts with values that are largely political in nature and that, within a democracy, the question of funding for independent schools will not be determined by social scientists, but by elected officials or the courts.

### 6.2 The FISA Approach to Government

A common theme that emerged from the interviews when discussing the political action of FISA centred on prudent politics and the need to approach issues with a voice of reason. The purpose of political action is to achieve a desired end result that will have a positive impact on the members of the organization. Since the inception of FISA, it has been the overwhelming desire of the member groups to conduct their political agenda with integrity,
transparency and equal regard for any political party that happens to be in government. All briefs presented to government authorities are also presented to the opposition parties. This transparent approach to government appears to have led to independent school benefits such as improvements in the payment schedule of government funding, access to special education services and improved grants, participation in government education committees, and input into policy issues prior to legislation.

Special needs funding is another case in point, where we went to the government and said, “We feel that there is justification for special needs funding for children in independent schools.” And again, we very quietly said, “This is our desire. This is one of the goals that we would like to pursue the government on.” And suddenly, it was announced 100% funding for independent schools for special needs students. Again, it wasn’t a very public lobby, that we were out there, which we did take against the government of the day when they were clawing back some of the funding that was going to be drawn back [in 2000]. Interview 2:23

That was the 3% cut that the NDP government was going to take out of FISA’s block funding. There was a provincial lobby that took... a successful lobby that allowed the government to change its agenda on that issue. Now, however, that wasn’t typical of the work that I’ve seen within FISA over the last eight or nine years. What I’ve noticed is FISA has been very, very... almost... quiet,
behind-the-scenes, working with the various power structures to move its agenda forward. Interview 11:43

One Director described the dynamics of government and FISA as building relationships, rather than lobbying for a cause. This is evident during the annual meetings that FISA has with representatives of the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools and government bureaucrats overseeing independent schools. The government representatives are always invited for lunch with the FISA Directors. The discussions during the meetings are cordial, yet specific to the goals that FISA has established collectively prior to these meetings.

FISA is successful for only one thing, and it did that right from the beginning. And that was relationship building. Right from the beginning and it carries through to today. The reason we are successful in what we do is because we know how to build good relationships. Interview 4:87

There is also an inherent danger in developing relationships with those who have power over you. In building relationships, you try to see situations from the other person’s perspective, and that can potentially lead to FISA taking on the perspective of the government at the expense of defending an important policy of independent schools. While no examples come to mind of this occurring, two Directors expressed caution in the strategy of relationship-building at the expense of independent school values.

I also think that we could become too comfortable with the governments, so that we are saying yes, we’re not being assertive
but we are saying yes, because we are beginning to understand their point of view too well. So, sometimes you need to have a few radical, outspoken people Interview 3:5.

This middle road position that FISA has adopted of choosing where it will make its battles, and where to step back and wait for the best political timing, has enhanced the credibility of the organization with all governments. It appears to have ensured that, if the government is not in a position of providing the support that is being asked, at least it is not removing any support.

### 6.3 FISA Political Action on Government Funding

Public funding of independent schools has been, and continues to be, a contentious issue in British Columbia. At issue is whether the state should be responsible to pay for the education in non-public schools when the state’s authority over those schools is limited. Independent schools argue that they are providing equivalent education to that of public schools but from a specific philosophical or ideological perspective. They postulate that British Columbia families have been given that right to choose the education for their children through Canada’s agreement to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 [64]. Opponents of public funding are supportive of the right of independent schools to exist, but oppose the use of public funds to support them. There is the fear that some independent schools could indoctrinate their students with values that are contrary to those
supported in a free and democratic society.

Within the province of British Columbia, public funding of independent schools has been limited to operating costs of the schools and no funding has been provided for the acquisition of land, buildings and equipment. Any independent schools that receive public funding must meet certain Ministry requirements that include employing certified teachers, teaching the prescribed curriculum for British Columbia, meeting the student learning outcomes, participating in all provincial assessments and being subject to regular Ministry inspections. With differing views on the use of public funds for education, it is not surprising that independent schools engaged in a political struggle for many years before they achieved recognition and funding. Funding levels are 50% for those schools whose operating costs are less than the average public school operating costs in the same district, and 35% for those independent schools whose operating costs exceed the average surrounding public school operating costs.

In order to understand the constructs of consensus within FISA, four distinct periods were reviewed to determine what strategies of consensus-building were employed by the Directors in order to achieve their goal of recognition and funding. Numerous improvements in funding have been achieved since 1977, but this research will be limited to four distinct periods:

- 1977: Bill 33 and the Independent School Support Act
- 2000: NDP Government Independent School Funding Reduction
- 2004: 100% special education funding for moderate to severe learning needs
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

- 2008: FISA Harrison Retreat discussion on requesting increased government funding

6.3.1 1977, Bill 33 and the Independent School Support Act

The September 19, 1974 minutes record that the Executive Director attended the NDP Annual Convention held on the Labour Day weekend in Kamloops. British Columbia Premier Dave Barrett and the provincial NDP Party were in government at this time. A resolution favouring support for independent schools, which originated in the NDP Education Committee, did not reach the floor because of a misinterpretation of the rules of procedure by the NDP executive. There appeared to be considerable resistance within the party on the issue of independent school funding, and the party’s own polling had suggested support from the public for some form of funding for independent schools (FISA Minutes, September 19, 1974) [24].

The minutes indicate that FISA had observers present at the conventions of both the NDP party in Kamloops, and the Social Credit party which was meeting later that year at Harrison. The Social Credit Party, through its Surrey constituency, had already prepared a resolution, based on the FISA position paper, for Independent Schools recognition. The Delta and Langley constituencies had indicated that they would support the bill.

The minutes also indicate that a rally was being planned by FISA at the end of November, spearheaded by the Committee of Communication, for the dual purposes of promoting the independent school movement and publicizing the desire of FISA to secure public funding for independent schools.

A special executive meeting was called on July 31, 1975, to react to
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

the Report of the Cabinet Committee on Basic Services, which had been released to FISA and the media that morning. The government had taken this action in response to a brief from FISA, dated July 16, 1975, requesting financial and material support for several educational needs such as busing, resources, libraries, public school facility and in-service use, access to specialized services, community recreation facility use at no cost, and access to public purchasing services (FISA Brief, July 16, 1975, p. 3) [25].

Of note was the change in government perspective over the previous two years, at which time a similar meeting had resulted in a statement from Premier Barrett to the effect that, “The door is closed [on independent school funding], but it is not locked” (FISA brief, July 16, 1975, p. 3) [25]. FISA’s position was firm but conciliatory, as noted by the following statements drawn from the brief:

- “... FISA interpreted that decision of the New Democratic Convention to coincide with the pledges made during the election, and FISA received the Minister’s promise that our point of view would be raised and discussed at future Cabinet meetings” (p.1).

- “We are most definitely encouraged by the knowledge that the granting of such items as busing, resources, libraries and other services is now under active consideration, and we appreciate the sincerity of the Government in considering the possible removal of some of the inequities which the independent schools have pointed out over the years” (p.2).

- “We deeply appreciate the goodwill that is evident in the possibility that various concessions will be granted...” (p.2).
“...on behalf of Independent schools, we pledge cooperation with the Government in translating into action its good intentions” (p.4).

While the government had acknowledged that some form of support would be coming to independent schools, and this was appreciated by the FISA, the Directors continued to press the issue that recognition and public funding of independent schools was the ultimate goal of FISA.

FISA’s response to the government recommendations was one of disappointment, as the support was minimal and supported only a small number (15-20%) of independent schools. However, it was the most positive response to independent school demands in approximately 20 years. The FISA Director agreed to acknowledge what they had achieved, but continued to express FISA’s disappointment over requests that were ignored, and reiterated the theme that funding and recognition were still the ultimate goal of FISA.

The Minutes of Sept 19, 1974 also indicated that FISA had used its PNE display booth to promote its purposes and to grow support for independent schools and for FISA’s goals of recognition and funding.

Two years later, the Social Credit Party, which had made an election promise offering funding for independent schools, was elected. The Executive Director’s report to the FISA Board meeting, dated February 19, 1976, indicated that FISA was already working on the assumption that funding was forthcoming. Letters to FISA had been received from MLA’s, indicating their support for an “Independent School Alternative” brief, prepared by FISA and submitted to the Education Minister, the Honorable Pat McGeer, providing the government with a recommended structure that would allow
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

funding for independent schools. The minutes indicate that FISA was prepared to accept recognition only, in the short term, if there were insufficient funds in the budget to proceed with both funding and recognition: “...the suggestion could be made that failing the availability of immediate funding, legislation be readied and passed to allow independent schools in British Columbia access to recognition” (FISA Minutes, Feb 19, 1976, p. 2) [26].

FISA’s strategy was to pursue a calm, logical approach with elected officials, using prepared documents that outlined a process for accomplishing the funding and recognition objectives. There was a concerted effort not to employ intimidation in gaining government approvals. “It is important that the reaction of Mr. McGeer be evaluated accurately, because it will give the combined Council Committee and the Executive Board an opportunity to respond to his initial reactions. Yet, the Federation should not send a large delegation which might give the impression of intimidation” (FISA Minutes, Feb 19, 1976, p. 2) [26].

FISA involved each association in the preparation of the brief to government. A Joint FISA Member Committee had been struck to ensure that the needs of all independent schools were included and that representatives from each association had a voice in the contents of the funding and recognition request.

The March 18, 1976 Minutes reported very good news for FISA. Correspondence confirmed that a meeting with Dr. Pat McGeer had been scheduled, and the Throne Speech of March 18, 1976 indicated that “the Department of Education has been asked to review the ways in which the Provincial operational funding can be offered to independent schools” (FISA
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

Minutes, March 18, 1976, p.2) [27].

The Vancouver Sun covered the announcement with this statement: “The speech announced that the education department is reviewing ways in which provincial funds can be offered to independent schools, and [Premier] Bennett made it clear he hopes some schools will receive some operating funds from the province soon. The funds would be given to schools which teach a standard curriculum and are open to inspection, he said” (Vancouver Sun, March 18, 1976, quoted in FISA, Mar 18, 1976 Minutes) [27]. The Province also indicated support for this government initiative in its editorial of March 18, 1976, commenting that, “Proposals to assist private schools in their delivery of approved standard programs sound reasonable, as long as there are adequate measures to ensure that the aid applies only to the delivery of standard programs” (The Province, March 18, 1976, quoted in FISA Minutes, Mar 18, 1976) [27].

The March, 1976 Education Today publication by the Ministry of Education quoted the Education Minister, Dr. Pat McGeer, as saying:

Private schools in BC will get some financial aid before the term of office of the Social Credit government is completed. They will get some funding...They are not going to get the same amount of funding as the public schools but it makes good sense to have a separate string to your educational bow...there is value to having a separate school system. Not every youngster gets along well in the public school system. It is also cheaper for the taxpayers to have some of the children going to another school where they
are not completely paid for by the government (quoted in FISA Minutes, Mar 18, 1976, p.3) [27].

The FISA agenda aimed at acquiring funding and recognition was finally being adopted by the British Columbia government. The NDP government of Dave Barrett had started the process by offering support for busing and libraries, and this appeared to open the door to increased support. Public endorsement appeared to have been gained by independent schools making the public aware of their services. The government, led by the Social Credit party, was now advocating for an alternative education option to that of the public system, and they were prepared to fund part of it. Their rationale to the public was that this was a cheaper alternative to the public system, in which the full cost of education was borne by the public purse. Ironically, this initiative would cost the government more money than they had previously been spending on education, since no funding had been offered to independent schools to this point in time.

A special Executive Board meeting was called for May 13, following the FISA presentation to the Minister of Education. The delegation reported to the FISA Executive Board and discussed some strategies for moving their agenda forward. The Board decided against immediate publicity because there was “little ‘hard news’ to report and a public statement would be open to public reaction (e.g. BCTF)” (FISA Minutes, May 13, 1976, p.2) [28]. Independent schools, parents and associations would be informed immediately, but the general public would have to wait until more concrete information was available. The June 17, 1976 minutes indicate that 400
copies of the brief to Dr. Pat McGeer were sent to MLAs, schools and courtesy requests. Seventeen thousand issues of the *Spokesman* Newsletter published by FISA were sent to parents, supporters and MLAs. A further 3,000 copies were prepared for the FISA booth at the PNE. A desire not to agitate other agencies that might be opposed to independent school funding prior to getting the approval from the government seemed important to FISA.

During the May 13, 1976 meeting between FISA delegates and government representatives, the members of government discussed the level of support that FISA enjoyed with independent schools in the province. FISA delegation reported back to the FISA Executive Board that the British Columbia government was satisfied that FISA was a representative body for the majority of independent schools in the province. The participation of the majority of independent schools in the request for funding and recognition appeared to have a positive influence in gaining government support for this request.

Both political and popular support for independent school recognition and funding had been growing throughout the 1970s. FISA, conducting its own poll of election candidates, found that in the 1972 election, 67% of the candidates were in favour of legal recognition and 53% favoured financial support for independent schools. Before the 1975 election, 79% of the candidates favoured legal recognition and 78% favoured financial support. A total of 76% of the candidates running for office responded to the poll (FISA Executive Director’s Annual Report, May 20, 1976, p.2) [21]. All political parties had taken a position on the status of independent schools, and all
were prepared to provide some level of support.

It is well known, of course, that in the 1975 fall election, the Liberal Party, the Progressive Conservative Party, and the Social Credit Party included planks in their election platforms favouring both legal recognition and financial support of independent schools. The New Democratic Party confirmed its pledge to make basic services available as recommended by the committee. (FISA Executive Director’s Annual Report, May 20, 1976, p.2) [21].

Even the BCTF attempted to gauge public support for independent schools and discovered that 57% of the population of BC favoured partial or total public funding for independent schools. Support for independent school funding was highest among adults in the 19-24 age group (64% support) and lowest in the older population of 55 and higher (49%) (FISA Spokesman, June, 1976) [29].

The June 17, 1976 minutes indicate that a FISA delegation was able to address the caucus of the provincial government, where Dr. Scott Wallace indicated that the independent schools issue had exerted a significant effect on the provincial election of 1975. A meeting of the opposition caucus was also held, though it lasted only fifteen minutes (FISA Minutes, June 17, 1976) [?]. These meetings provide evidence of a non-partisan approach by FISA to political parties and a desire to garner support from all elected representatives on independent school issues.

The Throne Speech on Jan 13, 1977 confirmed the BC government’s
intention to provide recognition and funding to independent schools: “My
ministry will introduce legislation that will lead eventually to the provision
of financial support for non-public schools for the first time since the intro-
duction of the ‘Public Schools Act’ of 1892” (FISA Minutes, Jan 20, 1977,
p.3) [30]. FISA responded immediately by sending a press release congrat-
ulating the government on Jan 14, 1977. Funding of 30% was implemented
later that year, once the legislation had been passed by the government.

Analysis of Recognition and Funding Request of 1977

The minutes show unanimous support by the Directors for funding and
recognition, which is hardly surprising. This meant more money for schools
and the ability to offer programs similar to those in the public system but
were expensive to operate, such as the applied skills programs of woodwork-
ing, foods, and textiles, which required specially equipped laboratories.

FISA developed a deliberate strategy of lobbying politicians about the
merits of independent school funding and recognition. This involved eliciting
written commitments from all political parties and individual candidates
prior to and during election campaigns. Independent school education was
also promoted at public events and on billboards located at independent
schools throughout the province as part of a public awareness campaign.

FISA used a consistently nonconfrontational approach with elected of-
officials in advocating for independent schools. This included providing the
government with a position paper outlining independent school program de-
livery and accountability to the Minister of Education, and suggesting how
independent school funding could be structured within public policy. Briefs
were prepared and distributed to elected officials calling for equal treatment of independent schools in the areas of recognition and funding.

All of the associations within FISA were in agreement with the direction of political persuasion and each association was actively involved in developing the arguments to the provincial government calling for independent school recognition and funding. The same representatives from FISA were authorized to speak on behalf of all independent schools, even though there were four associations and hundreds of independent schools.

Funding was formally approved by the provincial government on September 7, 1977, when independent schools meeting the Ministry’s requirements as outlined in the Independent School Act were eligible to receive 30% of the funding that a public school would receive in the same district. In 1987 the 30% was adjusted to 35%, and this was increased after the Sullivan Commission report A Legacy for Learners was released in 1989, raising funding for Group 1 schools to 50% while leaving Group 2 schools at 35%. Public funding for independent schools in British Columbia continues today at these levels. A school belongs to Group 1 or Group 2 based on whether its operating budget is lower or higher than the average operating cost of public schools in the surrounding school district. Schools with higher pupil operating costs than public schools receive less public funding.

A noteworthy shift occurred between the initial funding lobby of 1977 and the revised independent school grant structure in 1989, following the Sullivan Commission. Initially, FISA had directed its lobbying efforts regarding funding and recognition towards elected officials; but by 1989, FISA appeared to be interacting more regularly with the government bureaucracy.
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

and had directed its advocacy to the Royal Commission. FISA had created a political space for independent schools and funding had become an entitlement. This identity shift from lobby group to entitlement constituency is significant in that FISA’s attention was no longer directed towards the legitimacy of public funding for independent schools, but rather towards expanding funding issues through advocacy. The FISA reverted to its original activity of lobbying government elected representatives when funding was threatened in 2000.

6.3.2 Year 2000 and the NDP Government Independent School Funding Reduction

The first challenge to independent school funding came in 1992 with the attempt to eliminate special needs grants for independent schools. The government rapidly reversed its position when FISA lobbied to have the grants reinstated, without FISA having to resort to any high profile tactics. The situation in 2000 when the NDP government attempted to change the formula for calculating annual grants to independent schools, on the other hand, required mobilization of public opinion via letter writing campaigns and media intervention. The consequence of the new formula would have been a reduction to independent school funding amounting to 5 million dollars. FISA had been feeling so secure in its assumption that government funding for independent schools was unassailable, that a Funding Issues Discussion Paper was drafted on January 26, 2000, with the member associations providing their perspectives on the following eleven issues involving public funding:
Ironically, the first item in this discussion paper was the protection of the current funding levels for independent schools. Just two months later, at the BCTF Annual General Meeting on March 22, 2000, Education Minister Penny Priddy could not provide any assurance that independent schools funding would not be cut. On March 27, 2000, the third Supplementary Estimates request for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2001 was tabled in the BC Legislature [71]. The estimates indicated that the increase in funding for public schools operating grants was 2.29% higher than the operating grants for independent schools. The FISA interpreted this to mean that there had
been a downward adjustment of the funding formula for independent schools. A letter from the Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. Charles Ungerleider, dated March 29, 2000, offered assurances “that these changes would have minimal impact on current levels of support to independent schools... The changes are to recognize that funding for certain expenditures that occur in the public school are not required in the independent system” (FISA Brief, April, 2000) [32].

Excluded from the funding were salary increases for public school teachers, administrative board cost, and class size decreases in primary grades. FISA’s position was that the formula had not been changed since 1977, and eliminating certain aspects of the funding formula would have the net effect of reducing the grants from the current 35% and 50% levels. There was no consultation with the FISA prior to the implementation of this funding adjustment, and the Federation argued that the long-term impact of the adjusted funding formula on independent schools would be significant. FISA also noted that, prior to the elections in 1991 and 1996, the NDP had committed to keeping the funding for independent schools intact.

An Extraordinary FISA Board meeting was held on March 30, 2000, to outline a strategy to address this proposed reduction in government funding. The first political action was to initiate a provincial tour of all the regions in the province, beginning on April 3, 2000, to inform independent school constituents of the government’s intentions and to appeal to parents, Boards, and staff of independent schools to contact their government representatives by telephone and mail in protest.
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

An information package was prepared by FISA for all independent schools in the province. It contained information on the location of FISA provincial meetings, background information on independent schools in British Columbia, a sample letter for a proposed provincial letter-writing campaign, information on writing letters to newspapers, strategies on how to organize a telephone campaign, and contact information for MLAs, government authorities, and opposition party leaders.

Of interest is the fact that FISA has a staff of two: an Executive Director and an executive secretary. All of the political activity had to be arranged by the FISA office and the volunteer Board of Directors. If this campaign was to be successful, it would require the support of the grassroots members of the independent schools of the various associations connected to FISA.

By April 13, 2000, just two weeks after the release of the budget, the media had been provided with a press release on the British Columbia government’s decision to reduce funding for independent schools, and a groundswell of support began to form. Debates with proponents and opponents of public funding for independent schools were aired, from which emerged a growing support for the maintenance of current funding levels. A second press release was provided by FISA on April 25, 2000, outlining the response from parents to the reduction of independent school operating grants. By April 25, 2000, the Minister of Education had already received 2,000 letters from parents and supporters of independent schools. Eventually, 20,000 letters of support for independent school funding were couriered to Victoria from the FISA office, the highest number of responses on any issue by any government in the history of British Columbia, according to the Minister of Education.
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

(Internal FISA political activity chronology, undated).

The print media took the side of independent schools with comments such as, “Private Schools should not be shortchanged in funding” (Vancouver Sun, April 27, 2000) [82], and “Teachers’ association can’t get past reality that the cost of assimilating students from independent schools is prohibitive” (Vancouver Sun, April 29, 2000) [82]. One article supporting the government’s position came from the new President of the BC School Trustees Association, who said, “Reduced funding by the provincial government will mean more money for the public system” (Vancouver Sun, April 29, 2000) [82].

Radio interviews were initiated with the Executive Director of the FISA throughout the province, beginning with CJIC in Prince George on April 13th, 2000. This was followed by television debates on VTV cable TV, with FISA and BCTF representatives. The support for independent schools became apparent when Bill Good and Rafe Mair of radio CKNW provided positive editorials suggesting that the BC government was making a mistake in reducing funding for independent schools. Several commentaries suggested that the funding be increased. On May 1st, the BC Government’s proposed reduction in independent school funding was reported on BCTV and Global TV simultaneously after the FISA Executive had met with the Minister of Education, Penny Priddy, to ask for a restoration in the funding formula (FISA Internal Political Activity Chronology, undated) [39].

FISA was preparing to raise the level of political action with several protest meetings scheduled in the first week of May, but as it turned out, that strategy was not necessary. The day after FISA’s meeting with the
Minister of Education, Premier Ujjal Dosanjh made a surprise announcement on his way to the legislature on May 2, 2000, saying that he had been misled about the funding cut. The print media reported that the “Premier does a flip-flop on funding private schools” (Vancouver Sun, May 3, 2000) [82]. Upon restoration of the funding formula, FISA encouraged its constituents to send letters of appreciation to the government for reversing its decision. Government officials expressed as much amazement over the thank-you letters they received as over the volume of protest letters that had preceded them.

**Analysis of the Political Action on the Funding Reduction in 2000**

The response of FISA upon the news of funding reductions was swift and determined. Alert action on financial matters by the Executive Director led to immediate attention by the FISA Directors and the independent school communities.

Since FISA had now been functioning for over twenty years with partial public funding, they were quick to take action to protect the benefits that they had been granted from the provincial government. Within three days of the budget announcement, the Executive Director had communicated the budget information to the associations and had called a meeting on March 30, 2000, to draft a plan for political action. Having sensed something amiss for several months, he had already laid contingency plans to engage in province wide visits, calling on the assistance of the Executive Director of the Alberta Association of Independent Schools and Colleges to help make
the visits, should the need arise. Within a month of the announcement, grassroots support of independent schools had been mobilized through a provincial tour, and a letter writing campaign to address the cutbacks in provincial funding had been launched.

Bourdieu has stated that coalitions grounded in the structure of space and constructed in terms of capital distribution are more likely to be stable and durable (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 726) [11]. The rapid response by FISA and its membership to the proposed government funding cuts supports this position. When funding became threatened, FISA was able to generate huge support, as seen from the thousands of letters that were written by independent school supporters, along with positive coverage from the press, radio and television. This political action led to the funding formula being restored. The incident also supports the argument that diversity becomes a secondary issue when a coalition is able to unite behind a common cause or against a common threat. Loss of funding would have had a financial impact on many families whose children attend independent schools and on the ability of independent schools to provide competitive salaries to staff, if salary increases were no longer part of the funding formula. Therefore, the threat of funding loss was a significant unifying factor that enabled the diverse associations within FISA to collaborate.

The core arguments leveled against a reduction in the provincial grant included an acknowledgement that most independent schools enrolled families that represented the full spectrum of society, including special needs students. A survey for 1996-97 indicated that 9% of independent school students receive specialized instruction, often referred to as learning assis-
Chapter 6. **Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools**

tance. An additional 2% receive more extensive specialized help due to physical, intellectual or behavioral needs (FISA Backgrounder, April, 2000) [31]. As well, the full cost of land, buildings and equipment is paid by fundraising efforts of independent schools. If all the students in independent schools, which totaled 59,700 in 1999-2000, were to be integrated into the public school system according to their legal entitlement, the cost to the government at that time would have been an additional 200 million dollars annually over and above its current output, as well as 1 billion dollars in capital costs (Hansard, p. 6078, July 21, 1997, The Hon. Paul Ramsey) [2]. Finally, like all citizens in this province who send their children to public schools, independent school supporters continue to pay taxes for public schools, in addition to their contributions to the costs of tuition and capital costs needed to operate an independent school.

Employing the media was a new political action strategy for FISA. Newspapers, radio and television were informed of the government’s actions through press releases on interviews, talk shows, debates, and editorial comments. This was a new weapon that FISA had not been able to utilize previously because independent schools had not been accepted as an appropriate alternative to public school education. It appears that the government had underestimated the extent of support that independent schools enjoyed in British Columbia. One government bureaucrat that was interviewed indicated off record that he wagered a colleague a dinner for two, prior to the release of the budget, that the BC government would have to reverse its position on independent school funding reductions. He won his bet. FISA had achieved legitimacy or an official nomination as Bourdieu
suggests, since it was able to act as a delegated authority on behalf of independent schools with the media and with the State. It achieved its success through marshalling support within independent schools and legitimizing it’s raison d’etre in the public space through effective persuasion with representatives of newspapers, radio and TV. Through this incident with the NDP government, FISA was able to validate the extent of public support that independent schools had been able to generate during 23 years of public funding for independent schools.

FISA’s political strategy included lobbying the Minister and deputy minister of Education to restore the funding to previous levels. As well, politicians from opposition parties were informed of FISA’s concern and advocated on FISA’s behalf in the BC legislature. FISA’s approach continued to be based on the perspective that the cutbacks proposed would have a negative effect on independent schools and that if this 3% reduction were to be accepted, it would be the “thin edge of the wedge” to more funding cutbacks that might be considered in the future. In response to the perceived threat, FISA prepared an overt campaign of aggressive political action to heighten public concern over funding reductions and to increase pressure on the provincial government to reconsider its policy decision. Only a portion of the strategy needed to be implemented, because the Premier announced that the BC government had made an error and that the funding levels would be restored. FISA’s response was to call off the second phase of its aggressive strategy and instead request that independent schools send letters of appreciation to the government for restoring the funding formula.

The funding reduction proposed in 2000 by the NDP government re-
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

revealed a new level of power that FISA had not previously known. There had always been a strong grassroots support from families that were active within independent schools, but this policy decision by the NDP government strengthened public support for the public funding of independent schools and for FISA as the official nomination by the public and the State as the representative for independent schools.

6.3.3 2004: 100% Special Education Funding for Moderate to Severe Learning Needs

The most recent funding increase for independent schools came in 2004 with the implementation of 100% funding for students with moderate to severe special needs in independent schools. Independent schools are not required to enroll special needs students, as are public schools. However, families that choose to send their children to independent schools and that have special needs children would like the independent schools to enrol their special needs children. For the most part, the schools provide special needs support if they feel they have the professional staff that can provide the service, or if the school has access to skilled professionals who can be hired on a contract basis to support special needs students. In 2004, there were 1,286 students with moderate to severe special needs enrolled in 178 independent schools (FISA polling, 2004) [36]. This represented 1.8% of the total enrolment in independent schools, for which the provincial education ministry provided 50% of the funding that a special needs student with similar disabilities in the public sector would receive. In other words, a dependent handicapped student, classified as a Level 1 disability, would get $15,000 in special edu-
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

cation funding, while the same student in the public system would receive $30,000 annually. In each case, a special application to the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools is required in order to receive the grant. At issue for the FISA was that most schools were covering the cost of providing support for a special needs student by distributing the cost across the entire enrollment. Some families were required to pay additional tuition fees in order to have their special needs child attend the school. This was viewed as an injustice by FISA, which lobbied the senior officials in government for 100% funding for identified special needs students in independent schools.

FISA developed four specific requests in cooperation with its member associations. These included full funding for special needs students, access to special purpose grants, advancement in the payment schedule for provincial grants, and equal treatment in the development of Inter-ministerial Protocols within government. These four requests were developed by an ad hoc committee within FISA, with representation from each of the associations, for adoption by the FISA Board of Directors (FISA Funding Issues Discussion Paper, January 2000) [33].

Again, as in 1977 and in 2000, FISA continued to seek advice and participation from all the associations within FISA on their recommendations for special needs funding. This strategy has been consistently applied throughout the 40 year existence of the Federation.

The primary means of influencing government officials was through briefs presented to the Select Standing Committee of Finance and Government Services, and the Select Standing Committee on Education. The first presentation was made on October 25, 2001, followed by two further presentat-
tions on October 10, 2003 and October 12, 2004. The brief thanked the BC government for the funding levels that were in place for independent schools and acknowledged with appreciation that families could have their children educated in schools of choice throughout the province.

The ‘spin’ for special education funding equity was framed around the concept of access to independent schools for special needs students due to economics and equality of service. Since independent schools received only half of the equivalent funding for special needs students given to the public sector, independent schools were using tuition and operating grant funds from regularly enrolled students to meet the costs of providing an educational program for special needs students, or families were being asked to contribute additional funds to meet the high cost of educating students with special learning needs.

FISA asked the Select Standing Committee of the BC Legislature to remove the inequity by recommending equality of grants for special needs students. “They [special needs grants] are grants given to alleviate physical, health, or psychological conditions. FISA has always maintained that there should be full equality of services in the areas of health and social services regardless of the institution in which the student is being educated” (FISA Brief, Oct 25, 2001, p. 3).

For the first time, FISA was appealing to the BC government for parity in funding for special needs students because the funding was for the alleviation of health issues. At the same time, they were not requesting any increase in the operation grant formulas that had been established in 1989. Rather than seeking additional funding for independent schools for operating costs, the
strategy for a funding increase targeted a specific area, health care, for which an argument could be made for equal funding regardless of the institution providing the service. This seemed to be a reasonable argument, since many of the special needs services being provided in both public and independent schools were being funded through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Families.

In briefing notes prepared by FISA after the October meeting, it was noted that “the door seems to have been left open to possibilities in the wording recommendation which states, ‘[Government] continues to develop a system for funding education that ensures that appropriate funding flows to the service providers selected by each learner’ ” (FISA Briefing Notes, March 28, 2002, p. 1) [34]. It was also noted that the Minister of Education had rejected full funding for special needs students in independent schools in the House on March 11, 2002.

A subsequent presentation was made by FISA to the Select Standing Committee of Finance and Government Services on October 10, 2003. The FISA President and Executive Director made the following arguments in favour of 100% special needs funding. The following selected statements illustrate the argument:

- “These children have special needs due to health reasons” (p. 1674).

- “Independent schools are already saving the government some $252 million by educating children in independent schools, let alone paying for all land, all buildings and all costs of furniture and equipment, none of which accrue to government” (p.1674).
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

- “[FISA] wishes to commend the government for continuing their policy of dealing with independent schools in an equitable fashion. FISA appreciated the 50% and the 35% grants” (p.1674).

- “The issue is this: we have agreed to provide education at 50 cents on the dollar, but we have never agreed to 50 cents on the dollar for health services and services of a psychological nature. We have always argued that when government provides services for social reasons, then no matter where those students are located, they should receive full funding for the services they receive” (p.1675).

The leadership of FISA reported back that the argument for full funding of special needs students for health and social issues resonated with the Select Standing Committee and with the Minister during subsequent meetings with FISA representatives, opening the door to this possibility.

On October 12, 2004, a further presentation was made to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, with essentially the same message as in 2003. This time, the Executive Director was accompanied by a principal of an independent school providing services to special needs students.

We have always maintained, as a matter of public policy, that no matter who the service provider is, such service provision should receive equal payment, as it is done in all other sectors such as old age housing, ownership of hospitals, and all such social services. It doesn’t matter who delivers them. So long as they meet public...
policy ends, there is equality of funding. (Herfst, Oct 12, 2004 Finance and Government Services Minutes, p. 2163) [3]

Direct presentations were also made to the Hon. Christy Clark and the Hon. Tom Christiansen, former Ministers of Education, as well as to the current Minister of Education, Hon. Shirley Bond, on August 30, 2005.

What is evident in the appeal for special needs funding that appears to have been lacking in the original requests for funding during the 1970s, is that FISA is meeting with the Select Standing Committees of the legislature and the Ministers of Education. The government of the 21st century appears to accept FISA as a representative of independent schools, and appears to accept its role as a non-governmental organization tasked with overseeing independent school education in the province. There is also a sense of mutual respect in the relationship, as noted in some interviews.

Look how many years they… FISA presented, very well, very clear, the rationale of special education needs for students; that this is not, at heart, a matter of choice; this is more a health issue, that these students have real needs that have to be addressed. Why would we not provide the same dollars to hire staff and develop programs to meet those students’ needs because they happen to be in an independent school? Government, for some years, understood those arguments. There are Ministers that said to those delegations, “We understand your rationale, and when dollars will be available in the budget, we want to do this.” And now we see it. Interview 19:6
On Sunday, September 18, 2005, Hon Shirley Bond, Minister of Education, announced that government had decided to fully fund students with special needs in independent schools, as well as in the public school system. This decision provided equal opportunity for all special needs students in British Columbia. An email on September 19, 2005, from FISA to independent schools in the province stated, “For four years FISA has been requesting the Government to fund moderate and severe special needs students, for whom special application must be made, at the same level as similar public school students....FISA strongly urges each independent school to send a thank you letter to the Hon. Shirley Bond, Minister of Education…” (FISA Email, Sept 19, 2005) [37]. Seventy-eight letters of appreciation from schools that benefited from this additional funding were received by the Minister.

There were no negative responses from the press and public education agencies in regard to the additional special education funding. Funding of independent schools appeared to have become a non-issue within the press and television. The work of FISA had come a long way in garnering public support for funding of independent schools, in part because of the consistently polite approach that FISA had developed when interacting with representatives of the government, and in part because independent schools, as an alternative to the public education system, were providing good teaching and learning for the students enrolled in independent schools. The fear that funding of independent schools would lead to creation of eccentric schools with extremist values had not materialized, creating a level of acceptance and tolerance in the mind of the public for values-based schools as another choice for parents in educating their children.
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

FISA was enjoying a new relationship with government elected officials and senior civil servants. The request for equitable treatment in the delivery of services to special needs students in independent schools was viewed as just and reasonable. FISA’s relationship with representatives of the government had progressed to one of mutual respect, which enabled both parties to feel that there was a partnership between independent schools and the provincial government. The new level of respect served as symbolic capital, in Bourdieu’s parlance, which allowed both the Ministry of Education and FISA to draw on one another when either group had a concern. The Ministry of Education began seeking FISA’s advice on educational policy issues prior to adoption and FISA felt confident in seeking benefits from the BC government for independent schools. A mutual consultation process in FISA’s dealings with government had been initiated which had not existed previously.

Patterns of Engagement

What emerges in these examples are two patterns of engagement that were employed by FISA, depending on the political circumstances. The first is a ‘rights-based’ lobby and the second an entitlement constituency. The ‘rights-based’ lobby was engaged when there was a threat to funding for independent schools. This involved liaising with politicians to lobby for the legitimacy of funding. The entitlement constituency assumed the legitimacy of public funding for independent schools and sought improvement on the financial benefits. In this capacity, FISA tended to deal more with bureaucrats and senior civil servants, and, to a lesser degree, politicians.
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

2000, FISA engaged the Minister of Education and politicians in government and opposition to reverse the policy on independent school funding cuts. In 2004, FISA engaged with government bureaucrats on two different occasions to argue in favour of 100% funding for special needs students in independent schools.

FISA originated as a lobby group, taking its positions to politicians in order to influence public policy on independent schools. However, once public funding for independent schools became an expectation, its role changed to that of advocacy group. In an advocacy role, FISA was consulting with the OIIS, government bureaucrats, and the Minister of Education on improving educational practice in independent schools, which sometimes influenced general practice throughout the province. However, due to the potential threat of funding formula change in 2000, FISA was able to revert to its lobby group identity. This unstable funding reality is a powerful motivator for consensus within the diversity of FISA.

Analysis of the 100% Funding for Special Needs Students in Independent Schools

Several specific differences and similarities between the earlier request for funding and recognition in 1977, and the request for 100% special needs funding in 2004 are evident. There was little attempt to lobby politicians for support in funding special needs students. This may have been due to a perception that politicians are already supportive of funding for independent schools and it was therefore unnecessary to garner MLA support from each riding, or it may be that FISA has the ear of government. The Federation
Chapter 6. Political Action on Government Funding for Independent Schools

has become the voice of independent schools in British Columbia and there is a relationship of collaboration between government representatives and FISA. Funding requests are now made by FISA representatives directly to Standing Committees of the government as a normal order of business.

Prepared briefs continue to be used as the means to draw attention to government funding inequities in special needs funding, similar to the manner in which they were used in the original struggle for operational funding and recognition. Funding requests are now directed at targeted funding, rather than basic operating grants of 50% and 35% respectively.

There were no attempts to mobilize independent schools, the press or the public in support of special needs funding for students in independent schools. In previous situations when funding was requested, FISA’s strategy was to engage parents and staff from independent schools to support the need for sustained or additional funding by writing letters and talking to politicians, and writing letters to the editor of local newspapers. None of this was considered in this situation, as FISA had the assurance from government elected officials that funding would be provided when the funds were available. FISA’s patience in waiting four years for the fulfillment of a government commitment further strengthened the relationship that FISA had developed with senior government officials and the Minister of Education.

Discussions between FISA and senior government officials now occur as part of the normal business of government. Independent schools are accepted as legitimate educational partners in providing special needs support for students who attend independent schools. The approach for special needs
funding was made to government bureaucrats, rather than elected officials, advocating for independent schools on reasonable and defensible premises. FISA provided the bureaucrats responsible for implementing government policy with a position paper, citing examples in old age housing and hospital care where equal funding was provided for both public and independent service providers. Additionally, FISA was granted direct access to the Minister of Education when requesting policy amendments for independent schools.

The strategy for political action within FISA continued along the same vein as in 1977, where a unified position on 100% funding of special needs students by all the member associations and schools was developed, with all associations participating in developing the special needs funding proposal to government. As in the earlier funding initiative, the same representatives from FISA were speaking on behalf of independent schools, even though there are five associations and hundreds of independent schools. A school principal was included in a later meeting to elucidate the challenges of meeting the needs of special needs students without the funding increase.

A consistent message developed by all of the associations within the FISA was used in all cases to obtain the additional funding. The same messenger, the same message, the same principled approach, the same gratitude for the provisions already granted by government appears to have been very influential in the success of this initiative. However, direct access to people in the governing body who were able to effect change appears to have increased significantly from 1977 to 2004.
6.3.4 2008: FISA Harrison Retreat Discussions on Government Funding

The Harrison Hot Springs FISA Board retreat in January, 2008, was called for the purpose of discussing the future direction of the FISA organization. The Board had already adopted a strategic vision in a document entitled *The Road Ahead: Reaffirming the Mandate and Mission of the FISA*, and was gathering to develop a common position on several items.

One of the purposes of this meeting was to reflect on a proposal put forward in January, 2007, by the Catholic Independent Schools Association to consider a government lobby to increase the funding for independent schools. Funding levels currently stand at 50% for Group 1 schools and 35% for Group 2 schools. The argument for requesting an increase focused on the widening differential in real dollars between the public and independent school grants over the past 17 years. Other sources of income are having to be generated by the independent schools to make up the difference.

Potential risks of requesting increased funding include possible further loss of control over governance issues that are currently the responsibility of each independent school governing authority. A major issue that would elicit different responses from different groups within the FISA is how increased funding levels would affect school governance. A corollary of this is that increased funding would likely lead to increased accountability. If the government provides the funds, it has the right to define the terms under which the funds are spent.

The Catholic schools proposed a willingness to pursue funding beyond
50% on the condition that (1) the religious nature of the schools would be completely protected, (2) the schools would maintain control over governance, and (3) the schools would maintain control over school finances.

This was a challenging issue, since many groups within FISA struggle to pay teachers a competitive salary while also providing a broad range of course options for their students. Items such as land, buildings, and equipment costs, for which no public funding is provided, were increasing, making improvements to facilities a challenge. Tuition rates were already high enough to cause some families to abandon independent schools due to the high costs. Yet increased funding could provide a potential risk to the independence of independent schools. As one Director stated:

[The] biggest challenge for FISA, and I have strong feelings on this, is government funding. CIS and SCS are wanting 100% funding, ISA is divided, many ACSI schools would grasp at 100%. What are we prepared to give up for the higher funding? Alternative schools are offered by the public system. The FISA Board is primarily from the Lower Mainland where schools are doing well and detached from the 250 schools who are struggling. Declining populations are real in ACSI, SCS, and AMG. Catholics have diocese money to help schools in trouble. AMG have a limited voice but they are well served. But there is real pressure on small schools. Interview 14:9

How does FISA reconcile the varied desires from the five associations within the organization? After a lengthy debate with robustly opposing views being
expressed, it was the historical lesson given by the Executive Director that eventually led the association Directors to coalesce a common position. He reminded the Directors of the concerns raised by the founding fathers in 1966 that government funding carries risks that independent schools may not be willing to accept. The moment the government begins to pay for more than 50% of the operating costs of independent schools, is the moment that governance of independent schools could begin to shift towards government control. At the present time, the power to govern still rests with the schools, but increased funding could jeopardize their independence.

The opinion of a government bureaucrat within the Ministry of Education also influenced FISA recommendation on increased funding. He acknowledged that the political climate in the province was strained due to simultaneous declining enrolment in the public system and steadily increasing enrolment in independent schools. Political voices were suggesting that the independent schools were the cause of the enrolment decline in the public schools. However, enrolment statistics do not bear this out, since the demographics show a higher number of students graduating in grade 12 than are entering schools in Kindergarten. He stated the following:

There are many, many, many people who are opposed to independent schools, who say, “I don’t think it’s right that independent schools get to share every time we have to pay some more for the public school system. And I don’t think its right that independent schools get to share in the incremental increase that public schools get, by the reduction in the number of pupils. And so,
I think that if FISA came to me today and said we’re going to go ask for more money, I would say, “I cannot... I simply cannot counsel you strongly enough. Don’t do it! You will not be successful, and you will be fighting uphill, and it will be an irritant which you have no hope of winning. So why irritate government for it? Interview 9:17

Each association was given a voice in the discussion at the Harrison Retreat, and the recommendation arrived at by the Directors focused on maintaining the working relationship that FISA enjoys with the government by avoiding an issue that could compromise the relationships that have been developed over the years. The Board adopted a motion not to seek a change in the current percentages of the funding formula for Group 1 and Group 2 schools at this time.

The 2008 Harrison Retreat was not an engagement with the government, but rather an internal debate on whether to engage the government in discussions regarding more funding. The Board took a prudent approach by settling for the present levels of funding, and in so doing, avoided raising an issue that could potentially compromise its current working relationship with members of the government. Rather than pushing forward an agenda that could be beneficial to many smaller schools in numerous associations within FISA, the Directors decided to protect the funding benefits they already enjoyed. If funding improvement were to be gained, it would be through pursuing equal access opportunities to educational resources and services.
The issue for FISA was not just money. While additional funding would be embraced by schools in all five associations, it was the organizational principles of educational choice for parents to educate their children according to their own values, which ultimately determined the decision of the FISA Directors. Beginning in the 1930s, independent schools were lobbying the BC government for some form of recognition and funding, a goal that was only achieved when independent schools united as a non-governmental agency to advocate for all independent schools in the province. But the founding fathers lobbied within the context of maintaining their identity and the right of self governance. They were successful in maintaining the right to educate their children in a context that protected the beliefs and values of families in independent schools.

Despite the hardship of the smaller independent schools, a recursive argument emerged. Public funding is essential, but at what cost? Already, public funding of independent schools carries a level of accountability that requires schools to submit to regular inspections by representatives of the Ministry of Education, maintain minimal instructional hours, employ only certified teachers and write all provincial assessments. If funding were to increase beyond 50%, would the MOE require further levels of accountability that might interfere with an independent school’s ability to hire teachers that hold similar values to those of the independent school authority? With funding levels at 50% of operating costs and no funding for land, buildings and equipment, independent schools could still make a strong argument for control over governance of their schools. Despite the financial hardships experienced by many smaller independent schools, the right of families to
govern their schools according to the deeply held values of their particular communities took a higher priority than lobbying for higher public funding levels.

The strategies of prudent political action were evident in the recommendation to maintain funding levels. Protecting the independence of independent schools remained a high priority. As well, the relationship with government senior officials and elected representatives was deemed more important than the potential financial benefits to independent schools. The timing to request further funding was not appropriate, and FISA stood to lose its reputation as a reasonable advocate for independent schools in the province. Therefore, consensual agreement to maintain the status quo at this time regarding funding was reached.

**Strategies leading to maintaining current public funding levels**

Each group within FISA was given a voice on the merits of additional funding. This was done through a consultation process that asked each association to gauge the opinions of their association schools and report back to the Board. Then through the formation of a sub-committee that included representatives from each of the five associations, FISA was able to develop some recommendations for the full Board.

The leadership of FISA was instrumental in bringing consensus to a contentious issue. Understanding the historical context of the struggle to achieve funding through numerous position papers that had been provided in advance of the retreat enabled the Directors to assess the situation accurately. They concluded that the right to an education that is consistent
with the values of families was a higher priority than additional funding. An increase in funding could lead to a decrease in control over values. FISA was prepared to endure hardship, even if it meant financial challenges for the smaller schools that were struggling financially, rather than risk increased intrusion into independent school independence and authority.

6.4 Summary

In each of the four examples cited, a respectful, cooperative approach to those in authority on funding issues is apparent. Initial efforts toward funding and recognition involved grassroots support through lobbying elected officials, letters, billboards at schools, and presentations to government. As FISA became recognized as the voice of independent schools, the political efforts shifted to consulting with candidates and leaders from all parties regarding their positions on independent school funding. The leadership was able to make direct appeals to government committees on special funding agendas that FISA deemed to be unfairly applied. Through a process of building relationships with bureaucrats and elected officials, FISA has been able to systematically improve its fiscal agenda with the government in a respectful and patient manner. In each case, all association representatives were involved in the dialogue, shaping the proposals that were presented to the government. When increased block funding was considered at the Harrison Retreat, it was the value that independent schools placed on their independence and the right of families to choose the education appropriate for their children that determined the policy on maintaining current fund-
ing levels, even though many smaller schools were struggling under higher operating costs. To protect the rightful place of independent schools within a democratic and pluralistic society, and to strengthen understanding and cooperation between independent schools and government took a higher priority than the need for increased funding.
Chapter 7

Summary and Conclusions

We can conclude that the idea of an egalitarian, multicultural society makes sense only if we suppose a plurality of public arenas in which groups with diverse values and rhetorics participate. By definition, such a society must contain a multiplicity of publics.
(Nancy Fraser, 1997) [41]

The success experienced by the Federation of Independent School Associations of British Columbia has been analyzed according to five features of organizational operations. This diverse organization of independent schools has functioned collaboratively, with minimal dissent, for over forty years, and has made significant contributions to strengthening the position of independent school education in the province. The number of students attending independent faith-based schools, university prep schools, pedagogical schools, first nation schools and special education schools has grown every year since the inception of the FISA, even when the provincial demographics showed a decline in school aged children. The coalition has established itself as the official voice for independent schools, representing 92% of the students who attend non-public schools in BC through voluntary participation. FISA is viewed by the government and by other educational organizations
such as the BCCT, BCTF, BCSTA, and the press as the representative of the province’s independent schools. The Executive Director of FISA has regular communication with members of these organizations on joint committees and by direct contact, something that took place only occasionally a decade ago. Amazingly, this has been accomplished with a staff of two people and a volunteer Board of 18. What were the factors that led to FISA’s success; how was this broad-based coalition of diverse groups able to unite around its raison d’etre? Figure 7.1 uses the five facets as a framework to describe the strategies of consensus that led to FISA’s cohesive identity and successful political action. The points under each facet briefly outline the strategies that FISA employs in constructing a model of consensus in its interaction within the groups affiliated with the FISA coalition and in its political action strategies with the provincial government on policy, recognition and funding issues. Each of these strategies supports the raison d’etre of the FISA Board.

7.1 Beliefs and Values

- Members of FISA recognize and accept the differences in beliefs and values within the groups of FISA.

- Diversity is viewed as an asset of the cultural capital within the organization

- Members are respectful of diversity.

- Members trust one another, regardless of their diversity.
Bourdieu (1985) states that, “groupings grounded in the structure of the space constructed in terms of capital distribution are more likely to be stable and durable” (p. 726) [11]. One of the forms of capital that individuals bring to an organization is symbolic, also known as beliefs and values. Symbolic capital delineates the differences that occur between the groups, and both the faith-based and pedagogically-based groups have deeply-held values on ideological issues that are important to them. Yet within FISA, there is a conscious effort to recognize and respect individual differences. While there is symbolic capital evident in the relationships on the FISA Board, it is channeled into unifying the diverse characteristics of the Board. Thus Bourdieu’s theory is supported in that FISA is a stable and durable group
due to the respect and trust of diversity within the organization.

7.2 Group Knowledge

- The Board structure is inclusive of the diversity within FISA.
- Each group within FISA has equal representation on the Board.
- The constitution and bylaws declare as unalterable the equal representation of all associations within FISA.
- Each group within FISA has a voice on the executive, sub-committees and presentations to external agencies.
- The role of FISA is to operate within a narrow agenda to which all groups can agree.
- Consensus means inclusiveness of each group's voice in FISA policies and political action.
- Time is an asset in reaching consensus within the diversity of the FISA.
- Any group has the right to disassociate from a Board decision and still remain in good standing with the organization.
- The same group benefits are extended to all associations within the FISA.
- Membership is voluntary for any group or independent school.

FISA is composed of five independent school associations, one of which is a collection of many diverse schools who belong to the AMG or Associate
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

Member Group. A foundational strategy of FISA is to include representation from each of the groups on all decision-making entities of the Board. Thus, each group has a voice in policy development. Bourdieu (1985) [11] suggests that there is a spatial relationship between members of the group which is altered by agents raising themselves over others through accumulating different forms of capital for personal gain. This is not supported by the research of FISA’s operations. The Directors appear to be well positioned within their own associations and come to FISA with strong association support for their skills and abilities. Regardless of the strong personalities on the Board, there is an acceptance that each group will work diligently to find a common position that can be adopted by all groups through consensus. There is little evidence that individuals use their personal or association capital to their own advantage; the interests of the Federation take priority over individual or single association interests.

Individual benefits are replaced with group benefits. Whatever can be gained for all independent schools takes priority over what can be gained for oneself or one’s own association of schools. Often this requires items to be tabled so Directors can consult with their associations or items can be brought to a subcommittee of the Board where one representative from each of the five associations can develop a recommendation for the Board. The process can be time consuming but unless the issue is urgent, FISA considers time an ally of consensus.

The strategy of inclusiveness of all five groups is practiced in the business of the organization. This might explain why individuals and groups that join the FISA Board tend to stay for long periods of time because they
are affirmed in their work as Board members. One member is voluntarily serving on the FISA Board for his nineteenth year! Many have served for over a decade and continue to value their involvement on the Board.

### 7.3 Personal Identities

- Members of FISA hold in common the value of the rightful place of independent schools in the province and parents’ right to choose an education appropriate for their children.

- Power is not vested in individual members, but in the collective action of the groups within FISA.

- Directors hold positions of responsibility and power within their associations; the associations select their own representation on the FISA Board where the collective action of all associations elicits the power for political action.

- Effective leadership within each independent school association is reflected in effective leadership on the Board.

Many of the comments made in regard to group knowledge could be restated here, but the concept of power bears further discussion. As an organization, FISA has acquired recognition as the representative of independent schools in British Columbia. It is the official nomination, according to Bourdieu’s definition, as the delegated authority by the province. With an official nomination comes the assurance that its symbolic capital can be converted into some forms of economic and social benefit. Public funding and recognition
of independent schools are direct benefits of the symbolic capital FISA has gained through its patient and persistent interaction with government, the press, and independent school agencies. However, an official nomination also provides rewards (benefits) despite the quality of the work that is being done, and FISA has not yet achieved this level of nomination. While benefits have been achieved for independent schools, and while FISA has been recognized as the official nomination of independent schools, that title has not been institutionalized to the point where funding is an expectation or an entitlement. FISA continues to have significant levels of accountability placed on its schools as a result of public funding and it continues to exercise vigilance on the level of funding that is being provided each year. Power, therefore, appears to be vested in the collective organization as a whole, rather than with individual members, but that power is subservient to government agencies that ultimately control the provincial resources. This is different from the entitlement received by public schools, in that independent schools have seen an attempt to reduce their funding through legislation by one provincial government as discussed in Chapter 6. Constant attack by the public school teachers’ union ensures that FISA remains united in its defense of public funding for families who choose schools that reflect their values.

7.4 External Variables

- As an NGO, FISA has established itself as a credible authority for educational policy with external agencies such as the government.
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

- Funding is a major motivator toward consensus strategies within the FISA.

- The threat to independent school recognition and funding continues to be a unifying factor within the associations that make up FISA.

Some government representatives have argued that the threat to independent school funding and recognition is the primary motivator for the collaboration by the groups within FISA. I think a strong argument can be made for this view. On a very pragmatic level, the loss of funding would have a catastrophic effect on the sustainability of independent schools and so the pragmatic categorization of FISA as an NGO, according to Diani’s (1992) [19] paradigm, reflects an organization that is establishing itself to interface between the government and the independent school associations as a non-government organization. As such, it has earned the credibility to be included on numerous government policy agencies, such as the BCCT policy committee, where FISA contributes to the broader educational agenda of the province.

As a coalition of independent schools, FISA maintains a high level of support because of its political role on behalf of independent schools. This support stems from the advocacy role that FISA fulfills on behalf of the schools, especially on the funding issue. The threat of funding loss is a major unifying factor in maintaining consensus on the Board. Without this constant threat, the need for an independent school coalition diminishes and consensus might become more challenging.
7.5 Tacit Learning

- Members learn that their diversity, while respected, cannot be addressed in FISA policy and they exercise a ‘conscious misunderstanding’ on issues that are not common to all groups.

- A member’s representation, or habitus, as a FISA Director is learned, both directly and indirectly, through organizational constructs that have been instituted at the founding of FISA and continue to be learned as new members join the FISA Board.

- Political action is focused on establishing relationships with external agencies through a thoughtful, respectful, reasonable and consistent message to government and educational institutions.

- Independent schools are stronger together than they are as individual associations or schools.

- Stable leadership within the associations and on FISA is important to achieving consensus and initiating political action.

- Diversity is a strength of the organization when representing independent schools to government, not a liability.

The focused vision of FISA as an agency that advocates for parental rights in education, and for government funding and recognition of these rights, is deliberate. Any broader mandate could jeopardize the coalition’s ability to reach consensus on issues. Bourdieu’s (1985) [11] concept of ‘conscious misunderstanding,’ which refers to the restricting of the discourse to issues
of agreement and avoiding dialogue on issues that could lead to conflict and division, describes accurately the interactions on the FISA Board. This modus operandi allows FISA to refer contentious issues back to individual associations for resolution and thus avoid the struggle of arriving at consensus with the five diverse associations. However, I believe that this strategy will not always be possible on some future debates, such as same sex relationships, where legislated rights are in conflict with religious values. With 70% of independent schools being faith-based, it may not be possible to limit the debate if one of the association schools is ever challenged in the courts over a teacher’s right to a same sex marriage while remaining employed in a school whose values disagree with a legislated entitlement.

Habitus is the determining structure that serves as the compass for the organization through the embodied knowledge that confirms its existence. This knowledge was thoughtfully created when FISA was founded in 1966, and the representation of the organization is still ‘learned’ by members new to the Board. Simply by observing, listening and participating, new members to the FISA Board can observe the practices of those who have been long-standing members of the Board. These practices are integrated by new members through a conscious adaptation of perspective until they, too, begin to mirror the FISA ideology.

An important aspect of the FISA habitus is the manner in which it engages the public on issues relating to independent schools, and the manner in which it engages the government regarding independent school entitlements. FISA’s responses in each case are thoughtful and respectful rather than confrontational and challenging, using a logical approach that appeals
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

to reason to defend its position. This has been the modus operandi for many years and is generally followed. The 2000 clawback attempted by the NDP government saw FISA take a more aggressive position on addressing the issue, but even then, the strategies were carefully planned and enacted in an escalating fashion, so as to provide government every opportunity of recanting its position and saving face.

Finally, leadership is essential in the attainment of organizational goals. El Ansari and Phillips (2001) [5] suggest that organizations require an effective infrastructure in order to encourage diverse participation and collaboration. This is not supported in the case of FISA, where minimal organizational structure is in place to oversee the organization. However, there is a vast network of support within independent schools that can be drawn upon when needed. A strong letter writing campaign was successful in 1977 and in 2000 to support the funding issues with the government. The leadership of FISA has been able to direct the political action of independent schools very effectively in achieving funding and recognition, and more recently, in having a voice on provincial policy issues. Leadership is also an important aspect of defining the habitus of FISA and of ensuring that this corporate memory is learned by new emerging Directors from the five associations.

7.6 Linking Theory and Practice in Relation to this Research

Bourdieu has suggested that there are many multi-dimensional spaces, known as social fields, that are occupied by agents according to the amount of cap-
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

ital their command and the relative weight of the different kinds of assets they possess. If we consider FISA, we see the fields within which FISA is engaged while exercising its mandate regarding independent schools. Adapting Figure 3.1 to the specifications of FISA results in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2: Fields that Operate within the FISA Social Space.

A number of other agencies in other jurisdictions across Canada also interact with FISA, but Figure 7.2 provides a reasonable representation of FISA’s social space. To illustrate the intra-organizational connection for the five associations that are part of FISA, I have selected one group, the Catholic Schools Association, to show the relationship of the CIS in its responsibilities to Catholic independent schools. Notice that some of the same fields are common to both the CIS and FISA. As with Figure 7.2, Figure 7.3 does not present all the fields with which the CIS is engaged, but if I were to outline the fields in each of FISA’s separate associations’
social spaces, the uniqueness of each of the associations and the diversity they present on the FISA Board would become readily apparent. We are able to use Bourdieus concept of fields of power within a social space to diagram the extent of similarity or diversity between groups or associations within FISA. This research was not intended to investigate diversity, but rather to consider the strategies of consensus that FISA uses within the five diverse associations that are members of the Federation. However, it would be valuable in some future study to examine the fields that each association within FISA shares in common with the others, and the fields that are unique to each association. One could then provide empirical representation of the degree of diversity that exists within these groups.

Figure 7.3: Fields within the Catholic Independent Schools Social Space.

I was attracted to researching this organization because I had not experienced such collegiality and common purpose in many of the organiza-
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

tions that I had been involved with. Indeed, many supposedly homogeneous groups, such as church communities, do not demonstrate so unified a sense of purpose or so respectful an acceptance of the individuality of others as does this widely diverse coalition.

Bourdieu (1985) [11] speaks of the rituals that are practiced in organizations. Within the coalition of FISA, I originally found it difficult to identify any rituals as I was looking for patterns of behaviour that resembled initiation rites, for example. No rituals accompany the addition of a new Board member or independent school when they join the Federation. There is the requirement of an annual membership fee that is paid each year by schools in accordance with their enrolment, but this is hardly ritualistic. However, the consistent manner in which certain policies are adhered to could be seen as a symbolic practice that is employed by FISA in fulfilling its functions.

Each association is provided with a representative on all policy committees initiated by FISA. Thus, each association has a voice in shaping the policies of independent schools in BC. As well, new policy proposals are always sent to the schools for input prior to implementation, which, though time-consuming, gives all the schools, including those that do not have direct representation in the AMG group, an opportunity to shape the policy direction for independent schools. Finally, the executive consists of one representative from each association, and each of these representatives is invited to meet with government representatives when a policy proposal is being considered.

These protocols are followed consistently and appear to provide a strong sense of ownership to each of the associations in FISA. They also promote
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

the conviction that decisions are being made collaboratively rather than by an administrative structure apart from the Board. I believe that these protocols, or, as Bourdieu would have it, rituals, are instrumental in providing sustainability to the FISA organization and promoting loyalty within its members.

Mannix and Neale (2005) [59] created a classification system for group diversity by considering much of the research that had been done on that topic, the findings of which are summarized in Table 3.1. They concluded that social categories are influential in cohesiveness of a diverse coalition. I found that differences in Knowledge Skills, Personal Differences and Social Differences did not appear to have a significant effect on group cohesiveness. However, differences in Religious Values and Beliefs and Organizational Differences were significant on FISA. The debates over the inclusion of sexual orientation into the curriculum provided significant tension between faith-based associations and non-faith-based groups. As well, the debate over the continued inclusion of a school whose values supported polygamy also strained the Board’s ability to achieve consensus. These debates also demonstrated that contentious issues are not removed from the agenda if they have an impact on each of the associations. I believe that such issues will provide the biggest challenge in the next decade as independent schools grapple with legal entitlements by staff and students that may be in conflict with faith-based values. A new discourse and an alternate paradigm to consensus may be needed if FISA wishes to maintain the high level of support that it has garnered in the past. How does one sustain a diverse coalition when the discrepancy in world view between faith-based and non-faith-based members
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

of the coalition continually widens? Can a voluntary Board be sustained under a majority vote on contentious issues, or is a philosophy of consensus both essential and possible to maintain as the challenges to unanimity grow? Is the disassociation clause in the constitution sufficient protection to allow groups to remain in good standing with the organization while holding a contrary position?

Mannix and Neale’s (2005) [59] typology on Organizational or Community Differences is also reflected in FISA, especially in the area of tenure within leadership. Ancona and Caldwell (1992) [4] have suggested that tenure diversity improved the group’s ability to define goals, prioritize work and develop work plans. A significant number of interviews commented on the tenure of the current and past Executive Director of FISA, and affirmed the work that had been done by both individuals. Over a 40 year history, only two Executive Directors have served in this role since the inception of FISA. Some might argue that such a long tenure by two people might be a limiting factor in the development of the organization, but this perception is not shared by the Directors that were interviewed.

FISA has a very strong Executive Director. He makes sure that the Board members are very well informed about past decisions and history and potential difficulties, and he’s very well respected by all the Board members, and so when Fred talks everyone listens and we deliver. He’s very wise. Interview 18:7

A consistent theme of support was echoed by all interviewees, including representatives from the Ministry of Education.
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

I believe that the long-term relationship of the Executive Director with FISA has enabled the organization to act quickly when legislation might have a negative impact on independent schools. This was particularly significant during the proposed reduction in the independent schools grant in 2000. It is also very evident when policy recommendations are being proposed by the BCCT. Long term Executive Directors appear to have insights into the dynamics of educational policy that draws on their experience with various governments over a long period of time. The long-term tenure of the Executive Directors continues to be a stabilizing force within FISA.

The same can be said of the Directors who have volunteered for the FISA Board. A significant number of Directors have been on the Board for a decade or more, and they continue to provide insight and leadership in the areas of policy and government relations. Long-term tenure of the Directors also provides a strong source of knowledge that can be drawn upon when dealing with conflict situations. The longest serving member has recently resigned after 19 years on the Board, and there are other new members as well. One wonders if the past 40 years of consensus-driven political action will change with the introduction of younger new members to the FISA Board. The Executive Director is retiring in the next year or so, and this will also change the dynamics of the organization. No one has been groomed for the position, so the challenge of leadership transition may impact the way in which FISA operates.

Good governance would suggest that we should be doing Board assessment evaluation, Board transition planning. While we have
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

a strategic plan for the organization, we do not have a mission for the Board, or a strategic plan for the Board itself. And in times of transition, that seems to me to be an important issue.

Interview 10:37

One issue stood out for this researcher during the case study of FISA. Bourdieu speaks extensively of the need for diverse groups to restrict the discourse to issues of agreement and avoid dialogue on issues that could lead to conflict. He used the term conscious misunderstanding to define this process. It was unexpected for me to find out that this process is not a natural response by members of the Board when they consider bringing unique issues from their associations for deliberation by the FISA Board. Instead, the process of limiting issues that fall within the mandate of the FISA constitution or issues that have universal significance to all groups within FISA is carefully managed. It is not a natural limiting process, but a conscious process by members of the Executive Board. Items included on the FISA agenda are carefully reviewed, particularly by the President and the Executive Director, before they are included on the agenda. Items may be added by Board members at the meetings, but if the discussion moves in potentially divisive directions, then the Executive Director reminds the members of the purpose of FISA and politely encourages certain topics to be processed by the individual associations.

It is also surprising to see how quickly the concept of ‘conscious misunderstanding’ is learned by new members. Attempts to raise group-specific topics may happen once or twice before the neophyte determines for himself
or herself what issues are suitable for Board debate. That said, this learned process is part of the sustainability of FISA and appears to work for the majority of people appointed or elected to the FISA Board by their associations. The high percentage of voluntary participation (92%) by independent schools as FISA members is confirmation that self-limiting topics is not a deterrent to participation in FISA.

Some have suggested that achieving consensus is a relatively simple process if topics of discussion are limited from discussion by the Board. Bourdieu’s conscious misunderstanding essentially silences the voices that hold contrary positions to the majority. This has not been my experience. Limiting issues is based on the principle that some issues are not applicable to all associations in FISA and a degree of wisdom is required to determine which items are relevant and which are best processed by individual associations. For example, the debate over whether the curriculum in independent schools should include discussion about sexual orientation was debated at length, with contrary opinions being voiced and heard. Such a debate provides obvious challenges to developing a position of consensus, but within FISA, the limiting of issues appears to apply only to topics that are relevant to only one or two associations. In these cases, the discussion is heard and then referred to the individual associations for action.

Herein lies the primary strategy of consensus building within FISA. Five associations that are different in their worldview are able to function with unity. Consensus does not mean that people agree on all issues. It does not require that they abandon their values in order to submit to the values of FISA. Mouffe (2005) suggests that within democratic politics, the
established parties put forward a centrist position which blurs the views of those on the left or right, thus creating a void that may be filled by minority groups who hold extreme positions. This does not occur within FISA.

Consensus within FISA means that each association recognizes and respects the diversity of the other and trusts that each association will act in a manner that will protect the rights of individual schools and associations to function according to their own deeply held beliefs and values. Differences are accepted and protected in policy by associations being entitled to disassociate from a FISA position and remain in good standing with the organization. It is the recognition of differences that enabled these groups to come together to promote the shared values of FISA. Through recognition and respect of their differences, consensus is achieved by focusing on the purpose of FISA, which is to protect the rightful place of independent schools in British Columbia and to strengthen the cooperation of independent schools with the government, the public and other educational institutions (See Figure 7.1). Consensus is managed within this context and the leadership applies its power within the framework of FISA policies and Constitution.

Consensus is not a matter of belief. It does not mean that people agree on the same beliefs and values. It means that FISA finds ways to consolidate a position that is inclusive of the views of the associations on issues that are relevant to all associations. Everyone is heard, but not every position is incorporated into policy. Only those positions to which all the diverse associations within the organization can agree are established as policy. The individual beliefs of directors and group beliefs of associations are subordinated to the supremacy of what is the right thing to do in the interests of
independent schools. This is a key organizational strategy that effectively moves a group beyond individual differences towards achieving its goals. This principle disrupts the notion that consensus is not about the exercise of power, though the exercise of power can and does take place through the articulation of consensus.

7.7 Concepts that Require Further Discussion

At the conclusion of this research, I am left with several questions that require further consideration. These include the concept of FISA as a coalition, the independence of independent schools, the implications of conscious misunderstanding, gender, race and ethnicity, and dichotomy over funding.

It is clear that, at the inception of FISA, the four associations that were part of the founding group were members of separate and distinct independent school groups. An earlier attempt at a coalition between the CIS and ISA that failed was an example of the tenuous relationship that existed between the different groups of independent schools. The Protestants were reluctant to trust the Catholics, so any agreement between the four associations was significant. However, this coalition functioned successfully until 1977 when funding and recognition were eventually achieved, after which time the associations questioned the value of continuing with the coalition. During the last two decades, the working relationship between the Directors from the diverse associations has changed, and a collegial atmosphere has emerged. Directors from the SCSBC association feel as comfortable with the Catholic schools representatives as they do with their Protestant coun-
The Directors at the FISA table do not differentiate themselves as Directors of ISA or AMG. They appear to consider themselves as Directors of FISA and as representatives of the independent schools of BC. So do we still have a coalition of diverse associations in FISA, or has the organization become a representative independent school Board that oversees the policies governing BC independent schools?

What about the term “independent”? Are BC independent schools really independent? Clearly, the priority of the governing bodies of the various independent school Boards throughout the province is to maintain their independence from government regulation and to govern their schools according to the priorities of the schools’ governing bodies. ISA protect their right to provide a university prep environment for highly skilled students, ACSIBC protects its right to hire teachers that adhere to faith-based values based on biblical truths and to integrate this faith into the instructional program, the Seventh day Adventists want little government interference as they provide faith-based education in many of their small schools throughout BC. So the desire to maintain the control over governance of independent schools is understood. But are the FISA schools truly independent?

The conditions rightfully set by the government when funding was introduced in 1977 required that independent schools teach the BC curriculum, use certified teachers, meet the learning outcomes for each curriculum, write provincial exams, operate in safe facilities and be subject to inspections by the OIIS. In recent years, legislation in regards to smoking on school property became applicable to both public and independent schools. Safety regulations apply to public and independent schools. School evaluations carefully
review course outlines, teacher certification, facilities, administrative policies, student records, graduation requirements and privacy issues which are mandated by the OIIS through inspector regulations and the Independent School Act.

Public funds are provided for partial funding of the operational costs if the schools are certified as Group 1 or 2 schools. So are the schools truly independent or are they simply an extension of the educational program for the province, delivered by organizations that consider beliefs and values as important aspects of their children’s education? Or, are BC independent schools simply charter schools sanctioned by the Ministry of Education that have a right to charge a tuition for their services? This is a question that is worthy of further research and debate, but I have chosen simply to identify the issue, since the question of independence falls outside of the focus of the current research.

This research has also been silent on the issue of race and ethnicity, and has identified very little on the issue of gender equity. Yet within the AMG group of schools, there are a number of schools that cater to specific ethnic minorities and races. Unfortunately, the Directors of FISA are representative of the larger independent schools, primarily from the Fraser Valley, since each person donates his or her time from his or her own school association to serve on the FISA Board. Thus, smaller schools do not generally have their own representative on the Board. This has implications for the issue of race and ethnicity. Does FISA provide a voice for the smaller schools located in the interior of the province by the AMG representatives from the Fraser Valley selected to serve on the Board? I recently proposed that
the FISA Board hold several Board meetings in different locations in the province and visit several of these smaller schools to hear of their concerns and priorities for independent school education. The Board considered the proposal favourably.

The AMG group is also a somewhat disenfranchised group within FISA. It represents a wide range of First Nations, ethnic, faith-based, pedagogical and marginalized groups and is represented by six Directors, generally not from the areas where these schools are located. How can this apparent inequity be addressed as FISA moves forward over the next ten years? How does the Board ensure that all schools have a voice regarding the direction of independent school education in this province? The overwhelming participation by schools in FISA can be interpreted as an indication of a high degree of satisfaction with its representation of schools who have no direct voice on the Board. Nevertheless, ensuring that our smaller and possibly marginalized schools are considered when developing independent school policy is an important priority for the coming years.

Given the scope of this research, namely to address the strategies of consensus, particularly as they relate to funding in the form of government grants to independent schools, the issue of gender was not fully examined. There is a significant imbalance of males representing the five associations of FISA, suggesting that gender inequity may be an issue. It may be appropriate to address gender issues even though gender was not voiced as a concern by the people interviewed for this research. Women represent a minority of the 18 positions that are available to the five associations. FISA does not select the Directors who are appointed or elected to the Board but there
has been no attempt that I am aware of to make the various associations aware of the limited number of women serving on the Board. It is not the role of FISA to make specific recommendations to the associations regarding who should serve on the Board, but it may be appropriate to address the apparent masculine habitus that appears to dominate the FISA table. Is there a role for the FISA leadership to inform the associations of the current composition of the Board and, in this way, encourage associations to send a proportional representation of women to speak to policy issues within independent schools as individual associations select their representatives? This would certainly merit further research when considering the composition of the FISA board of directors and by extension, the composition of leadership positions within the five associations that are part of FISA.

Funding appears to be the major issue that maintains the collaborative spirit among the association representatives. Ironically, it was the major issue under discussion by the FISA Directors at the Harrison Retreat in 2008. It is also the major issue for educational organizations such as the BCSTA and the BCTF when discussing support for independent schools. FISA does not want an increase in the per pupil operating grants to independent schools beyond the current 50% and 35% because they fear further regulation of independent schools by the provincial government. The BCTF and BCSTA are on record as opposing all public funding for independent schools, while supporting the right for these schools to operate. When I asked several BCTF representatives on the BCCT Board about the Federation’s position on independent schools, I was told by two former Presidents of the BCTF that the Federation is not opposed to independent schools, but is opposed to
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

public funding for these schools (discussion, July 31, 2009, BCCT offices).

The partial consensus between BCTF and FISA members regarding funding contains an irony that illustrates an interesting principle about consensus, which is that people may agree for different reasons, just as readily as they may disagree for different reasons. We have the FISA Directors refusing to ask for additional funds in the per pupil operating grants at the expense of smaller schools that are struggling to meet their financial obligations, and we have the BCTF advocating for no funding for independent schools in BC. Both groups hold a similar position of public funding restraint but for ideologically different reasons. The BCTF endorses public funding for public schools only, while FISA sees additional operating grants as a threat to the independent governance of their schools.

I believe that the struggle over funding is an important factor in unifying the diverse associations within FISA, and as long as this issue continues to be under debate, independent schools will continue to work together as a unified body to protect the legal recognition and partial public funding that have been gained over the past forty years.

7.8 Discussion

FISA’s strategies for consensus within the diversity of its groups allow it to form a common defense which can effectively defend against attacks such as a funding reduction, as was the case in 2000. It can utilize inclusive strategies, reflective of some aspects of its diversity, to formulate effective policies for governance and political action. FISA’s consensus strategies are
like armour that protects it when under attack and gives it confidence that it can defend itself because of the preparation and organizational structures that have been created to allow for a unified approach to political action.

Each of these five organizational facets must be addressed in order to construct a framework for consensus. If FISA were to adopt organizational strategies that would provide a structure for FISA to conduct its business, but ignore the beliefs and values of the members that are part of the Federation, the result would likely lead to a failed organization. Some of the first coalition attempts between the Catholics and the university prep schools failed because the respective groups did not have an understanding of the values that each group considered important. The coalition was based solely on a desire to change the taxation system for independent schools and resulted in disappointment for both groups. In the same manner, failure to understand the dynamics of the personalities representing the five associations, or being insensitive to the symbolic rituals and cultural aspects of the different groups, can also lead to a dysfunctional Board. Planning FISA meetings for a Saturday, for example, may be logical for most people but it provides a problem for the Seventh-day Adventist group as it is their Sabbath day. Diversity provides challenges to an organization, but it can also be an asset if the organization respects the values of its members and establishes practices and organizational structures that enable its members to feel valued through an active participation and inclusion into the policies and practices of the organization.

Facing external threat is not a pleasant fact of organizational life, but often it can be a significant factor promoting unity within the group. The
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

threat of losing something or of being left out of the information loop can be a powerful motivator for any diverse group to coalesce. The government and other groups who support public school funding exclusively serve as that threat for independent schools. Despite FISA’s non-partisan approach to government, the government has the power at any time to change the way independent schools are supported with public funds or to increase the level of accountability that may be required as a result of receiving public funds. I believe this is a significant unifying factor for the five associations within FISA.

The group benefits are almost as powerful a motivator as the threat of losing funding. FISA has been effective in securing additional benefits for independent schools which improve learning opportunities in independent schools around the province. Special education funding, special purpose grants, a more favourable grant payment schedule, and French language grants are just some of the additional benefits provided to independent schools. While the individual members are not recipients of direct benefits, their associations collectively are beneficiaries of the work by FISA. Benefits are also a powerful tool around which a diverse group can collaborate (Olson, 1974) [65].

This study supports the view that FISA has been effective in establishing the social constructs of consensus within its diverse membership. It has gained a reputation as a respected educational body that takes a reasonable, patient, but persistent approach to independent school issues. It has also become a voice for independent schools on government committees such as the Education Advisory Council, school evaluation processes, the BCCT
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

policy development committee, and numerous ad hoc committees that are formed to develop new strategies to improve education in this province. This process has been deliberately orchestrated by the founders of FISA, and continues to be practiced by the current Board and leadership of FISA. In the view of this researcher, FISA serves as an effective model for organizations that are seeking a broad-based, heterogeneous level of support from members who are part of independent schools in British Columbia. Diversity is not something that should threaten progress; it can be an effective catalyst for organizational success if the appropriate strategies are socially constructed in the formation of the organization and maintained in its operations.

7.9 Limitations of the Study

This is a case study of the Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia. The study is a single case study and therefore, should not be used to make generalizations to other groups that may be similar in organizational characteristics. While many of the strategies may appear to be applicable to other groups, the research is only a reflection of this organization in this location and at this time. Should an attempt be made to replicate this research or to extend its findings to another group or organization, one cannot generalize the same assumptions that I have made in this research to another setting without conducting a multiple case study of several similar organizations. Yin (1994) states that, “Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions only and not to populations or universes” (p. 10) [89]. While it has been shown that this
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

case study illustrates Bourdieu’s social space theory quite accurately, the findings documented herein cannot be assumed to be true of other diverse groups without further investigation. The interviews also may have generated information that was sympathetic to the research question, due to the fact that the researcher is a Director of the FISA Board and is known to most of the individuals who were interviewed. Interviewed persons may have given responses that they felt were supportive of FISA and their responses may have been intended to portray the organization in a positive light. While there is no way of determining if this was the case, the possibility exists that the interviews may have been less critical of the overall functioning of FISA because of the participation on the FISA Board of interviewees and interviewer.

The questions given to the interviewed individuals might have been written to allow the individuals to deconstruct their relationship with FISA more directly. That said, all of the interviewees responded in a very direct and open manner to all of the questions.

Though I have attempted to deal with the information in an unbiased fashion, my position as an external-insider (Merton, 1972) [61], director of FISA and supporter of educational choice for parents in British Columbia via partial government funding for schools that meet specific education requirements set by the MOE and defined in law by the Independent School Act, does have a bearing on my interpretation of the findings. My involvement as a director of FISA has provided me with unrestricted access to the current and archival data within FISA, as well as full access to directors meetings and some executive meetings. Harding (1998) posits that
class, race, culture and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint (p. 9) [43]. One must consider that one’s own frame of reference will provide a perspective that will influence the researchers presentation of her/his analysis. Thus, the perspective that I hold may have caused me to view circumstances in a more favourable light than had I been an external researcher. There may have been contextual factors that should have been given careful attention but may have been overlooked because of my insider lens with FISA. While I acknowledge my direct involvement in FISA, I tried to maintain an objective stance in my analysis of the interviews and related data, though I recognize that the highly effective manner in which FISA functions may have disposed me towards positive interpretations of the data. I also acknowledge that an external researcher may have observed the same data through a different lens and thus may have drawn different interpretations. This may also provide a limiting factor for this research.

7.10 Implications

The conclusions drawn in this study merely open the possibility for further research on how consensus can be achieved within a diverse group. As a single case study, the findings are applicable to this particular organization and cannot be transferred to another context. Given the success that FISA has experienced in its forty year history, it may be appropriate to determine if other long-standing organizations would show similar findings
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

to this research. One could apply the constructs of this research to similar organizations to determine if similar results can be achieved by other organizations.

The five facets of organizational structure developed in this research also need further critique and development. While it served as a useful model to study this particular organization, more work may be helpful in determining if the model has a broader application for further research. There may be value in considering leadership as a separate facet of organizational development, rather than linking it to personal identities as I have done. Leadership was identified as a significant factor in the success of FISA, potentially enabling it to be as powerful a motivator to consensus as the threat of losing public funding for independent schools. The issue of individual or group benefits has been discussed within the five faceted rubric under Group Knowledge. At the conclusion of this study, I believe there is value in considering benefits for the individual or group within an organization as a separate facet in the paradigm used in this study. El Ansari and Phillips (2001) [5] confirm that, when coalitions are not able to deliver on their promises to members, then the members become dissatisfied and conflicts arise. The absence of conflict within FISA suggests that the benefits to the associations within the Federation are sufficient. The absence of intra-Board conflict and the extended tenure of many Board members suggests that the individual benefits are also substantial. Bourdieu (1985) [11] speaks of the social space that agents create within a particular field which defines their relationship to other agents. I believe the benefits that agents or members receive as a result of their affiliation with a group are significant enough to
warrant adding a sixth facet of organizational study. Further research would be recommended in the development of my organizational paradigm, drawn from the work of Jarvis (1998) [49], where I currently limited the facets to beliefs and values, external variables, personal identities, group knowledge and tacit learning.

7.11 Further Research

This research was conducted on members of FISA, an educationally-based diverse group. The strategies for consensus were analyzed on the basis of public funding issues for independent schools. A diverse coalition could find agreement on funding issues with much more frequency than on a philosophical issue that applies to all groups. It would be important to determine if the same strategies for consensus would apply to the groups within FISA if the issue was ideologically based, such as whether independent schools should accept teachers into their schools based solely on their professional qualifications, regardless of race, creed, gender, or sexual orientation. Could the same strategies for consensus on such issues be successful?

A number of strategies have been identified that have enabled the FISA coalition to operate successfully in developing policy action and policy development for over four decades. The strategies for building the coalition were closely connected to an act of generosity by the Catholic schools, which agreed to equal representation despite their majority student enrolment. There were also thoughtful organizational policies established as a foundational framework for the federation. However, coalitions are formed for a
variety of reasons, some short term in nature, such as a specific environ-
mental issue around which a community might coalesce, and others of more
lasting duration, such as a coalition of political parties in order to form gov-
ernment. What can we learn from the way FISA was built, as a coalition,
in relation to other coalitions in the field of education? Further research
on coalition-building in the field of education, both in British Columbia
and in other jurisdictions across Canada, would provide important insights
into how groups engage with one another in various political and provincial
contexts, particularly in relation to issues pertaining to public funding of
independent schools.

This research was conducted in an educational setting. It would be of
interest to see if similar findings would be evident in other non-government
organizations (NGOs). Diani (1992) [19] suggests that informal networks of
interest groups try to maximize their outcomes by forming alliances with
other agents or groups, and the collective entities only maintain their rela-
tionship until the conclusion of the conflictual situation. If this study were
to be conducted on political interest groups or community advocacy groups,
would similar findings be identified as were observed in the FISA study, or
would the coalition terminate when the crisis expired? Further research on
diverse coalitions outside of education would be of interest.

The question of funding for independent schools in Canada and other
jurisdictions needs to be further problematized. British Columbia has been
able to develop a legislated means of support for independent schools that
other jurisdictions have been unable to achieve. Other provinces in Canada
have resisted funding of independent schools (see debates in Shapiro (1986)
[73]. Notwithstanding, British Columbia appears to have articulated a provincial political solution to applying public funds to non-public schools. A comparative case study, across Canadian contexts, would open the debate on school funding and independent schools in other Canadian contexts, in order to understand why certain provinces have provided funds in support of all independent schools and public schools, or in support of Catholic schools and public schools, or in support of public schools only. A comparative study would provide some useful information to policy-makers, since Shapiro (1986) suggests that the final decision appears to be in the hands of the politicians or the courts.

Operating within a culture of diversity is a challenge for many people as suggested by Mullen and Copper (1994) [63], who indicated that diversity may have a detrimental effect on group performance, because group members may perceive that they lack the similarities required for cohesion. Given our multi-cultural society in Canada, further work in the area of diversity within organizations, and how diverse organizations might work collaboratively, may be helpful in finding common ground despite individual and group differences.

The present case study on FISA suggests that further research is needed on the very meaning of “diversity” within education and its articulations across various Canadian contexts. The present research considered diversity of independent school associations upholding diverse ontological perspectives, primarily around pedagogical and theological perspectives. Critical questions for further research emerge at this juncture: How is diversity defined and perceived in social movements and coalitions similar to FISA?
Chapter 7. Summary and Conclusions

What larger politics and ontological positions shape the contours and limits of diversity, and how does such diversity shape organizational dynamics and politics? What is the impact of diversity within school communities where the teaching staff represents a broad range of ethnic, racial and ideological diversity? What has been the impact multiculturalism within a democratic and pluralistic society?

There is an ongoing need to understand how diversity can be normalized and how groups can collaborate through a process of decision-making that values all those who are members of a diverse community. This is an important aspect of this research and an important aspect of civic relationships. Diversity is a reality within most cultures in the world and yet there appears to be constant struggle in accepting diversity, individual and group differences causing social tension that can be volatile. Recognition that diversity has the potential of enriching one’s personal life or an organization’s success, is further cause for reflection and further research.

7.12 Conclusion

This research was driven by what I experienced personally as a member of the FISA Board. I had sat on numerous other governing Boards during the course of my career, but I had not experienced the supportive spirit that was evident among the different independent school organizations represented on the FISA Board. It was my desire to determine what enabled this group of professional educators, representing many different faith-based and pedagogical perspectives, to collaborate in spite of their differences. I
believe that the organizational structure implemented in 1966, the potential threat to public funding of independent schools, the trust and respect that each Director shows to the others, the shared benefits, and the manner in which conflicts are addressed are the main factors in developing consensus strategies within this diverse group.

As I write some concluding thoughts for this research, I am looking out over the beautiful Fraser Valley dressed in fall colours of red, orange, brown and yellow, interspersed with green conifers and open meadows. It is a beautiful view of my favourite season of the year. It is also a colourful analogous mosaic for the diversity that we experience in this multicultural nation of Canada. The challenge for us is to find ways in which we can protect the beauty of each individual and cultural identity by providing a means of self-expression that validates the good in each of us. An “awakening of consciousness,” suggests Bourdieu (1985), is a political action designed to enable a group to achieve its objectives. I would broaden this interpretation to include an awakening of consciousness to the awareness that our diversity is an enabling strength that can move us to some collective good, where accepting and respecting the uniqueness that each of us brings to our communities and nation contributes to a richer society in which both individuality and interpersonal connections can be more deeply realized.

And within such an awakening of consciousness, this research shows that there is a need to reexamine the concept of consensus within our cultural diversity and to allow differences to be respected and valued, in order that an understanding of each participant’s or organization’s uniqueness contributes to the determination and achievement of common goals. Each of us contains
beliefs and values, cultural practices and rituals that are as colourful as the landscape that I see around me; and in spite of these differences, we have the potential to build consensus through a process that is not about granting power to the dominant and limiting the influence of those in minority positions, but is rather about developing an inclusive position derived through thoughtful discourse and an acknowledgement that our uniqueness can be protected and valued within an organization while we pursue some common good.
Bibliography


Chapter 7. Bibliography


Chapter 7. Bibliography


[23] FISA. Poll of political candidates, August 1972.


[27] FISA. Minutes c, March 1976.


[31] FISA. Backgrounder, April 2000.


Chapter 7. Bibliography

[34] FISA. Briefing notes, March 2002.


[37] FISA. Email, September 2005.

[38] FISA. Future directions for board meetings, January 2008.

[39] FISA. Internal political activity chronology, undated.


Chapter 7. Bibliography


Chapter 7. Bibliography


Appendix A

FISA Letter of Permission

June 20, 2005
Mr. Peter Hope
3017 Goldstream Avenue
Vancouver, BC
V7T 3C5

Dear Mr. Hope,

Thank you for your letter of June 7, 2005 requesting that the FISA allow you to study the operation and governance of the FISA with respect to the effects of community within diversity in fulfillment of requirements for your doctoral studies.

I am pleased to advise you the FISA officers, in meeting on June 22, 2005, and the FISA President, in consultation on June 24, 2005, gave approval to your request. All of them were pleased to see the FISA as an object of study.

We wish you every success as you unplug in your studies while carrying the A-lime Superintendent's responsibilities.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

FISA Executive Director
Appendix B

BREB Certificate of Approval
Appendix C

Case Study Protocol

Diversity and the Social Construction of Consensus – A Case Study of the Federation of Independent School Associations of British Columbia

Purpose:

To explore the policies adopted by FISA as a framework for uniting its coalition of diverse independent schools. Specifically, how was consensus achieved on the FISA Board regarding a funding policy for operational grants for independent schools in 1977, and was this same strategy used in obtaining full funding for independent school special needs students in 2005?

Key Features of the Case Study:

FISA is a coalition of independent schools representing every faith group in the province, as well as university prep schools and pedagogical schools such as Waldorf and Montessori. FISA has operated collaboratively for forty years, despite group differences. The five groups within FISA include:
Appendix C. Case Study Protocol

1. CIS Catholic Independent Schools
2. ISA Independent School Associations (University prep)
3. AMG Associate Member Group (ungrouped independent schools)
4. SCSBC Society of Christian Schools of BC
5. ACSIBC Association of Christian Schools International of BC

The case study will consider interviews with the two Executive Directors of FISA, directed interviews of numerous Board members (past and present), an examination of FISA’s records, newspaper articles and personal observations of Board meetings.

Organization of this Protocol:

1. Procedures
   (a) Initial Scheduling of Opening-ended Interviews
   (b) Schedule interviews with two Executive Directors of FISA
   (c) Identify themes that are discussed in the interview
   (d) Develop a questionnaire for the directed interviews of current and past Board members of FISA, as well as several Ministry representatives

2. Identify the List of Individuals to be Interviewed
   (a) Two Directors from each of the groups within FISA
Appendix C. Case Study Protocol

i. CIS – Catholic Independent Schools

ii. ISA – Independent Schools Association

iii. SCSBC – Society of Christian Schools of BC

iv. ACSIBC – Association of Christian Schools of BC

v. AMG – Associate Member Group

(b) Two Representatives from the Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools of the Ministry of Education

(c) One Representative from the Ministry of Education

(d) Gender-balanced interviewee selection - The list of interviewees includes the three female members on the current Board.

3. Case Study Protocol and Questions

(a) Interviews of Subjects

i. Subjects to be interviewed are to be contacted in advance of the interview, giving them the option to refuse to participate if they wish. Prior to the interview, a consent form will be presented, outlining the purpose of the study and confidentiality protection that will be undertaken by the lead investigator. All identities will be kept anonymous and the audio tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet during the data collection phase of the study, and destroyed within one year after the report has been completed.

ii. Audio tapes will be transcribed and the transcriptions will be viewed by the lead investigator and an assistant.
Appendix C. Case Study Protocol

iii. The questions that will be used have been derived from the interviews of the two Executive Directors of FISA and from themes that have been identified by the lead investigator.

iv. The question list and consent form are attached to this protocol.

(b) Examination of Minutes of FISA for 1977 and 2005

i. Minutes will be examined from 1975 – 1977, and from 2003 – 2005 to assess the working of the Board on the issue of funding from the Provincial Government.

ii. The minutes will also be examined for 2000, when FISA took action against the government for removing 5 million dollars from the block funding, an amount equal to 3% of the total independent school grant.

(c) Examination of the FISA briefs that were written to support funding requests in 1977 and 2005.

(d) Examination of press releases and newspaper articles on the funding question.

(e) Board meetings will be attended by the lead investigator, who will take notes on Board member interaction during consensus building.

4. Analysis Plan and Case Study Report

(a) Theme Identification
Appendix C. Case Study Protocol

i. Themes will be developed that show how consensus has been achieved on the issue of funding for FISA

ii. Interviews will be the primary source of thematic data, and the minutes, briefs, newspaper articles and Board observations will be used to identify chains of evidence to support the themes.

(b) Case Study Report

i. A descriptive narrative will be written on the findings of the case study. This narrative will articulate the key themes on how consensus has been achieved within an alliance of diverse groups within the FISA.

ii. The report will be provided to the Executive Director for review to ensure accuracy of information within the body of the report.
Appendix D

Interview Questions

Community of Diversity: A Case Study of the
Federation of Independent School Associations of
British Columbia

Introductory Comments and Questions:

Thank-you for consenting to participate in this interview. I will ask several questions that I’d like you to answer to the best of your understanding. If you wish to reflect on your response for a moment, I will move to the next question and come back later for your response. If you would like to expand on your answer by giving an example or introducing a new thought or perspective, please feel free to do so. This is a directed interview, but you are free to add your own thoughts that you feel are germane to the organization and policy development of FISA.

1. How long, and in what capacity, have you been associated with FISA?

2. Do you feel that FISA is successful in achieving its objectives? [Why/why not?]

3. Once FISA achieved legal recognition and funding in 1977, there was
Appendix D. Interview Questions

discussion on the Board about dissolving FISA. What has been FISA’s role since achieving recognition and funding?

4. Describe your impressions of the working relationship among the members of the Board.

5. Are there individuals or groups that are privileged over other members within FISA and if so, in what way? Do some groups get a greater benefit as a FISA member than others?

6. How does the Board resolve issues or develop policy which reflects the will of all its members? What occurs when the Board is unable to arrive at consensus?

7. FISA represents schools from practically every religious, pedagogical and educational perspective in the province. How is such a diverse group of educational leaders able to work together when there are so many differences between them?

8. In your view, how would you describe FISA’s reputation among various stakeholders? What factors have shaped FISA’s reputation over time?

9. Most Boards are selected or appointed by members of the organization. This is not the case with FISA, where others determine who sits on the Board. How is the FISA Board able to accomplish its objectives when it has no say in who serves on the Board?

10. Are you familiar with the disassociation clause in the FISA bylaws that allows a group to opt out of supporting a position taken by the rest of
Appendix D. Interview Questions

the Board? [Any association or the group of associate members shall have the right to disassociate itself from specific decisions or actions of the federation.] Why do you think this has rarely been used?

11. When FISA was formed, there were four groups that joined, each having an equal voice on the Board, even though one group was substantially larger than any of the others. Do you think that ‘an equal voice for all’ has influenced the FISA Board, and if so, in what ways?

12. What objectives have been achieved during your association with FISA that have assisted in advancing the cause of independent schools? What were the setbacks and why?

13. In what ways do the personalities of members around the Board table influence the capability of FISA to achieve its goals as an organization?

14. Funding and recognition have been a priority for FISA in its engagement with the government. The current 35% and 50% has been in place for many years and recent discussions at FISA are suggesting that independent schools should request more funding from the Ministry of Education. What strategies do you think will be employed by the Directors to achieve consensus, when some groups fear a loss of independence with greater funding? In other words, predict how you think the FISA Board will deal with this issue.

15. What do you see as the major challenges for FISA that could threaten its capability to collaborate on organizational and policy issues in the future?
Concluding comments:

Are there any other thoughts that come to mind on the workings of FISA? [Allow an opportunity to respond] If not, I want to thank you for your participation in this interview. Once the study is concluded, I will provide an executive summary of the findings for all individuals who participated in this project. Thank-you once again for your participation.

Peter Froese, UBC EDST
Appendix E

Letter to Participants

Department of Educational Studies
Mailing address:
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

July 26, 2006

Dear [interviewee’s name]

I am conducting a study of the attributes that build community within the diversity of the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA) in British Columbia. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Andre Mazawi, professor of Educational Studies at the University
Appendix E. Letter to Participants

of British Columbia, and is in partial fulfillment of an EdD degree. The research will become a public document upon completion.

One aspect of the research will be a number of interviews that I will conduct with current and past members of the FISA Board in order to get a sense of how such a diverse group of individuals representing a wide range of religious beliefs and pedagogical perspectives can function with such unanimity and common purpose.

Your participation would involve an interview that would take approximately one hour to complete, in which you will be asked to reflect on your involvement with FISA and your perception of how this organization has been successful in organizational and educational policy development despite its diversity. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, in that the information you provide will be coded and your name will not be used in any reports of the completed study. Interviews will be taped and kept in a locked filing cabinet, and transcripts of the interview will be stored in a password protected computer database. You may request a copy of the transcript prior to it being used for the research.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the research at any time without jeopardy. A follow-up interview may be requested in order to expand on information given in the first interview; however, this is unlikely.

I will contact you in the next week to set up a time when it would be convenient for me to conduct a one hour interview with you. If you have any questions or desire further information about this research, you may contact me, Peter Froese, at 778-240-5242 or via email at rlfroese@shaw.ca.
Appendix E. Letter to Participants

You may also wish to contact the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Andre Mazawi, at 604-822-5374, or via email at Andre.Mazawi@ubc.ca.

Thank you for considering your participation in this research.

Best regards,

Peter Froese,

EdD candidate, UBC
Consent Form

Identifying Attributes That Build Community
Within the Diversity of Independent Schools in
British Columbia

This study is being conducted by Peter Froese, an EdD candidate working under the supervision of Dr. Andre Mazawi, professor of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. The research is being conducted in support of a thesis, which is in partial requirement of an EdD degree, and upon completion will become a public document. Peter Froese can be contacted at 778-240-5242 or via e-mail at rlfroese@shaw.ca.

This research examines the organizational and educational workings and policy development of the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA). A number of interviews will be conducted with current and past members of the FISA Board in order to get a sense of how such a diverse group of individuals representing a wide range of religious beliefs and pedagogical perspectives can function with such unanimity and common purpose. In addition, minutes of meetings, historical documents, publications, and FISA records will be examined for the purpose of identifying attributes
that have contributed to building consensus within Independent Schools and specifically, the FISA Board.

Your participation will involve an interview that would take approximately one hour to complete, in which you will be asked to reflect on your involvement with FISA and your perception of how this organization has been successful in organizational and educational policy development despite its diversity. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, in that the information you provide will be coded and your name will not be used in any reports of the completed study. Transcripts of the interview will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and computer hard disc data will be restricted through password protection. You may request a copy of the transcript prior to it being used for the research.

If you have any questions or wish further information about this research, you may contact the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Andre Mazawi at 604-822-5374 or via e-mail at Andre.Mazawi@ubc.ca. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the research at any time without jeopardy. A follow-up interview may be requested in order to expand on information given in the first interview; however, this is unlikely. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records and that you consent to participate in this research.
Appendix G

Annual Enrolment of
Independent and Public
Schools in British Columbia
### Appendix G. Annual Enrollment of Independent and Public Schools in British Columbia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public Enrlmnt</th>
<th>Annual Growth %</th>
<th>Indep Enrlmnt</th>
<th>Annual Growth %</th>
<th>Total Enrlmnt</th>
<th>Indep Frac %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>536,192</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>23,318</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>559,510</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>527,771</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>23,691</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>551,462</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>517,786</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>24,556</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>542,342</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>511,671</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>24,827</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>536,498</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>509,805</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>26,314</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>536,119</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>503,371</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>27,936</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>531,307</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>500,336</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>28,280</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>528,616</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>497,312</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>29,118</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>526,430</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>491,085</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
<td>30,326</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>521,411</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>486,692</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>33,553</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>520,245</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>486,221</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>34,242</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>520,463</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>491,234</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>36,724</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>527,958</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>499,994</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>37,731</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>537,725</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>512,926</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>38,438</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>551,364</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>519,958</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>40,381</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>560,339</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>539,300</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>42,860</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>582,160</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>554,590</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>46,024</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>600,614</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>568,668</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>49,402</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>618,070</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>582,781</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>52,400</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>635,181</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>594,773</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>54,207</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>648,980</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>607,644</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>55,866</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>663,510</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>615,980</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>58,497</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>674,477</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>614,458</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>59,606</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>674,064</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>613,607</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>59,720</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>673,327</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>610,851</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>59,743</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>670,594</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>609,033</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>59,951</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>667,388</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>600,245</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>62,113</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>656,362</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>593,724</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>62,878</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>656,602</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>588,010</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>64,406</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>652,416</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>582,096</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>65,724</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>647,820</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>572,156</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>67,561</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>639,717</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>568,110</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>68,633</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>636,743</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>567,141</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>69,687</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>636,828</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table G.1: Annual Independent School Enrollment in British Columbia Proportional to the Provincial Student Enrollment (represented by graph in Figure 5.1).