WOMEN CREATING A CARING ORGANIZATION:
THE PUBLIC DIMENSIONS OF CARE

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to describe and illustrate how the Board members of a nonprofit organization have constructed and sustained a caring organization. The study answers the ethnographic questions that framed the research purpose and focus: What are the organization's core values? Where, when, how and by whom are they articulated? How do the participants enact these core values in their practice? What is the role of learning in a caring organization? What does care look like in a caring organization? The focus of this study's description and analysis are the interactions and practices of the women trustees as they engaged in the work of governance within routine Board of Directors' meetings. The data collected include field observations of Board meetings, interviews with Board members and organizational documents. The study conceptualizes meetings as the primary process and form in which organizational members create, maintain, and re-create their organization (Schwartzman, 1989). The study uses a multi-perspective approach (J. Martin, 1992) to organizational culture in order to describe elements of congruence, difference and contradiction in a caring organization. The study describes and illustrates how the organizational members developed care as a central organizing principle, a moral practice and a political idea (Tronto, 1993). The members' values, beliefs, and practices had moved care from the private realms of caring work into the public realms of caring practice, expanding care from its predominantly private interpretation to a larger public notion. The organization studied was one that was founded by women, governed by
women and predominantly staffed by women. It provides programs, services and resources to meet the child care needs of families, children, child care providers, child care related organizations and the community. The study's findings have implications for practice in the development of nonprofit organizations that support caring practice and caring work.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and illustrate how the members of an alternative organization construct and sustain an alternative vision of organizational life. The focus of this study is the women Board members of the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, which is a provincial, nonprofit organization that was founded in 1989 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Its mandate is to promote and support “affordable, inclusive, quality child care resources and services throughout British Columbia” (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1994-1995, p. 1).

In this thesis I argue that Westcoast is an alternative organization because it is structured by care rather than by profit or production (Hart, 1992). Its caring practice, however, did not “spontaneously” emerge from the “natural” acts of its members’ caring and cooperation (Brown, 1992; Tronto, 1993). On the contrary, Westcoast is a complex organization that required skilled leadership and the skillful negotiation of caring values. This study is also one of learning--learning that is situated in the governance activities and interactions of a Board of Directors as they maintain and develop a caring organization.

The focus of the study’s description and analysis is the trustees’ Board meetings. The primary role and responsibility of a nonprofit Board of Directors is to govern their organization through the establishment, maintenance and renewal of organizational policy, purpose and vision (Carver, 1990). Fundamental to this responsibility is the
articulation, development and negotiation of shared core values. How Board members learn to develop organizational values has not been closely examined in the nonprofit, organizational or adult education literature or research.

In an alternative organization like Westcoast, it is important to understand how routine Board activities and processes supported or hindered the Board’s governance work to sustain a caring organization. Schwartzman (1989) argues that organizational meetings, such as the Board meeting itself, serve as the primary organizational "sense-making" and "culturally validating" processes. This framework supports the idea that the routine Board meeting is the organizational space where the participants are engaged in the process of generating, affirming and developing shared core values of care and caring practice.

**Context of the Study**

The Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre provides a broad variety of programs and services that serve the child care needs of families, children, child care providers, child care related organizations and the community. Westcoast is also an umbrella organization, offering a variety of administrative services to its five nonprofit member organizations, each of which share premises with Westcoast--B.C. Daycare Action Coalition, Children’s Services Employees Union, Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, School Age Child Care Association of B.C. and Western Canada Family Day Care Association of B.C.

In its first six years of life, Westcoast experienced remarkable growth in the breadth of programs and services it provides, in the level of provincial government
financial support it receives, in the number of staff it employs, and in the complexity of external and internal issues to which it responds. During the period of the field study, March 1994 to March 1995, Westcoast’s Board of Directors experienced the transition from a founding and older membership to a membership that included new individuals. The Board was shifting from an intimately connected group of people who shared a common history, social networks and friendship ties to a larger, more diverse Board whose members were less socially affiliated outside the organization.

Westcoast is predominantly a women’s organization. It was founded by a group of women, it is staffed primarily by women and it is governed by women trustees. The 17 members of the Board of Directors, who are the focus of this study, were all English-speaking. These women predominantly shared a White, European heritage. One woman came from an Indo-Canadian background. The majority of Board members also shared a professional background in child care work as advocates, educators or providers. Two women did not work for pay in the child care field but had served as volunteers in their children’s child care settings.

An Ethnographic Approach

The study takes an anthropological or cultural approach to examining routine Board meetings. Meetings are not taken-for-granted organizational events but are understood as problematic organizational processes. Meetings are constructed by their participants and are rooted in a particular socio-cultural setting (Schwartzman, 1993). Through the ethnographic methods of cultural description and interpretation, the study examines elements of the Westcoast Board of Directors’ meetings, such as participants,
structure, meeting talk, topics, and norms of speaking and interacting in order to understand the caring culture in which the meetings are embedded. Board meetings provided the Board members an organizational process and forum for making themselves “visible and apparent” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 6) to one another as organizational sustainers and creators. As such, Board meetings comprised the primary organizational space where the women trustees worked together to ensure Westcoast’s caring values were maintained in policy and practice.

There are gaps in the research literature regarding some of the major conceptual areas of the study. The literature does not go far in answering the questions that frame the study. These questions include: What does care look like in an organization? How do trustees learn to sustain and develop caring values in routine, everyday activities and interactions? What are the learning and developmental challenges of caring organizations? What dimensions of care support care as a public and political idea? What dimensions of care hinder its political potential?

The data I collected for this ethnography include field observations, interviews, and organizational documents. Over 12 months I observed Board meetings, committee meetings, annual general meetings, strategic planning meetings and informal meetings. I conducted open-ended interviews using a purposeful sampling of new, older, and founding Board members. I collected a variety of Board and organizational documents over the entire period of the field study, such as meeting minutes, Board reports, annual reports, policy documents, planning documents, brochures and flyers.
Conceptualizing the Study

Central to this study is my belief that care can be a central organizing principle in the construction of organizations as well as the study of organizations. I also want to argue for an alternative understanding of care as both an ethical practice and a political idea in the public realm of organizational life. Care in North American society is both marginalized as work and trivialized as private emotion (Tronto, 1993). Care as work is devalued because it is primarily the work of "the least well off members of society" (p. 113)—women, lower socio-economic classes, and non-White racial and ethnic groups. Care as an idea is devalued because of its connection "with privacy, with emotion and with the needy" (p. 117). However, care is a central aspect of our everyday lives. By limiting our interpretation of care, we, as practitioners, ignore its ethical potential to guide our practice of care and, as citizens, ignore its political potential to transform our institutions and social structures. Care and caring practice can be an oppositional idea—one that challenges our conceptions of work, our working relationships, and our institutional structures, processes and outcomes.

Care is subject to many culturally determined, and often conflicting, interpretations (Sirianni, 1993; Tronto, 1993). In this thesis I use a definition of care that helps us explore care’s potential as a practice, as a moral idea and as a political idea. For this conceptualization of care, I use Tronto’s (1993) definition: "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible" (p. 103). This definition of care supports its public and socio-political dimensions and does not limit care to an individualistic or private notion. It also supports the reality that care is a culturally-determined idea, that care
includes caring for objects and the natural environment, as well as others, and finally that care can be understood as both a disposition and a practice (Tronto, 1993).

This study’s cultural description and analysis of Westcoast can help us understand the significance of care in an organizational setting. First, we can learn how a caring organization is created. Next, we can learn what care looks like in an organization as its members are engaged in the work of generating and developing their organization. Finally, we can learn what aspects of a caring organization support or hinder care’s moral and political capacities.

Contributions of the Study

The study has both a practical and a theoretical purpose. At the practical level the study contributes to the knowledge and practice of two organizational contexts: 1) nonprofit, voluntary, and feminist organizations addressing caring social functions and 2) more specifically, the research setting of the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre. At the theoretical level the study contributes to the research literature on the nonprofit sector, organizational development, feminist studies and adult education.

The study has two contributions for the managers and trustees of nonprofit organizations. First, the study can help nonprofit managers reflect on and assess informal and formal Board policies and practices. Since meetings are the central organizational space where trustees do the work of trusteeship, understanding meetings as primary sense-making sites can help managers to re-imagine their meeting contexts as learning-based, re-generative, and possibly transformative processes. Meetings, therefore, can be understood as the sites where organizations are constructed. Second,
the study enhances understanding of the kinds of organizational values, intentions, relationships, practices and actions necessary to construct and sustain a caring organization. The study will help to delineate the moral and political commitment necessary to "value care and to reshape institutions to reflect that value" (Tronto, 1993, p. 178).

More immediately, the study can benefit the research setting, Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, in the development of its organizational practice. I hope to enhance Westcoast's learning and ways of knowing by providing two conceptual frameworks as interpretive lenses to explain and support its organizational commitments and practices. One conceptual framework interprets routine Board meetings as forums and processes for learning, developing and even re-creating a caring organization. The second framework interprets care and caring practice as moral and political ideas that challenge the boundaries of the private and public divisions of women's lives.

The study has theoretical value for the development of nonprofit, organizational and feminist research and knowledge. The study's focus on the Board meeting itself furthers our understanding of the significance of everyday, routine activities and events as fundamental organizational "sense-makers and social and cultural validators" (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 40). The study also illuminates our understanding of care in the public realm of organizational activity, one that provides an alternate vision of organizational structures, practices and outcomes. Care as a central organizing principle has been given little attention in either the organizational or the feminist literature. In spite of the fact that feminist research is often "designed with social change in mind"
(Cummerton, 1986, p. 95), care's political and transformative potential has been less emphasized than care's potential to subordinate women culturally.

The study has theoretical value for the field of adult education. The field has given less attention to the learning processes that occur in "the real world of human activity" (Wilson, 1993, p. 77), such as the activity of a purposeful and cohesive social group. This study is framed by conceptions of learning that, first, recognize the significance of the social and cultural contexts of learning, such as the organizational meeting, and second, recognize the social, interactive nature of learning amongst persons involved in purposeful organizing activities, such as the members of a voluntary Board.

The study intentionally eschews the management perspective that attempts to understand how culture and learning can be "manipulated, managed and changed" (Schein, 1992, p. 1). In such a perspective culture and learning are framed by the needs of management and not by the organizational members themselves. Organizational literature that has examined the concept of organizational learning most often has framed learning as a management tool. In this view learning becomes another method to control change for the overall purpose of improving organizational effectiveness (Huber, 1991; Stablein and Nord, 1985; Schurman, 1989; Schwartzman, 1993; Welton, 1991). Such organizational learning studies have not focused on how the organization can enhance and support employees' individual or collective learning needs (Leymann, 1989) nor have they focused on how employee learning can transform the organization or its system of control (Welton, 1991).
The study also has theoretical value for the broad field of citizenship. Scholars and advocates of the nonprofit sector portray nonprofit organizations as the “foundation of democratic pluralism and the source of creative social innovation” (Herman and Van Til, 1989, p. 1). Tronto (1993) suggests that the practice of care in the public realms of life can inform the practices of democratic citizenship. Nonprofit organizations that uphold care as a core organizing principle may have more significant implications for sustaining democratic values than is recognized within the literature. Advocates of the social innovation and social change roles of the nonprofit sector argue that citizen education and citizen participation may be the sector’s most unique and significant social functions (Hodgkinson, Lyman and Associates, 1989; Evans and Boyte, 1986).

Limitations of the Study

The research design purposefully selects a particular organizational setting in order to describe and interpret the interactions, behaviours, and meanings amongst a group of women trustees. The intent of the study is to capture the context-bound meanings of the participants in a caring social system. The study is designed to support transferability and the extension of understandings. To accomplish these two applications of ethnographic research, I have provided a detailed description of the Westcoast Board of Directors’ meetings—their informal and formal practices and policies, their interactions and relationships, their meeting talk, and the participants themselves. This ethnographic description and analysis provides a finely textured narrative of the setting through the use of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), emergent knowledge, and applied conceptual frameworks. These elements of the research design
provide the necessary specificity that contributes to transferability to similar contexts, thus enabling the extension of these understandings in subsequent research.

Westcoast staff interactions, behaviours and meanings were not within the scope of this study. At various times during the field study, members of the staff attended Board meetings to give program presentations, to review organizational initiatives and projects, to assist the Board Chair with meeting details, to serve as committee members and most significantly to participate in an organization-wide strategic planning process. I did not attempt to ignore staff and Board interactions during these engagements, instead I used these opportunities as another way to see the Board. However, I purposefully did not observe or interview staff outside of the context of Board meetings and Board interactions.

The study does not focus on formal, planned learning methods and interventions such as Board orientation processes, skill development workshops, or Board manuals. Such learning methods are most often skill-based, focusing on the instrumental skills required to perform the work of governance. Instead, the study examines the informal and implicit instances of learning that contribute to cultural meaning and to the value dimensions of organizational life.

Overview of the Chapters

The chapters of the thesis are structured to provide the reader with progressively closer levels of interpretation and analysis, uncovering layers of meaning in order to understand core values, personal commitments, organizational practices, and informal learning processes at work in developing and generating this caring organization.
Chapter Two defines the ethnographic framework and approach to the study; Chapter Three provides a descriptive and interpretive account of Westcoast's founding circumstances, organizational context and culture; Chapter Four describes and analyzes the informal value-based learning processes and interactions within routine Board meetings; Chapter Five interprets and analyzes Westcoast's organizational culture, "the Westcoast way," as an ethic of care and a political practice of care; and Chapter Six summarizes what I have learned from the study and identifies implications for nonprofit organizational practice. The relevant literature that frames the study is not set aside in a separate literature review chapter. Instead the literature is embedded in the chapters, close to the "descriptive and analytic accounts" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 17).
Chapter Two

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to place the study’s cultural approach within the literature and second, to describe the study’s ethnographic design and methodology. I begin by identifying the organizational literature that guided my anthropological approach. Next I describe the research site, the participants and myself as a participant observer. Following, I describe my data and the ways I gathered it over twelve months. I then describe the analysis process, including the reflexive role provided by the study’s relationship to a larger research project and team of researchers. Finally, I describe the ethical considerations that were integral to both the research process and the research product.

Cultural Approaches to Studying Organizational Life

Cultural studies of organizations help us to understand both the assumed, hidden aspects of organizational life and the consciously chosen and enacted aspects of organizational life. An ethnographic approach to the study of organizations provides us with a closer understanding of how organizations are “created, embedded and developed” (Schein, 1992). Ethnography illuminates cultural meaning through description and interpretation (Wolcott, 1988). The intent of this study is to describe and interpret Westcoast in order to understand both taken-for-granted cultural elements and consciously chosen cultural elements that supported and hindered the development of Westcoast.
Schwartzman (1993) identifies three broad perspectives in research on organizational culture: a) culture as “external variable”, b) culture as “informal organization,” and c) culture as “formal and informal organization”. The perspective that defines culture as “external variable” views culture as an outside element that is imported into the organization through its members (Smircich, 1983). Studies using this perspective see culture as “residing in geographic, linguistic and ethnic groups” (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 34). Schwartzman points out that though this view is sensitive to cultural issues, it is essentially ethnocentric. In this perspective organizational culture is limited by the assumptions of a particular socio-cultural group, therefore ignoring the differences between and within groups.

The perspective that defines culture as “informal organization” views culture as something that is informally developed within the organization itself. Studies using this perspective focus on organizational values that are transmitted by language, stories, humor, ceremonies and practices (Schein, 1992). Schwartzman (1993) argues that this view of organizational culture assumes that culture “unifies [the] behaviour” (p. 35) of organizational participants. It is assumed that once the unifying factors of a culture are identified, they can be molded and shaped by management. This perspective ignores the organizational elements of difference, ambiguity, multiplicity and flux (J. Martin, 1992).

The perspective that defines culture as “formal and informal organization” views culture from multiple perspectives (J. Martin, 1992) and “moves away from the concept of culture to solve the problems of management” (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 35). This perspective challenges the conception of the organization as a stable, predictable, concrete, and unproblematic entity (J. Martin, 1992; Schwartzman, 1989). This third
perspective informs this study for two reasons. First, it frames meetings as the primary process that generates the organization (Schwartzman, 1989). Second, it provides a frame for understanding Westcoast’s evolving organizational culture as the interaction between “individuals and their relationships, processes and contexts and their interrelations over time” (Brown, 1992, p. 49). I look more closely at this approach to studying organizational culture in Chapter Three.

Research Site and Participants

The focus of this study was shaped by my theoretical commitment to using women’s experience as a basis for socio-cultural analysis. I wanted to identify research problems that furthered an understanding of women’s everyday lives and, more specifically, an understanding of women’s everyday lives as organizational participants. As I began the task of identifying a setting, I hoped to find a group of women who shared a commitment to constructing an organization that challenged, rather than took for granted, predominant conceptions of organizational life and hierarchy. In this section I begin by describing how I identified and gained access to such an alternative organization; next I provide a brief overview of the organizational context; then I describe the kinds of Board meetings that were the focus of the study; following I describe the Board members themselves, most specifically the nine women interviewed; and finally I identify my research role as participant observer.
Site Selection

It was through the professional contacts of my graduate advisor, Dr. Allison Tom, that I identified the Westcoast Board of Directors as a possible research site. Allison was the principal investigator of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council project entitled, “Caring for Children: A Study of the Meaning of Women’s Work.” This project brought her into formal contact with one member of the Westcoast Board who was participating in the “Caring for Children” project as a co-investigator, representing the child care community. Allison’s research and scholarly work had also brought her into contact with one member of the Westcoast staff. This staff member was responsible for collecting and distributing current research and information to the child care field on behalf of Westcoast. These two Westcoast relationships provided us with the opportunity to informally approach the Westcoast staff member to determine if the Board was suitable for the research question and if so, to seek a formal request for access. After an initial meeting with this individual at the Westcoast offices, both Westcoast members informally approached, on our behalf, the organization’s Executive Director and the Chair of the Board. The women expressed interest in both studies, this study and the larger “Caring for Children” project. Within a few weeks of this initial, informal contact, the Executive Director took our request for access to the Board of Directors and the Board gave unanimous approval to their involvement in both studies. During the access process, the “openness” that was expressed by the Westcoast staff members and Board foreshadowed the texture of the values and practices that were at work in this organization.
Organizational Context

In this section I provide a brief overview of the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre. I include in this overview a description of the environmental forces to which Westcoast was responding during the period of the field study. These external and internal forces are identified to illustrate the kinds of challenges Westcoast was responding to as a result of the pressures of organizational growth and change.

Broadly considered, Westcoast was engaged in community work that contributed to the lives of parents, families and children. More specifically it provided a variety of support services for women in their private and public roles as parents, child care providers, educators and advocates. As an example, within the Westcoast offices themselves the community could access a broad variety of services and resources, such as a lending library of child care resources, a referral service to assist parents in locating child care settings, a laminating machine for child care providers, meeting rooms, a children’s services employees Union, anti-bias educational toys and materials for young children, and free child care-related materials and brochures regarding educational opportunities, professional development, workshops, conferences and special events. Westcoast’s goals were multifaceted and included program development, information resource and referral services, education, and advocacy.

Westcoast had evolved from a “flattened hierarchy” (P. Martin, 1990) that is typical of many feminist organizations, to one with a simplified division of labor based around its program and service areas. In the six years since its conception, Westcoast had evolved from a small organization employing 5 individuals to a moderate-sized organization employing approximately 30 individuals. Westcoast’s most significant
internal resources were the staff and Board volunteers themselves—their vision, their leadership skills and abilities, their shared core values, their individual and collective commitments and the level of competence they demonstrated in the work they performed—qualities that will be more closely examined in the remaining chapters. Their exceptional leadership abilities contributed to the significant external support that Westcoast received financially and politically from the B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality, its primary funding source.

Westcoast's diverse program served the child care needs of a variety of individuals and groups: 1) parents seeking multilingual child care referrals and information; 2) child care providers seeking consultation, information, and training; 3) child care advocates seeking consultation, information and support; 4) nonprofit child care staff and parent board members seeking information and support in the administrative and financial management aspects of their child care centres and; 5) policy-makers seeking consultation, information and partnerships with the child care field.

Westcoast was both an umbrella organization, supporting the work of other nonprofit child care organizations, and a service provider, serving the child care needs of a large constituency. As an umbrella organization Westcoast provided support for five independent membership-based organizations that shared offices and administrative and technical support with Westcoast. The membership organizations affiliated with Westcoast included: B.C. Daycare Action Coalition, Children's Services Employees Union, Early Childhood Educators of B.C., School Age Child Care Association of B.C. and Western Canada Family Day Care Association of B.C.
Westcoast also provided publicly-funded child care programs, services and resources that were coordinated and managed by Westcoast personnel and governed by Westcoast's Board of Directors. The overall services included: Child Care Resource and Information Services, a province-wide resource of child care information, accessible by phone or in person; the Vancouver Child Care Support Program, a training and support service for family daycare providers; Information Daycare, a referral service for parents seeking child care options for their children; Early Childhood Multicultural Services, a multicultural training and support service for child care providers, parents and community organizations; the Child Care Financial and Administrative Services of Vancouver, a service offering administrative and financial management support to Vancouver nonprofit child care facilities; Child Care Inform, a service offering administrative and financial management support to nonprofit child care facilities across the province of British Columbia; School-age Support Services, a support service for persons working in school age child care programs and settings; the Multilingual Services Development Program, a service supporting the needs of non-English speaking families with children in child care settings; and Core Administrative Services, a central administrative service for the overall organization. These services were positioned within five program areas or "departments." Five coordinators had an overall responsibility for managing these departments and, with the Executive Director, the overall organization.

Westcoast, as a nonprofit organization, was providing an extensive variety of support programs, services and initiatives on behalf of the child care community at a time when no comprehensive child care policy existed at the provincial or national
levels. Westcoast, in a very short period of time, had achieved a far-reaching effect in the development of a provincial child care infrastructure.

During the period of the field study a significant external environmental factor to which Westcoast was responding was the socio-political context of the 1990’s in which traditional provincial government responsibilities were being contracted out to nonprofit organizations (Rekart, 1993). This shift in social welfare responsibilities from the public sector to the nonprofit sector had provided Westcoast with necessary financial support. However, relying on government support can invite external forces that threaten nonprofit autonomy. Weakening independence of nonprofit organizations within a changing socio-political landscape is a significant issue in the scholarly nonprofit literature (Rekart, 1993; Wolch, 1990; Van Til, 1988). The nonprofit sector has historically been an important locus of social change, innovation and advocacy. However, nonprofit organizations have become increasingly dependent on government financial support, particularly through purchase-of-service contracts, at the same time that governments have reduced their social welfare responsibilities. As the welfare state is being restructured, a “mutual dependency” between governments and the nonprofit sector has created a new, but unequal, partnership (Rekart, 1993; Wolch, 1990). In this relationship governments retain control of the funding on which nonprofit organizations have come to depend, therefore threatening the nonprofit sector’s historically autonomous role from government agendas (Ng, 1990; Rekart, 1993; Schreader, 1990; Wolch, 1990).

Westcoast was experiencing the tensions created by this evolving partnership. Its members acknowledged the dependency created by their reliance on government
funding sources. During the field study they were establishing goals and strategies to begin to diversify their funding base. One of the Board members spoke about the deterring consequence of “not biting the hand that feeds you” that resulted from their reliance on government partnerships.

We are so dependent, financially dependent, on them [provincial government] that sometimes we feel like even when they are doing something we don’t particularly agree with, we can’t voice that. We sometimes feel we have to be very careful of what we say because we are so dependent and that, it’s not that we’re unethical, it’s that it does silence us sometimes.

However, Westcoast’s partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Women’s Equality also provided valuable benefits. This relationship offered Westcoast their primary funding source and access to government policy makers.

An internal environmental factor to which Westcoast was responding was the re-shaping and “re-organizing” of their organizational structure. Westcoast’s “re-org” was precipitated by the departure of a key employee who had held a structurally important place in the organization as the coordinator of Westcoast’s resource and information services. This individual had moved for personal reasons with his family to a new community in the eastern Kootenays. At the time of his departure the staff took his leave-taking as “an opportunity to re-group and re-think” how they might define their structure “in light of the [changing] needs of the organization.” The Executive Director referred to this “re-org” process as a collective attempt to represent themselves as
"circles of responsibility" and "circles within circles." In our interview she talked about this restructuring process in an historical context.

We are growing and changing and the leadership in the staff team was changing and we were putting in new systems in the staff. We were defining a coordinator's group which is our version of a management group and we were defining what we would do on the staff team and we were defining, trying to put meat around what does it means to run a non hierarchical organization? If we are going to build this organization on, I would call it, a feminist and different orientation than the typical hierarchical model, then we have to be able to do it and articulate it and understand it. So we talked a lot about, we're still talking a lot about circles of responsibility. People's individual responsibility within the circle of responsibility. The circles are the Board, and the advisory committees...the other committees attached to the Board and then the staff teams, you know, the coordinators' team, each individual program team and then the whole staff team.

As the Westcoast staff continued to "re-think" the organizational structure, the Board of Directors responded to organizational growth and change by enlarging and broadening its membership composition. During the study the Board increased in size and brought into its membership new individuals who did not share the historical relationships of its older members. These new members brought with them new ideas, perspectives and goals, therefore manifesting internal forces of organizational change.
How the new and older members learned from each other’s perspectives and abilities will be closely examined in Chapter Four.

Board of Directors’ Meetings

Routine Board meeting structures, processes and interactions are the focus of this study. The Board members’ primary role within meeting talk and interactions was, as defined by Westcoast’s Executive Director, “to develop policy for the organization which shapes the organization’s practice” (Field notes, 940907). The Board accomplished its policy role and responsibility in many kinds of meetings—the overall Board, ad hoc committees, standing committees, short term strategic planning meetings, advisory committees for each program area and annual general meetings. The kinds of standing committees that the Board designated included an Executive Committee, a Personnel Committee, a New Initiatives Committee, a Financial Management Committee and a Community Relations Committee.

This study primarily focuses on interactions in the setting of the general Board meetings. The reason for this focus is that Board meetings were the governance setting in which all members, new, old, and founding, were present. These meetings served as the primary organizational vehicle in which all Board members collectively worked to fulfill their role of establishing organizational policy and purpose. Several standing committees of the Board were also observed during the study. The composition of Board committee meetings was predominately founding and older members. A series of strategic planning meetings were also observed. These meetings involved all Board and staff members.
Research Participants: The Board Members

The Board was composed of 17 women, including the Executive Director as an ex officio member. As identified in Chapter One, the Board members were predominately English-speaking, White women. One Indo-Canadian woman was the exception to this racial homogeneity. Six women shared a Jewish heritage. The socio-economic status of the women was diverse, with some of the younger women having a lower socio-economic status than the older women. The majority of the women had a diploma in Early Childhood Education. Six of the women had undergraduate degrees and two women had graduate degrees.

Within the study, I group the Board members into three categories: a) founding members, b) older members, and c) new members. I selected three members from each of these categories to be interviewed. The founding members had been key persons in the establishment and development of Westcoast and had shared friendship ties during Westcoast's development. The older members had been involved in Westcoast for at least two years, and two of these women had been active Board and committee members since Westcoast’s beginning. The new members had joined the Board during the field study and had not shared the historical ties of the founding and older members. These categories were specifically chosen to represent the different kinds of historical ties and relationships the women brought with them to their Board interactions. These categories are not meant to negate the women's individual differences, intentions and motivations but were developed as a way to understand how their length of organizational experience contributed to informal teaching and learning processes. The
women themselves used this “situated vocabulary” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992) as they described themselves.

In the study I use both pseudonyms and real first names for the nine women interviewed because that choice was made by the women themselves. To maintain the confidentiality of those who chose pseudonyms, I do not reveal to the reader which names are real and which are not real. For purposes of confidentiality I have not individually described in this section the personal characteristics of each woman. However, in the descriptive and interpretive chapters that follow, I identify individual interactions, behaviours, intentions and beliefs in order to delineate the roles and perspectives each woman contributed to the Board’s informal teaching and learning processes. The founding members are identified in the study as Maryann, Elaine and Gyda. The older members are identified as Susan, Karen and Jennifer. The new members are identified as Sue, Molly and Wanda.

Researcher as Participant Observer

A central aspect of ethnographic inquiry is to recognize the subjectivity of the researcher within the research process. It is imperative to recognize that “we are part of the social world we study” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 15) and to use this subjectivity to gain a closer understanding of the organizational context. To ignore this interaction between the researcher, the participants and the context would obscure the ethnographic intent. In this section I attempt to expose for the reader my world view and personal assumptions as the research instrument. I begin by acknowledging particular skills, experiences and perspectives that I brought to the field study and
analysis. Rather than submerging or eliminating these effects, I identify them in order to strengthen the ethnography. I conclude with a description of the participant observer role I chose to maintain in the field study.

First, regarding the application of ethnographic skills, I understood myself to be a learner and not an expert. I was learning how to do ethnographic inquiry in the experience of doing research. I understood myself to be an apprentice of ethnography. The experts who provided guidance and mentorship through this learning process were Drs. Allison Tom and Shauna Butterwick.

Individual experience influences how we see and understand the world. My perspectives were framed by my experiences as a White, middle class, heterosexual woman. I shared the socio-cultural characteristics of the majority of the older Board members—a common generational experience as White, educated, North American women who were directly or indirectly influenced by the emergence and development of the feminist movement and the social movements of the 1960's and 1970's. I felt at ease in Westcoast’s culture which I interpreted as women-centered and alternative in nature. I felt at home with their values of caring, cooperation and collaboration.

Two feminist-oriented perspectives inform my approach to the research. First, I believe that the women and men who are creating and maintaining caring organizations contribute to the sustained development of the social, civil and political functions of the nonprofit sector. The nonprofit sector plays and will increasingly play a significant social change role and function in a changing socio-political landscape, one driven by the competitive and profit-driven forces of a globalized, market-place economy. Participation in nonprofit organizations, which provide a caring social function,
individuals with an alternative understanding of themselves—an understanding that is noncompetitive and non-market oriented. This alternative understanding recognizes both the relationships with and the responsibilities to a civil society. In these organizational settings individuals are able to know themselves as citizens participating in sustaining community work—work that is concerned with human needs and concerns rather than with profits (Hart, 1992). Second, as previously stated, I am committed to identifying research problems that are based in women’s experiences as organizational participants and that challenge traditional organizational conceptions, including dominant conceptions that take hierarchy for granted (Acker, 1990; Brown, 1992; Ferree and Martin, 1995; P. Martin, 1990).

I chose a participant observer role during the field study. My reason for this choice was based on the nature of trusteeship. The Westcoast Board members were either nominated by the Board or nominated from the floor of the Annual General Meeting. The Board was therefore the elected governing body of the organization. It was ethically imperative that I be a silent observer of their governing work. I spoke in the Board and committee meetings only when I was asked to speak about matters relating to the study or the “Caring for Children” research project. However, I interacted socially in the women’s informal conversations which took place outside of the formal Board meeting process. The one exception to this chosen silent role took place at the end of the field study during the organization-wide strategic planning meetings. These meetings were designed to use small discussion groups as the basis of developing common understandings amongst the participants. There, I made
deliberately limited contributions. However, the organization’s core value of inclusiveness encouraged my engagement.

Over the 12 months of the field study, I came to understand that I was being socialized to Westcoast’s organizational culture and caring social order. My relationship with the women became an ongoing, interactive process which “sometimes contributed to a sense of conflictual interest[s] and emotion[s] . . . as an authentic, related person (the participant) and as an exploiting researcher (the observer)” (Stacey, 1991, p. 114). I used my experience of being socialized as a Board member to deepen my understanding of Westcoast and the emergent theme of care. At the same time, I paid attention to the danger of “going native” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992) and to the possible power inequities that are inherent in the process of doing research. I return to this theme later in the chapter as I describe the ethical considerations of the study.

**Data Collected**

I used observation, interviewing and document collection to gather data for the study. The field observations took place between March 1994 and March 1995. During this period I observed 11 Board meetings, 5 standing committee meetings, 2 Annual General Meetings, 3 strategic planning meetings and 3 informal small group meetings.

I conducted nine open-ended interviews three months before the end of the field study. These interviews were conducted in the women’s homes or their places of work. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interviews were centered around questions that encouraged the women to talk about Westcoast as an organization, their understanding of themselves within the organization, Board meeting
practices and relationships and Board goals and initiatives. I did not ask the women to describe what they learned or how they learned within meeting contexts. This kind of direct question was avoided as I believed it would limit their response to a narrower conception of learning, possibly focusing their attention on instances of instrumental or task-oriented learning. I was interested in learning that was focused on the value dimensions of organizational life—on how the women learned about and learned to generate the culture of their organization. The interviews were designed to identify instances of learning that were related to the development of their shared values.

I also collected a variety of printed materials during the field study for the purposes of document analysis. These materials were produced by Westcoast for a variety of audiences that included: the Board, staff, volunteers, child care providers, child care advocates, parents and families, the broader community and government bodies. The kinds of documents collected included: meeting agendas, meeting minutes, committee and Board reports, annual reports, financial statements and budget documents, historical documents, planning documents, policy documents, constitution and by-laws, brochures, flyers, announcements, publications and an in-house newsletter.

**Analysis**

Analysis was an on-going process throughout the research study. This analysis process was assisted and enhanced by several methods and tools that included: its relationship to a research team and the team's reflexive discussions and analysis, the researcher's reflexive tools and processes, and a software data analysis program.
The larger research project to which this study was affiliated, “Caring for Children,” was comprised of several studies that were being conducted by four graduate students and two faculty members. These six university affiliated women, along with one woman who was an Early Childhood educator, a child care advocate and who provided a liaison role with the child care field, worked together as a research team, meeting twice a month over the entire period of this study. The Early Childhood educator was not able to attend the majority of team meetings because of her professional obligations, however, throughout the study she received all of the team’s written memos, analysis, and materials. Her presence on the research team provided an important grounding for the team in the everyday concerns and issues of the child care field.

The research team’s ongoing discussions and analysis provided a collective reflexive process for my thinking and analysis. The team’s participation in critical dialogue and discussions, memo writing and formal analysis helped to uncover and interpret emerging themes within the study and the larger research project. These themes were focused not only on context and content, but equally on the processes of ethnographic research, collaborative research and the ethical considerations of qualitative research. Our team discussions and analysis involved us in a praxis of qualitative research, giving us the opportunity to de-construct boundaries between theory and practice. The Early Childhood educator, who was also a Westcoast Board member, provided the situated perspective of a child care advocate and a Westcoast organizational member. She critiqued my interpretations and extended my
understandings in the team discussions, challenging me to remain reflexive within the research process.

As partially defined above, I used various reflexive tools and processes throughout the field study and analysis period. These tools included: field notes, journal writing, memo writing, ongoing written analysis, research team discussions and formal analytic presentations. These tools and processes contributed to the trustworthiness of the research and to my continual observation and critique of the interactions between myself as the researcher, the study's participants, and the research procedures and processes.

The software program used to organize the data after the completion of the field study was Textbase Alpha. The data was coded into approximately 60 themes that were eventually grouped into 10 categories. These 10 categories represented the emergent themes, the participants' "situated vocabulary" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992), the conceptual themes informed by the literature and my interpretations.

Analytic Strategy: Embedding the Literature

The thesis is not structured to have a separate literature review chapter. The literature which frames this ethnographic account is placed within the descriptive and analytic sections it was meant to enhance or challenge (Wolcott, 1990). My intention was to embed the literature where it most made sense for the reader in revealing meaning and developing understanding. This approach to analysis and to the use of the literature was taken because the study's purpose was not to critique specific research studies and their results. As Cummerton (1986) states, "Much feminist research focuses on generating new concepts, meanings and information rather than testing existing
theory, partly because of the paucity of knowledge about many aspects of women's experiences” (pp. 95-96). This study challenges the gap and the overall lack of attention in the relevant bodies of literature to the contributions of women as organizational creators and innovators; to the roles, functions and contributions of nonprofit organizations in a changing socio-political and economic landscape; and to the concept of care as an organizing principle in the re-structuring of work.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice in research was an ongoing consideration throughout the field study and the analysis. As I constructed and implemented an ethnographic inquiry, I became more acutely aware of the ethical considerations which required continual reflection and scrutiny, most specifically the possibility of emerging power inequities between the participants and myself as researcher. In the end, regardless of my intention to do respectful research within field work practice, “the research product is ultimately that of the researcher; structured by researcher’s purpose, offering researcher’s interpretations and registered in a researcher’s voice” (Stacey, 1991, p. 113).

Throughout the field study I did not assume that my “good” intentions to do respectful research would absolve me from the ownership dilemma of the final research product. My goal to produce a research product that would be useful for the participants of Westcoast guided me through this ethical dilemma.

At the outset of the field study, several actions were taken to protect the research participants. The Board members were initially informed of the nature of the study in the second Board meeting I attended. In this meeting I outlined the research purpose
and process. Soon after this introduction each Board member received a letter of consent seeking their approval for observation (see Appendix A). Toward the end of the field study, in preparation for the interviews, I obtained a second written consent from the nine women I interviewed (see Appendix A). During the interviews I asked the women to select a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Not all of the women felt it was necessary to use a pseudonym, however, there are times in the study that I do not name the specific woman being quoted in order to further protect her anonymity.

During the initial access meeting, the issue of whether to name Westcoast explicitly was discussed with the Executive Director and Chair of the Board. Both women felt that it would be difficult to “hide the name Westcoast as most people in the [child care] field will most likely know the agency by its description” (Field notes, 940323). Thus it was decided to name Westcoast as the context of the study. My field notes describe their stated belief in organizational “openness” as another reason for their choice not to conceal Westcoast’s name:

Maryann says that she feels the agency cannot be kept confidential. Elaine agrees and says that Westcoast had made a commitment to being an “open” organization and “it’s not time now to stop with this commitment to openness” which guided their first five years. (Field notes, 940323)

At the completion of the thesis writing process, each interviewed Board member was informed of how her quotes and words were used in the text of the thesis. The women received their individual quotes within a portion of the text surrounding each
quote. The women were given the opportunity to delete their quotes from the body of the thesis if they felt its use threatened their confidentiality or misrepresented their intentions. The quotes were sent by mail and the women were asked to call me within a period of ten days if they wished to make any changes. Two women edited their quotes in order to provide clarity and I have identified these quotes in the thesis. None of the women requested that their quotes be removed from the text.

In retrospect, I believe this step of seeking the women’s consent came too late in the thesis process. If I had sent the women their quotes during my preliminary analysis stage instead of at the end of my analysis, I would have allowed both myself and the women the necessary time to address possible difficulties with interpretation or use of data. Providing adequate time for this exchange during the analysis stage is one way that a researcher contributes to respectful research.

An emerging ethical issue during the field study was the issue of trust—the trust given to me as the researcher, to the study and to the “Caring for Children” research project by the founding and Board members. I quickly came to understand that “developing trust” was a central organizational ingredient that framed their working and social relationships and their ways of working. My field notes describe this essential issue of trust as I spoke with the Executive Director and the Board Chair about the tentative findings of the research midway through the field study:

The last item I wanted to discuss with Maryann and Elaine was the issue of reciprocity. I explained that reciprocity was an important concern for my study as well as the overall project. I said, “you have trusted this research, welcoming us
into Westcoast without a great deal of specificity regarding the research questions of my study.” I said that my intent was that the study be useful for Westcoast. Maryann responded to this by saying, “We trusted the research process since the lunch [regarding access] we had at Isadora’s [restaurant]. I was direct at that first meeting” in order to discover what the research was about and from that discussion “I trusted the research intent.” (Field notes, 941020)

This study was not intended or designed as a collaborative research project with the Westcoast Board members. However, I found myself responsive to and responsible for the “trust” given me by the Westcoast participants. This trusting relationship helped my research in two fundamental ways. First, this relationship contributed to my understanding of Westcoast’s caring values, beliefs and practices. Second, this relationship supported my resolve to produce a research product that would contribute to the participants’ practice and learning (Spradley, 1979).

A sensitivity to reciprocity with the members of Westcoast was one way I responded to the needs of the setting and my commitment to do respectful research. The ways in which this issue was addressed included: 1) I informally identified emerging interpretations and analysis with Board members on two occasions and with Gyda more frequently as a member of the research team; 2) the research team formally presented emerging analysis and perspectives with the child care community on two occasions; and 3) at the end of the thesis process I will present to the Westcoast Board my analysis in an interactive and respectful form and process that will be mutually determined.
Chapter Three
The Context: A Caring Organization

The voices of women as organizational creators are under-represented in organizational literature and research (Acker, 1990; Iannello, 1992; J. Martin, 1992; P. Martin, 1990) and yet feminist scholars and researchers argue that women's organizing efforts have created social orders that offer alternatives to the assumed hierarchical structuring of organizations (Brown, 1992; Ferree and Martin, 1995). Brown (1992) states that "some of the most thorough-going criticisms of conventional organization and many examples of practice which attempt to create alternative forms of organizing come from a feminist perspective and conviction" (p. 3). Organizations created by women to address a diversity of issues which affect women's lives offer an alternative view of organizational life, one which considers the absence of hierarchy (Brown, 1992; Ferree and Martin, 1995; Iannello, 1992; P. Martin, 1990) and which recognizes "as important the varied dimensions of women's lives and experience" (Gould, 1979, p. 237).

Organizational scholars have also given little attention to the setting of the nonprofit organization as a worthy subject in the development of organizational theory. Since most research has focused on large corporations, government bureaucracies and labor unions, we might assume that researchers have seen nonprofit, voluntary organizations as relatively insignificant social phenomena. This lack of research attention leaves little theoretical understanding of the socio-political roles, functions and distinctive contributions of the nonprofit sector in society (Hodgkinson, Lyman and
Associates, 1989) or of its contributions as an alternate place of work outside the public (governmental) and private (corporate) realms of work.

Helen Brown’s study (1992) of nonprofit, women’s organizations is particularly enlightening for my study of Westcoast, not only because her study acknowledges the gaps in organizational literature, but also because Brown gives theoretical attention to the importance of the phenomena of shared core values within non-hierarchical, alternative organizations. Her work is inspired by the question, “Do women who share values of cooperation and equality organize differently?” Brown’s research emphasizes the importance of studying alternative, consensual organizations in order to develop a theory of organizing that is not tied to dominant hierarchical structuring and “discourses of contemporary capitalism” (Brown, 1992, p. 1). In her study of two Women’s Centre organizations, Brown sought “to develop a theoretical understanding of the processes which characterize organizing activity in situations where there is a commitment to egalitarian values and where the intention is to organize without hierarchy” (p. 5). In her study of alternative, or what she identifies as “oppositional” organizations, she argues that the activities of the participants themselves are critical to the construction of the organization. According to Brown, the study of these organizations requires that we take into account four basic components of analysis: a) individuals and relationships, b) processes, c) contexts, and d) the interrelations of these elements over time.

In this chapter I begin to uncover and identify the values that inform Westcoast’s structures, practices and outcomes. To accomplish this I broadly draw from Brown’s (1992) four analytic categories as a guide for description and interpretation in order to address the cultural question, “What kind of organization is this?” I understand
Westcoast to be what Brown has named an "oppositional" organization. Brown uses this concept to specifically identify women's organizations that are structured by "collectivist-democratic and non-hierarchical forms of cooperation" (p. 4) and she understands these organizations to be in opposition to conventional, hierarchical organizations. Borrowing from Brown's concept of substantive difference, I use the term to define Westcoast precisely because Westcoast is structured by core values of care. Care, rather than collectivism or non-hierarchy, informs the participants' beliefs, relationships, practices and actions. Caring values and practices, like the values and practices of non-hierarchy and collectivism, are fundamentally in opposition to conventional conceptions of organizational life. Caring values challenge the traditional values and purposes of public and corporate sector organizations—values of efficiency and control in the public sector and values of profit and production in the corporate sector.

I use the women's language, stories and interpretative perspectives to describe their individual and collective intentions and actions, their organizational context and processes, their relationships to one another--most specifically their friendship ties--and the interrelation of these elements and events over their brief history of six years. I use the ethnographic tools of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) and emergent knowledge as ways to delineate commonly shared, explicit values as well as the equally important, though less tangible, implicit values.

I begin this chapter by nesting the Westcoast Board within its larger organizational context. This broader description of Westcoast includes an account of its founding circumstances--"the Westcoast story"--and its present-day context. "The Westcoast
story,” as told by the founding members, is a cultural narrative that “serves to constitute organizational reality for participants” (Schwartzman, 1989, p. 246). This story illuminates Westcoast’s common interests and shared purpose. Next, I continue with the organizational description I began in Chapter Two by examining Westcoast’s explicit and implicit core values. Following this, I examine the centrality of friendship to the creation of their organization. Finally, I conclude this chapter with an examination of the particular values, beliefs and practices that contribute to what the women identified as “the Westcoast way.”

A Cultural Story: A Shared History of Organizing

Schwartzman (1989) recognizes stories as an important source of data about organizations because “they are often natural answers to the recurring question the individuals in organizations ask themselves, ‘What kind of organization is this?’ ” (p. 56). For this reason I re-tell the story of Westcoast’s founding circumstances using the women’s voices and interpretations. In order to narrate this cultural story I draw from three sources of data—the story as told by the founding members in Board meetings, a written account of the story as described in a Westcoast document (Skulski, 1994) and the personal interpretations of Board members as they talked about Westcoast’s history in their individual interviews.

The women refer to their founding circumstances and history as “the Westcoast story.” Each interpretation, whether told publicly by the founding members, recounted in written form, or told privately within the interviews, reflected a shared commitment to values of cooperation and inclusiveness and to relationships of mutual respect. In the
written account of their founding circumstances, their history is described as “a kind of ‘love story’ for our members” (Skulski, 1994, p. 1). This deliberate choice to use a language of relationships to describe their history foreshadows the centrality of friendship within their organizing efforts. Relationships of equality, mutual respect and trust were fundamental ingredients in Westcoast’s founding circumstances.

The story begins, as one founding member described it in her interview, as the “collective dream” of the child care field that began in the talk of a small group of child care advocates and colleagues around kitchen and restaurant tables.

We had been working together on a number of other [child care] committees. I mean our paths . . . all cross any which number of ways and plus we’re all good and best friends. So this is why it never feels like, ‘Oh, we’ve got to go to a meeting and what and whatever.’ It just felt that for about six months for sure no matter what meeting we happened to be at in the evening, we established a tradition that we would convene at [the] White Spot [restaurant] where at that time they still had those paper place mats and we’d flip them over and we’d do all our dreaming and our charting and our planning around that . . . It had what [we] call the kitchen table start and then the follow up with the White Spot place mats.

As this group of colleagues met and talked, they sketched their idea of a “home” for child care on restaurant paper place mats and napkins. In their “kitchen table” talk they identified the environmental issues that hindered the efforts of the child care community--the lack of funding, resources and financial stability; the isolation and
fragmentation between child care organizations; and the existence of significant gaps in programs and services (Skulski, 1994). The vision they shared to address these shortcomings was to provide a space and a “structure where people come together to share information and resources, support and enhance existing services and explore new ways of working together” (p. 1). Though as one founding member identified, “space [for members of the field] was the driving mission,” the “structure” and processes that would eventually shape the shared space were to become fundamental to achieving their vision.

Moving from this intimate and creative stage of giving form to a shared “dream”, the women decided that “we’d better not go too far along this road until we see that there’s real community interest and buy in. . . we just can’t be off in this little dream by ourselves.” They planned an evening coffee party at one of their homes to which they invited “every related child care, early childhood group or organization that we could think of.” Inviting their fellow child care colleagues into a home setting for a “dessert party” and discussion rather than into a board room for a formal meeting foreshadows Westcoast’s practices of openness and inclusiveness. Drawing from the creative inspiration of their vision and from the everyday practices of working with children, they mailed their child care colleagues “party invitations . . . to discuss a dream, an idea, a vision of our future.” In these invitations, as one founding member explained in her interview, each organization was asked to send two people, whether that be staff, Board member or volunteer,

Not to worry, just come. [Send] somebody, anybody. . .
So that night we just put out the dream of a resource centre where all these different groups could live together and share and liaise and network and build upon.

Within the historical document, it was stated, “One oft-repeated motto during those early years was to ‘begin well at the beginning’ ” (Skulski, 1994, p. 3). This statement reflects their conscious commitment to begin “well” by acting inclusively and cooperatively with the broadest representation of the child care field. Gyda, one of the founding members, described their commitment to inclusiveness as she affirmed that the idea of a shared resource centre was the idea of many individuals:

I think we always wanted to be very clear and quite humble that the idea of Westcoast, while we spent a lot of time refining it and working on it, wasn’t just our idea. The concept of some kind of a place that served as a resource centre for the child care and the early childhood field has probably been around for a long time. Different people have had different tries at it but we just found ourselves at a place in time where we thought the window is there and something could really happen.

Elaine also indirectly spoke in her interview about the meaning of this commitment to “begin well in the beginning” as she explained that in the beginning stages of the organization the founding members had deliberately chosen organizing efforts which did not compete with established child care services.
If there’s not consensus then we’re not going to do it. And that’s all there is to it. There are not a few that will push something through. It just isn’t--we’re not like that. We’re nice people. It’s funny--but we started at the very beginning saying we didn’t want to take away from--we didn’t want members because we didn’t want people to give money to Westcoast and not to ECEBC [Early Childhood Educators of B.C.]. We didn’t want to have a newsletter because then we would pre-empt what other people were saying in other organizations... we started right at the beginning by saying we’re here, we have a reason to be here but we’re not going to be here and push people out of our way. We just started right at the beginning that way. The coffee party at Gyda’s was, “This is our idea, what do you think? Do you want to join us? Is this a valid thing to do?” So we did it right in the very beginning, really. We just kept on.

As Karen described the founding circumstances of Westcoast, she particularly emphasized the importance of the founding members’ leadership and organizing skills. She acknowledged that their individual abilities were fundamental to Westcoast’s successful creation. She affirmed Gyda’s recognition that the idea of Westcoast came from a number of child care organizations that wanted to “improve the climate and the landscape for child care in the province” but she added, “Gyda was the true visionary and the true motivator behind wanting to bring these groups into some sort of collaboration.”
Upon receiving a positive response from their child care colleagues who attended the dessert party, the founding members began the work of looking for a way to support the emerging organization. Federal government sources provided the “window of opportunity” to fund their dream. Maryann explained:

Then we learned of the new series of grants coming out of Health and Welfare Canada called the Child Care Initiatives Fund which was for new and innovative projects that might support and enhance the field . . . now maybe here was the tool, the mechanism to test out if we came together could we work effectively together? What could we learn from each other and could we more effectively support the field.

The collective goal of moving various child care organizations and services from scattered and isolated spaces into one “home” became a reality in April, 1989, within a year of the initial gathering in Gyda’s home. With a common space to offer its constituents, five membership-based, nonprofit organizations and two publicly funded services moved their premises under one roof. The nonprofit organizations became Westcoast’s member organizations and the publicly-funded services became the initial services offered under the umbrella of Westcoast. During this time there were lengthy discussions regarding the nature of Westcoast as an organization in relation to their five membership-based partners and the two pre-existing child care services. Within their documented history an early debate regarding whether to be a separate membership-
based organization or not is recounted. This written account reveals the values which guided their actions:

After much discussion, it was eventually decided that Westcoast itself would not be membership-based. We did not want to engender competition, we did not wish to pull members away from already established organizations. . . (J. Skulski, 1994, p. 2)

This decision regarding the open, non-competitive nature of Westcoast’s membership demonstrated a shared and deliberate commitment to values and processes of cooperation and openness.

In these early days the women discussed the idea of using the image of an open umbrella as a symbol to convey their organizational purpose and the relationships between their interdependent programs. They struggled with how to represent their relationships and core values. Elaine explained:

We had endless umbrellas drawn . . . and was Westcoast the handle that was supporting the umbrella or was it the little point at the top of the umbrella that was supporting the others from on top. We decided to be the handle. We decided to be underneath, propping them up rather than on top. That didn’t seem to suit us very well.
Once the member organizations and services shared a common working space, new working relationships and possibilities emerged. Karen and Susan described how these new arrangements enabled the emergence of creative and collaborative processes.

Once they actually had a place and... when things actually started developing everyone realized just how enormous this could actually end up to be because again you have all these dreams and ideas and things that you want. When it actually happens it ends up being much bigger than you envisioned at first. (Karen)

It was like an exciting time to try and explain what Westcoast conceptually wanted to be to people who were applying for new positions... people who got it you could see their eyes light up and they saw the potential so even though the jobs didn’t have a high salary... It really drew people who had a commitment to a vision... So it was a real exciting energy. (Susan)

As their initial three year Federal initiatives grant drew to a close in 1992, Westcoast had grown to a staff of 17 and provided a broad variety of child care programs, services, and resources. Westcoast’s 1991-92 Annual Report, prepared at the closure of their Federal funding grant, reflected on this extraordinary growth and success. From its kitchen table start, Westcoast had established a “comprehensive child care resource centre” (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1991-1992, p. 7) and had significantly contributed to the development of a provincial child care infrastructure. This annual report “celebrate[s] our successes” (p. 6), and
acknowledges the contributions of all its members to this success—the policy work of the Board of Directors, the program development and administrative work of the staff in the provision of services and resources, and the collective work of creating “a community within a community:” (p. 7)

As a “community of place” Westcoast has proven the benefits of bringing together expertise, resources, good will, high energy, and creativity in a central, accessible and welcoming home. On a daily and long term basis, we have learned to live together, share, network, problem-solve and co-operate for the betterment of the child care field.

As a “community of interest” Westcoast has demonstrated the value of bringing together individuals and groups who share common interests, experiences, issues and hopes and who desire to work collectively as child care advocates. (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1991-1992, p. 7).

Prior to the termination of the Federal initiatives grant, the Westcoast staff worked to secure ongoing funding from municipal and provincial levels of government. A new provincial government Child Care Branch within the Ministry of Women’s Equality agreed to support the program after lengthy discussions (Skulski, 1994, p. 7) with the Branch and Ministry staff. Just one day prior to Westcoast’s 1992 Annual General Meeting it was confirmed that the Ministry would support their operating funding. Describing the eleventh hour circumstances they found themselves in after
three dynamic and successful years, Elaine said, “Gyda had written two speeches for the AGM--a good news and a bad news speech--depending on the outcome” of their funding request. The evening of the Annual General Meeting Gyda used her “good news speech.”

Westcoast’s initial office space quickly became too small for the number of users, participants and ultimately for its services and programs. As an example, the only available space for their photocopier was in the office’s narrow hallway, requiring the people using the machine to “continually duck into doorways to enable others to pass” through the hall (Skulski, 1994, p. 4). This first home could no longer contain the work, the relationships and the cross germination that occurred as a result of bringing individuals and groups together. Once again a suitable space needed to be found and in the beginning of their fifth year of operation, 1993, they moved to premises that were three times larger than their original space.

Westcoast’s new home possessed an ambiance of openness and accessibility and an atmosphere of welcome. One founding member explained in a Westcoast annual report, “from its beginning, Westcoast has been a ‘people place,’ warm and welcoming like the early childhood community of organizations and individuals it serves” (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1991-1992, p. 11). The new office space had a large open foyer area and a wide central hallway off which the program offices, meeting and storage rooms and the Westcoast library were located. The office walls bordering the central hallway were made of glass. These glass walls were not curtained or covered, so that natural light filtered into the central hallway from the exterior windows. Participants and users could see people at work in their offices--
writing, talking, meeting, reflecting, constructing, etc.—as they walked through the hallway. In addition to the physical characteristics of openness, most every office door was usually open and the people at work acknowledged passers-by with a smile, nod or simple gesture, heightening the atmosphere of openness and welcome.

The hallway walls were used to display a great variety of child care information, including flyers, brochures, posters, articles and reports, that people could pause and read or take with them. The space was neither cluttered nor sterile but instead displayed qualities of careful attention and personal touches that gave it a friendly, homey and un-intimidating feeling. As quoted above from their annual report, the Westcoast offices were an "accessible and welcoming home."

This is where both the formal written document of Westcoast’s history and the founding members’ story telling ends. I continue to examine their intention “to begin well in the beginning” by next describing the core values that informed their practices and actions.

**Explicit and Implicit Core Values**

During the field study, all staff and Board members participated in a series of strategic planning meetings. These meetings provided me with an opportunity to discover explicit, written organizational values that framed the planning process and to see in practice implicit, caring values that framed the women’s interactions and discussions. These planning meetings were intended to formalize their organizational beliefs and guiding principles, to develop their mission statement, and to establish a three to five year strategic plan. As an entry point to frame the planning meetings, the
contracted facilitator presented to the women seven core values that she had identified in the guiding principles or policy statements of various program and organizational documents. The values she identified were: family centered, choice, responsibility, equity, honoring diversity, accountability and accessibility.

I came to understand these seven identified values as being primarily focused on Westcoast's organizational actions, outcomes and end results, giving guidance to Westcoast's various programs, services, and projects. However, the language Board members used to talk about their relationships, their organizational culture, and their ways of working were not completely captured in these seven values. The founding members described the strategic planning process as an opportunity that would help them formalize both their explicit and their assumed core values, assisting the women in a process of articulating commonly "shared understandings." This purpose was explained by Gyda to her fellow Board members as they prepared to "refine" the belief and value statements formulated in the planning process workshops:

Gyda said that now the organization was involved in the third planning session of the strategic process. This first component of the process consisted of "back to the basics - identifying our value and belief statements." She said that [the planning process facilitator] had identified for them that "some of these statements were written, some were assumptions which were not written and some values needed a shared understanding" which is the purpose of this [evening's participatory] activity. (Field notes, 950104)
The founding members, most particularly Maryann, expressed the need to identify the implicit, less tangible aspects of their organizational culture as the organization responded to internal and external pressures of change and growth. One of her early expressions of this concern was framed by my question regarding what I heard them identify as “the Westcoast way.”

I asked Maryann about “the Westcoast way” and she said, “Yes, we have a ‘Westcoast way’ but I don’t know if we’re conscious of all the aspects of our culture . . . and so we are so curious to know what you are seeing.” (Field notes, 941020)

Three values that were explicitly identified in the historical document help to shed light on what Maryann and Gyda called the assumed or taken-for-granted aspects of their culture. The document stated that Westcoast “continues to be guided by what is at the heart or essence of the Westcoast story—a commitment to caring, cooperation and collaboration” (Skulski, 1994, p. 10). Values of care, cooperation and collaboration can be seen in the founding members’ intentions, language and actions as described earlier in “the Westcoast story.” Also present in the day-to-day Board and staff interactions and relationships were the values that form the basis of friendship and of democratic practice—mutual respect, trust, and equality.
The Centrality of Friendship

In Mansbridge’s (1980) study of a participatory workplace and a New England town meeting, she explores friendship as the basis of unitary democracy. She provides a description of the relationships in a unitary democracy, drawing a comparison between the relations of citizens with the relations of friends:

Friends are equals. They choose to spend time together. They share common values. They expand in each other’s company. So, too, in a democracy based on friendship, participants are equal in status; the costs of participation, of which some make so much, do not feel heavy. Citizens “fly to assemblies” as if to meet their friends. They value the time they spend on their common affairs. They share a common good . . . (Mansbridge, 1980, p. 9).

Mansbridge’s description closely echoed the voices of Westcoast’s founding and older members as they described their work and the significance of their working relationships. One founding member mirrored Mansbridge’s account of friendship when she stated,

We’re all good and best friends, so this is why it never feels like a “Oh gee, we’ve got to go to a meeting.” . . . [later in the interview] when the work and the friendship all go together, then it’s just all pleasure. It’s like nothing is that bad. Nothing is that hard.
Friendship was a significant ingredient in the creation and development of Westcoast. Maryann described the importance of friendship within the work of birthing and building their organization.

Of course the beginning of Westcoast is a story and a legend in the sense that it binds a group of people together. For some of us it's quite, it's not only about the development of an organization but the building of friendships and the development of a group of working colleagues in the community. It's sort of mixed up for me.

The significance of friendship to the development of Westcoast was openly acknowledged by the founding and older members in their interviews, casual conversations and several public documents. An excerpt from an early annual report captures the significance of these relationships to the success of Westcoast:

With these opportunities [regarding stable government funding] before us, we are mindful of our primary responsibility—that of working with and for our friends, colleagues and advocates in the child care community. (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1991-1992, p. 8)

The women's friendships and social network ties continued to have meaning in the present for the older and founding members as they individually reflected on their shared experiences:
Well, one of the things that’s still there which I really enjoy is the still down home kind of feeling. There always is food at a Board meeting. I don’t know how it gets there but somebody always brings something to contribute and there’s friendship and there’s networking so that was always there at the beginning. That sort of magic is still there. (Susan)

There’s an incredible amount of enthusiasm and goodwill that comes from so many of the people and there’s of course many people that have known each other for so many years that there’s an affection there, a camaraderie there that is so lovely and a circle that enfolds new people as they come in. It’s not a clique, it’s not exclusive. (Karen)

The older members’ friendships seemed to ensure that the essential qualities of friendship--the sharing of common values, mutual respect, trust and equality--were central to Westcoast’s core values. Yet the friendship bonds between the older members aroused in new Board members subtle feelings of exclusion. Intentional acts by older members to exclude new members from pre-established friendships were never expressed or evident in their behaviours, however, the insider/outsider dimensions of friendship were delicately and tentatively expressed by newer members. One new member talked about a “cliquish feeling” between the older members, but she modified her feelings by recognizing the respectful ways in which the women worked.
I tend to think that there’s a lot of positive energy on the Board. I mean there’s also sort of sometimes a cliquish feeling to it because people do go back a long way but again I think that on the whole what I see there are respectful working relationships.

A different women tentatively spoke about understanding herself to be outside the child care networks shared by her fellow Board members.

I’m finding that now that I’ve been on the Board for a while, that the close relationship among child care advocates on the Board does not have as global an outlook as I initially thought there was.

Another new member talked about not having the friendship and social ties of the older members though she valued these “personal friendships” within the different organizations she had served on as a trustee.

I know there are some other people who are new [to the Board]. I just haven’t made the contacts with them. But then I know other people on the Board from other places, but I don’t feel like I know people on a personal level. It’s just that I know them from being on the Board but I know a lot of the people have personal friendships. So I guess in that way I feel like I don’t know people very well.
Though the friendship bonds of the founding and older members had sustained organizational values of respect, equality and trust, their friendship relationships also created feelings of difference and exclusion amongst newer members. The new members, who did not share the social network ties of their older colleagues, expressed feelings of being outside the subtle boundaries of friendship and therefore this made them feel different. Relationships of mutual respect were central values within Westcoast’s culture, “the Westcoast way,” and yet the friendships in this caring organization also created exclusionary feelings for those outside those established relationships.

“The Westcoast way:” An Organizational Culture

L: What I’m curious about, Maryann, how would you talk about “the Westcoast way”...

M: So undefined, isn’t it? I mean it’s totally the culture, Westcoast culture is like every culture. You cannot completely articulate it because it is beyond words. But there are a number of things that must be in place for it to happen. People have to have some sense of safety, they have to have some sense of trust in one another and in a place to go if they do need more support. Right? (Maryann)

The purpose of this section is to continue the task of uncovering Westcoast’s implicit core values by exploring how the women talked about their indigenous cultural concept, “the Westcoast way.” This expression was used by the older members in Board meeting discussions as an expressive way to identify their organizational
uniqueness, but as Maryann implied in the quote above, not all elements of "the Westcoast way" were formalized, easily named or commonly understood. Though there was a shared understanding amongst the founding and older members, the new Board members were not as familiar with this expression or its usage.

The first time I heard "the Westcoast way" used was during a Board meeting in the early stages of the field study. In a discussion regarding a new letter of employment for Westcoast employees, one of the Board members expressed a concern that the letter, which served as a legal contract, sounded too officious and "was not very friendly." Maryann responded to this comment by saying "the tone of the letter doesn't feel like 'the Westcoast way'" and another more "friendly" letter welcoming the employee to Westcoast would be attached. At this meeting no one present asked Maryann what "the Westcoast way" meant and so I assumed there existed a common understanding amongst the women. I believed the term referred to particular organizational practices.

Maryann and Elaine were the members who used the expression most often during informal conversations and Board meeting discussions. I began to understand that the older members shared this expression as a way to identify commonly understood beliefs and practices. As stated earlier, by the nature of their newness the newer members did not share this understanding. Thus, "the Westcoast way" was not a universally shared expression, in spite of the fact that its use called attention to both explicit and implicit aspects of Westcoast's culture. I asked Elaine if she thought everyone on the Board understood the expression and her response identified the taken-for-granted nature of the expression for the veteran members,
L: I wonder if everyone here knows what that is?

E: I think it is understood what “the Westcoast way” is.

Gyda identified the “informal” nature of “the Westcoast way” when I asked her how the new members might learn what this expression referred to. She acknowledged that “parts of the culture” were transmitted outside of the “formal Board orientation” and new members who did not share the historical friendship and social ties of the older members would have a more difficult time learning these informal, cultural aspects.

L: I haven’t heard from new members [the term “the Westcoast way”].

G: No, because they are not quite probably on with it yet.

L: How do they get on with it? How do they, how does that get to be known?

G: I guess that’s at the whole informal level, isn’t it? And actually—see, we’re just so chock-a-block with the business. The informal stuff doesn’t happen as much as it needs and wants to with our new members. That’s the thing, you know. Because it all meshes, I guess—those of us who have known each other a long time, our play is our work and our work is our play and we’re always talking about the same things, no matter what we are doing. With the newer Board members there can be the more formal Board orientation. You get your manual and you understand a little bit about the history and so on. But I guess that’s a part of the culture that hasn’t quite been transmitted yet and maybe parts of it will come out in the strategic planning.
Interestingly, though the expression, “the Westcoast way,” was neither used by nor even recognized by new members, in their interviews the new members described values and practices particular to Westcoast, implying that they had an informal understanding of “the Westcoast way.” The founding members understood that Board members often shared Westcoast’s beliefs and values before joining the Board. This ability of Westcoast to draw people with common values is acknowledged by Elaine:

> I think we’ve been around long enough and we’re well enough known that people, the field, knows what Westcoast stands for so I think the people that apply to work there or who agree to stand on the Board already know what Westcoast is all about and support it . . . those people who were asked to be on the Board already knew about Westcoast, had some association, had used its services. Something—knew what we stood for, supported it and agreed to be on the Board.

**A Multi-perspective Approach to Culture**

During the field study I was particularly curious about identifying and understanding the cultural elements that shaped Westcoast’s unique organizational landscape of unity and congruence. The tangible and concrete qualities of care and cooperation most immediately and strikingly stood out as the source of this congruence. However, as my field study progressed, I was able to discover multiple, and sometimes contradictory, perspectives that did not necessarily contribute to an organizational sense of unity and congruence.
Early in the field study, Maryann described to me her personal commitment to maintaining “a culture of continuity between all aspects of the organization.” In the early stages of the research I framed my understanding of “the Westcoast way” to reflect Maryann’s focus on the organizational elements that provided congruence. Though both explicit and implicit values provided the essential threads of unity, shared understandings and shared values did not provide a complete picture of Westcoast’s culture. As the field study progressed and I began to see and to hear organizational and individual difference and ambiguity, I came to understand that the uniqueness and the concreteness of caring and cooperative practices did not completely define this caring organization. Interwoven amongst the threads of congruence, informed by caring values, were threads of contradiction and paradox. As J. Martin (1992) acknowledges in her broad analysis and interpretation of organizational culture:

In any cultural context—some things will be consistent, clear and generate organization-wide consensus. Simultaneously, other aspects of the culture will coalesce within subculture boundaries and still other elements of the culture will be fragmented, in a state of constant flux, and infused with confusion, doubt and paradox (p. 4).

I use J. Martin’s (1992) multi-perspective approach to organizational culture as the conceptual frame to help with my description and understanding of “the Westcoast way.” Martin argues that each of three dominant perspectives of organizational culture are necessary to help one understand organizations; “any cultural context contains
elements that can be understood only if all three perspectives are utilized" (p. 176).

These three dominant perspectives are identified by Martin as an integration perspective, a differentiation perspective and a fragmentation perspective. Each perspective is defined in terms of three key variables: (1) the relationship among cultural manifestations—is there consistency, inconsistency or complexity between cultural processes and products?; (2) the degree of consensus amongst the organizational members—is there organization-wide consensus, subculture consensus or a multiplicity of views?; and (3) the orientation towards ambiguity—is ambiguity excluded, channeled or focused upon?

In the sections that follow, I examine how each of these cultural perspectives can help us uncover Westcoast’s implicit values. However, these distinct perspectives are not simply isolated view points, they are also to be understood as simultaneously at work in the generation of Westcoast’s culture. J. Martin’s multi-perspective framework allows us to see the complexity of Westcoast’s organizational culture—a culture that contained elements of unity and congruence, elements of contradiction and difference, and elements of complexity and multiplicity.

An integration perspective: unity and congruence.

An integration perspective defines consistency, organization-wide consensus and the exclusion of ambiguity as the key ingredients of organizational culture. The shared values of care and cooperation provided Westcoast with the organizational-wide elements of congruence and unity. Both new and old Board members were able to talk about caring practices and actions that reflected common values, or what the founding
members sometimes referred to as "guiding principles." Within the interviews, as the
women responded to my question, "Can you talk about the Westcoast way?", the
descriptive language they used included the words: "compassion," "caring,"
"consensus," "collaboration," "empathy," "feeling people," "inclusiveness," "openness,"
"respect," "soul searching" and "shared responsibility." This language reflected the
values and beliefs that were "at the heart or essence of the Westcoast story" (Skulski,
1994, p. 10) and that were central to what was unique and alternative about Westcoast
as an organizational culture.

Two new Board members, after serving on the Board for only four months,
responded to my question, "Can you describe 'the Westcoast way?' " by identifying
practices of cooperation, collaboration and consensus-building.

No, not really ... I have heard Maryann say "oh, this is the Westcoast way" and I
just thought it was a way of internally dealing with whatever is happening or
getting a consensus from the different member groups, you know. But I don't
really know anything specific. (Wanda)

I haven't [heard them use that expression] to a huge extent. I guess my sense of it
would be I mean my sense of how that organization is run is very much as a sort
of family, collaboration, inclusion of everybody's thoughts ... I think it's sort of
more just the ethic. Organizations get their own culture and what that's about.
(Molly)
Other Board members, both new and old, responded to this same question by acknowledging a relationship between the values and practices of child care work with the values and practices of Westcoast.

No, I don’t know exactly what it is. I think “the Westcoast way” is basically the use of child care language, such as, “Thank you for this,” “we appreciate that idea,” “I know you’re feeling sad,” and similar positive reinforcements. I guess what I interpret “the Westcoast way” is--basically empathy and handling [situations] with child care language. (Jennifer; quote edited for clarity by respondent)

I think “the Westcoast way” is often a similar thing when someone will say well that’s “the child care way.” Well, we do that because we’re in child care and if we approach working with children the way we should, where we need to show mutual respect, we need to have an open mind, you need to talk about your differences, use your words. I mean it’s all those sorts of ECE [Early Childhood Education] kind of guiding principles that is “the Westcoast way” and that they’ve just transferred it. But that’s what it means to me, I don’t know what it means to somebody else. (Karen)

Two founding Board members also responded to this question by talking about qualities and practices that are central to the work of child care. Though each women spoke about “the Westcoast way” differently, they used a common language that
acknowledged the importance of respectful human relationships to “the Westcoast way.”

I think a lot of it is an interpersonal approach that people adopt, maybe they don’t begin with it but it’s a quick learn up culture. You see that people are always greeted warmly. You see that every meeting does have little refreshments. You see they do have little bits of joke and light hearted things. . . . I think it has a fair bit to do with it being predominantly women and I’m becoming more and more aware of this. . . . Those same skills that Early Childhood purports to foster, value and so on, aren’t just and shouldn’t be only things we do with children. It’s sort of a pervasive way, it’s a way of being and I guess when you hear people joking about, “oh, well, it’s ‘the Westcoast way,’ ” it’s the ECE way [Early Childhood Education]. (Gyda)

I think consideration of feelings. I think examining things before they’re done from all aspects is “the Westcoast way.” . . . We’ve got it made because we’re already drawing on a field of caring, feeling people. (Elaine)

Maryann spoke about “the Westcoast way” by using a language of interdependence and mutuality.

“The Westcoast way” is shared responsibility. This is a very dynamic organization that could scare anybody half to death if they felt they were doing it alone. You
know that is the truth of it, but I’m not alone because I’ve got the Board to support me and they’re not alone because they’ve got the staff team and me to support them and the coordinators aren’t alone because we each support each other and the staff teams aren’t alone because they support each other and I will always support them . . . the circle of responsibility in “the Westcoast way” is always the goal and the best way. Sometimes it gets hard to do and even the best of us who are trying to step out of old ways will step back into them . . . but that’s not “the Westcoast way.”

Identifying and describing the “old ways” that the women sometimes “stepped back into” can help us understand the challenges of constructing and developing a caring organization. As J. Martin’s (1992) multi-perspective lens of organizational culture suggests, “the Westcoast way” can be more fully described and understood by acknowledging the areas of difference, complexity, and ambiguity along with the areas of congruence and harmony. Her cultural framework brings to the foreground cultural elements that, as Maryann had inferred in her above quote, were not commonly understood as part of “the Westcoast way.”

A differentiation perspective: subcultures channel difference.

The differentiation perspective suggests that organizational difference is channeled into organizational subcultures or groups. In this view consensus is established within groups rather than within the overall organization. The inconsistencies that exist
between groups are perceived as dichotomous, therefore limiting the value of difference and conflict as organization-wide resources.

New members, older members and founding members can be understood as three organizational subcultures or groups that were distinguished by the members' different levels of organizational knowledge and expertise and by the degree to which they were engaged in discussions of conflict and difference. The existence of such subcultures in Westcoast’s Board was not an intentional act to isolate members, to disempower new members or to hinder organizational consensus. However, the level of organizational knowledge, the experience of a shared organizational history and the close ties of established relationships contributed to differentiating new members from older and founding members. Since many aspects of “the Westcoast way” remained implicit, new Board members initially lacked both the organizational knowledge as well as the social ties of their older colleagues. In this way the older and founding members can be understood as a dominant Board subculture.

As a dominant subculture, the older and founding members may have unintentionally submerged the expression of conflict, and therefore the expression of difference, at the Board level. Conflict was not visible in Board meeting discussions and yet its expression was present in the smaller, and more private, committee meetings. This invisibility of conflict in Board discussions may have supported a perception that the expression of disagreement and difference were “not the Westcoast way.” Some of the newer members identified a reluctance to openly express their different perspectives in this caring culture.
As one founding member talked about the issue of advocacy in Westcoast’s development, her description reflected a reluctance to express disagreement. Her description viewed conflict as a potential threat to organizational harmony.

I guess where we think there has been or currently is or is likely to be some difference of opinion, we haven’t attacked it in a big time way because the cohesiveness for the health of Westcoast is probably more important than finding those spots where there is some disagreement or discontinuity. I know I am being kind of general but I am seeing, well this is an interesting piece because although at many, many levels, and I’m still sure that the shared understandings of the agreement are much larger than understanding the areas of disagreement.

On the contrary, a newer Board member talked about feeling “frustrated” by the Board’s lack of expressed conflict. She understood the open expression of conflict as a healthy contribution to meeting discussions:

My interpretation of “the Westcoast way” is, empathy and supporting one another, which is great, but sometimes I find that there isn’t an openness to differing views or alternative suggestions. Sometimes more difficult issues are left unsaid.
(Quote edited for clarity by respondent)

In Sirianni’s (1993) analysis of the democratic practices at work in feminist organizations, she found that organizations practicing a consensual, unitary democracy
had difficulty with the open expression of dissent, difference and conflict. She states, “the unitary caring model can stifle dissent because those who disagree [with the group consensus] are often made to feel . . . guilt” (p. 310). Reflecting on Sirianni’s analysis, possibly Westcoast’s commitment to the values of care, cooperation and collaboration contributed to an unconscious or uncritical “channeling” (J. Martin, 1992) of conflict into the more intimate and safe environment of committee meetings. Possibly the intimacy of committee meetings framed conflict in ways that supported caring values and practices. Channeling conflict into committee discussions affected the Board in several ways: 1) it maintained and reinforced consensus, congruence and harmony at the Board level; 2) it deterred the expression of conflict and difference at the Board level; and 3) it permitted the use of conflict as an organizational resource in the setting of committee meetings.

The deflection of conflict in Board discussions was not a conscious act to disempower Board members, in fact, such an act would contradict core values of respect and inclusiveness. Rather, it seemed to be an issue that was related to the challenges of organizational growth and development. Gyda’s previous quote, “the cohesiveness for the health of Westcoast is probably more important than finding those spots where there is some disagreement or discontinuity,” reflected the founding members’ beliefs and intentions at the time of Westcoast’s conception. During these early years the cultural elements of harmony and congruence were essential elements for Westcoast’s successful birth and early development. As the organization grew in size, bringing new people and therefore new ideas into its culture, the Board was creating fertile ground for the growth and emergence of difference. The challenge for the
Board’s continued development was to define a commonly understood “public” use of conflict, one that would not threaten the cohesiveness of their caring organization.

**A fragmentation perspective: complexity, multiplicity and flux.**

The fragmentation perspective recognizes that organizational culture is “a web of individuals, sporadically and loosely connected by their changing positions on a variety of issues” (J. Martin, 1992, p. 153). This perspective views organizations as complex relationships between individuals and therefore focuses on the multiplicity of views and the ambiguity within organizations. This perspective helps us see Westcoast as a tapestry of interconnected relationships that coalesce around changing challenges and issues. In this view, individual differences are not interpreted as oppositional or as a threat to organizational survival. The cultural elements of difference and diversity are instead understood as the natural contributions of human participants.

As described earlier, Westcoast was experiencing the challenges of change and growth that new members, new goals and changing environmental forces brought. The older and founding members acknowledged their openness to change as they sought to broaden their membership and “bring new people along.” The strategic planning process itself, an organization-wide event, illustrated the women’s commitment to respecting the multiplicity of views that existed within both their Board and staff. As one older member recognized:

That’s why the method of strategic planning becomes really critical as you broaden beyond sort of an inner circle of people, you do have to provide guidance
and a procedure so that people have a place to make a contribution and move
things forward.

However, the expression of ambiguity and multiple perspectives, and therefore the
expression of conflict and difference, was not apparent in regular Board meetings. This
aspect of their Board meetings will be examined more closely in Chapter Four within a
framework of social, interactive learning and organizational development.

Summary

Maryann had recognized that growth and change challenged their caring
organization when she questioned early in the field study, “How do we maintain the way
we are as we grow larger?” The “way we are” included the seemingly paradoxical
cultural elements of congruence, difference and multiplicity. Organizational congruence
was shaped by shared core values of care, cooperation, inclusiveness, trust and respect.
The more silent areas of organizational difference and multiplicity were channeled into
the smaller, more private committee meetings. In the more public Board meetings,
difference and multiplicity were framed by a reluctance to create disharmony or conflict.
How the Board members learned about and learned to develop these elements of “the
Westcoast way” in routine Board meetings will be examined more closely in Chapter
Four.

In summary, the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre is a nonprofit,
alternative community-service organization that has acted in ways that are progressive in
nature. It is an organization that professes “a commitment to caring, co-operation and
collaboration” (Skulski, 1994, p. 10). It provides a caring social function through the provision of programs and services that support and enhance the work of child care on behalf of child care workers, families, children and the community. It has developed respectful and inclusive personnel policies that recognize its staffs’ social and cultural diversity and that also recognize the private or domestic responsibilities of its employees’ lives. It is an organization working in non-hierarchical ways with a simplified division of labor. It is an organization whose members are predominantly women, most of whom commonly share Early Childhood Education backgrounds. More abstractly and ideologically, it is an organization that challenges conventional public and private organizations by structuring itself around caring values, relationships and practices. Even though the women of Westcoast do not consider themselves as primarily a feminist organization, they share what are frequently cited as feminist organizational values, goals and practices (P. Martin, 1990).
Chapter Four
Meetings: Learning About and Generating Organization

In the work of trusteeship the Westcoast Board members learned many things about themselves, about the group and about the organization. It is unlikely, however, that the women entered this voluntary commitment with the explicit goal of learning "the Westcoast way" or the core values of Westcoast. Carver (1990) has argued, however, that in order to accomplish the Board's primary role of policy clarification and development it is fundamental to the work of trusteeship that members of any Board articulate, negotiate and develop core organizational values. Westcoast's core values were informed by "caring, cooperation and collaboration" (Skulski, 1994, p. 10).

Delineating how Board members learned about and learned to develop shared core values illuminates the ways the women integrated care into the many dimensions of organizational life— their beliefs, goals, structures, relationships, practices, talk and outcomes. It is important to learn how the members of a caring organization constructed, sustained and developed their caring social system; such organizations offer an alternative vision of organizational life.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze how the Westcoast Board members developed the value dimensions of organizational life within routine Board meetings. Board meetings were consciously and unconsciously constructed by the members. The ways they constructed Board meetings both generated and affirmed cultural values and beliefs (Schwartzman, 1989). In this chapter I describe and analyze Board meeting structure, talk, practices, and interactions.
The focus of this chapter is specifically the general Board meetings in which all members met once a month. The Board's policy roles and responsibilities were significantly enhanced by the work of standing committees, ad hoc committees and a series of organization-wide strategic planning meetings, however, the interactive teaching and learning relationships between new, older, and founding Board members primarily occurred in the monthly Board meetings. Within these governance relationships and interactions, processes of socialization, learning, negotiation, change and development sustained and generated the organization.

I use Schwartzman's (1989) analysis of the organizational meeting to provide the conceptual framework for this examination. Though meetings have primarily been taken for granted within the organizational literature, Schwartzman pulls them forward as a primary organizational process and form. Schwartzman frames these everyday, routine events as learning environments that constitute, develop, and sometimes transform the organization. Her cultural interpretation of the meeting as a fundamental socio-cultural event recognizes the relationship between the values of a social order and the meeting itself.

The conception of learning that guides this examination of the meeting is one that emphasizes the social nature of learning within particular social contexts (Selman, 1988). An interactive and situated perspective of learning is used for the study rather than one which views learning as primarily an internal, psychological process or simply as processes of socialization and enculturation. A social interactive conception of learning calls attention to the relationships of learning and to the interactions between individuals and between individuals and the organization. As Acker (1995) reminds us,
it is individuals and groups who learn, not organizations, and through their learning it is possible to develop and change organizations. This study focuses on the Board members' reciprocal teaching and learning relationships as they did the work of trusteeship. Making these incidents of learning visible can help us understand how the women constructed an alternative, caring organization.

In Westcoast change was a central theme and an on-going organizational phenomenon that both challenged and developed core values. As previously identified, Maryann had acknowledged the challenges of change when she stated, “How do we maintain the way we are as we grow larger?” (Field notes, 941020). Weick’s (1979) analysis of organizations as organizing processes “directed toward the establishment of a workable level of certainty” (p. 6) sheds some light on Maryann’s question. He states that “change rather than stability is the rule of any organization” (p. 117). Using Weick’s conception of the organization, Board meetings provided members an organizational space where they could interpret and negotiate “among themselves an acceptable version of what’s going on” (p. 11) amidst the phenomenon of change. Put simply, Westcoast Board meetings were primary organizing events in which the women interpreted change, responded to change and intentionally shaped change. The purpose of the descriptive and analytic accounts that follow is to depict how the women constructed their meetings, how they interpreted their meetings and how meetings affected the women’s understanding of themselves within their changing social system (Schwartzman, 1989).
A Conceptual Framework

Schwartzman (1989) used an anthropological approach to examine the meetings of an alternative mental health organization in the mid-west of the United States. She defined this alternative organization as an “organized anarchy” because of the high degree of ambiguity which existed in all areas of their operation. From her ethnographic study of this organization she discovered that her original conception of the meeting as a tool to explore other organizational topics had to be re-conceived. As her study progressed she learned to see and re-conceptualize meetings as topics in themselves, and she pulled them from the background of her research into the foreground. She interpreted meetings as “communicative events that are examined because they are embedded within a sociocultural setting as a constitutive social form” (p. 39).

Schwartzman’s (1989) analysis of the organizational meeting challenges the taken-for-granted understanding of this routine activity. In opposition to dominant organizational theories, she states, “it is meetings that produce ‘organization’ ” (p. 215). Schwartzman argues that management-focused organizational literature and research carry an assumed individualistic bias. The focus on individuals as organizational leaders ignores the possibility of seeing “how a social form such as a meeting may create and control the structure of everyday life along with the influence and authority of specific individuals in organizations” (p. 222).

Schwartzman’s framework of the meeting provides individuals and the organization with a way to create meaning and to interpret the meaning of what they are doing and saying. These routine organizational events are conceptualized as both “sense makers” and “social and cultural validators” for organizational participants. The
meeting, therefore, provides us with a way of understanding how an organization is
constructed and how its members make sense of their organization.

Schwartzman identifies several meeting components that organizational
participants manipulate and shape, both consciously and unconsciously, to construct
their meetings. These meeting components include: the participants themselves, their
forms of communication (i.e., speaking, writing, singing), the meeting frame or
structure, their meeting talk (i.e., topics, norms of speaking and interacting, forms of
speech, participation), norms of interpretation, goals and outcomes, and meeting cycles
and patterns. Organizational participants construct their meetings by combining and
modifying these meeting components in ways that are particular to the social system in
which they are embedded.

In this chapter I draw from Schwartzman’s ethnographic framework and approach
to the study of meetings in order to identify instances of value-focused learning. The
most salient components of the meeting for analyzing the structure and practices of a
caring organization are the Board meeting frame or structure, the Board meeting talk
and the Board members themselves. This modification of Schwartzman’s model does
not negate the usefulness of describing and analyzing the other meeting components.
However, these three components--frame or structure, talk and participants--contribute
sufficient evidence to help us understand how the women learned and developed the
value dimensions of their organizational culture.

I begin with a description of their meeting frame or structure. In this account I
include a description of their informal consensual decision making rule. A consensual
practice was identified by the founding members as the Board’s norm for decision
making and yet aspects of the meeting structure deterred the use of this practice. Next, I describe and interpret their meeting talk, which includes the Board’s meeting topics and the members’ norms of speaking and interacting. Lastly, I describe the participants themselves as they were engaged in informal teaching and learning relationships and roles. In this examination I only briefly explore the Board’s smaller committee meetings and their organization-wide strategic planning meetings. I draw from these alternative kinds of meetings solely as a way to provide an analytic counterpoint to the general Board meetings. It is not my intent in this chapter to provide a comparative analysis between the different meeting contexts, but rather to focus on the Board meeting as the primary governance setting (Carver, 1990) in which new and old Board members are engaged together in processes of maintaining and developing organizational values.

Board Meetings

The welcoming way people were received when they entered the Westcoast offices was a significant aspect of the meeting structure and environment. The members of Westcoast did not take for granted the way people were acknowledged upon entering their “home.” One of my first impressions of Westcoast was its acts of “making people feel comfortable.” When I entered Westcoast I was greeted in a friendly manner by either a staff or Board member. During day time hours, when a staff member worked at the front desk, I would be promptly acknowledged, even if by just a nod and smile. I would be asked if I needed assistance and offered a cup of coffee if I were waiting. Unlike my experiences of entering large institutions, I never felt invisible upon entering Westcoast.
Susan acknowledged Westcoast’s inclusive practices as she delineated the qualities of “the Westcoast way.” She described a commitment to making people “feel welcome” whether that person was a new staff member, a new Board member or a first time visitor.

So right from the beginning if a new Board member is coming or if you’re just new to the whole thing and there you are checking out the library - you are always welcome, made to feel welcome and somebody always makes sure that you’re not parked in a place where you are going to get ticketed or towed away. Just real simple things like that.

Board meetings were the formal monthly gatherings of the entire Board membership—the table officers, members-at large, member organization representatives and the Executive Director as ex officio member. These evening meetings occurred on the same Tuesday once a month, generally lasting from 7 to 10 p.m., but sometimes they started at 5:30 p.m. with a sandwich supper provided. The meetings took place in a large meeting room, around a number of tables which were pushed together to create a large rectangular meeting table. Seventeen women would be seated around the table, and sometimes the numbers were as great as 20 because of the presence of guests or staff members. Elaine, as Chair of the Board, regularly sat at the head of the table, nearest the front of the room, with Maryann sitting on one side of her and a flip chart stand with a prepared agenda standing on her other side.
Alongside the arranged tables was a kitchenette area. This space had a sink, counter area, refrigerator, cupboards, plates, cutlery and coffee supplies. During the meetings the women would sometimes move to this space for hot or cold beverages. Though the table arrangement served as a formal Board table it often felt like the intimate space of a kitchen table. I observed in my field notes midway through the Board orientation meeting, “The table . . . is now covered with notebooks, papers, empty plates, cups, cutlery, a tray of sweet buns, cream cheese and a plate of apple slices and honey. It looks like a kitchen table” (Field notes, 940907).

My field notes at this particular meeting continued to describe how Elaine skillfully established an atmosphere of “making people feel comfortable” within the first few minutes of the meeting:

Elaine’s manner is very welcoming, her facial expressions are animated with enthusiasm and she uses positive remarks within her introduction--such as “how wonderful it is to see new faces,” clarifying that she doesn’t mean that the “old faces aren’t wonderful.” She uses humor in her talk and sets a positive tone to the meeting in her opening remarks. (Field notes, 940907)

Informal Structures and Practices

At the first Board meeting I attended, Elaine and Gyda in separate conversations with me highlighted the “informal nature of their meeting processes.” Early in my observations I came to understand this informal nature to include their relaxed use of Robert’s Rules; the presence and circulation of food at the table; the casual attire of the
women; their use of humor and story telling within the business of the meeting; their acknowledgment of organizational accomplishments with simple celebrations and gift giving; the informal turn-taking in discussions; an emphasis on verbal reports rather than written reports; the ease with which external interruptions or inquiries were handled by the table officers; and the social talking and networking which occurred before, during and after meetings.

One notable "informal" element that was a Westcoast signature was the "personal touches" of care evident in their meetings. Both new and older members identified gestures in the meeting format and process that contributed to the members' sense of "being cared for." Sue, a new member, talked about these informal caring gestures in her interview:

I think that there's a lot of care and people look out for, in general terms, the health and welfare of other people who are on the Board. There's a lot of personal touches that are made when the agenda is drawn up. There's a lot of really nice things that happen and some people nickname that the ECE way [Early Childhood Education] and I'm sure that's part of it and another part of it is just that people have those skills and they're compassionate people.

In my field notes I wrote about Sue's request to have the opportunity at the beginning of a Board meeting to acknowledge the older Board members' caring gestures. These acts had made a difference to her sense of well being in the organization.
Sue asked Gyda if she could share something at this time with the Board as an opening remark to the evening. She said, “I have a nice thought to start the meeting,” it feels good to be at Westcoast Board meetings because “even though it’s a meeting, it’s nice to be here . . . people take time to greet you, share food, and be nice. I go to other meetings, but these things don’t happen.” (Field notes, 950207)

As Elaine and Gyda talked with me about the “informal” nature of their meeting “process,” they explained that votes were not taken in the meeting proceedings unless it was felt that they had “reached consensus.” However, a consensual decision rule was not consistently obvious in the course of the meetings. I observed that they used a one person, one vote decision rule for day to day, routine business items, such as the passing of minutes and the acceptance of program and member organization reports. They did not, however, use majority rule as a way to resolve larger issues and dilemmas, such as how to resolve minor disagreements about a revised Personnel policy document.

The difficulty of seeing their consensus rule in action was related to two factors--first, the practice was not encoded as a written policy nor was it openly discussed or formally taught as a Board practice and second, the in-depth discussions that might invoke the practice of consensus building did not primarily take place in the Board meeting itself. At the Board orientation meeting Maryann provided a general description of Board roles and responsibilities and in this presentation she briefly acknowledged the Board’s consensus approach to decision making. However, this
decision making rule was not explicitly identified and defined in subsequent Board meetings.

Elaine talked in her interview about the informal nature of their consensual practice and she identified this practice as an “unwritten guiding principle.” She described consensus building as a decision making process that engendered qualities of “making people feel comfortable” with decision outcomes as opposed to the win/lose consequences of vote taking.

E: I think we [the founding Board members] all feel that if we are not all going in the same direction then there’s trouble ahead. We look around and we say okay are people feeling comfortable with this? I think you’ve probably noticed that at Board meetings votes aren’t taken unless there seems to be a consensus in the discussion. If there doesn’t seem to be a consensus then it’s put on the side. Well, we’ll ask Maryann to bring forward something or other because we would not like to have a vote. “There are eight for and five against. Okay, well then it passes.” We would not like that. We would like people to feel comfortable enough, have enough information that they’ll go with it, that it’ll be there.

L: Why is that? Can you talk about that? Is that a “guiding principle?”

E: It’s not even an, well, it’s an unwritten guiding principle that you just don’t want to ram things through that everybody is not comfortable with. That it’s very important that all the Board members support what is happening. Maybe if they don’t all support it, it’s not a good thing to be doing even if the majority would agree... that’s definitely “the Westcoast way.”
L: Has it ever been said, I mean it’s an important issue, has it ever been said publicly that that’s what we try to achieve?

E: I don’t know whether it’s been said publicly. I’m just thinking it’s probably something that Gyda and Maryann and I have talked about. . . . [later in the interview] Have we said it in so many words? I don’t know if we said it in so many words, but we agreed that that’s important.

Informal organizational practices can unintentionally possess an exclusionary nature. New members had to discover taken-for-granted and informal practices. Informality within alternative organizations can unwittingly disempower new members’ ability to participate and contribute. Freeman (as cited in Reinelt, 1995) describes some of the problematic aspects of a feminist organization in which formalized practices and policies had not been used. Most specifically she argues that without a formal structure, informal power relationships and structures can emerge. Westcoast’s informal policies and practices, which sufficed to sustain the organization in its early years, were beginning to be formalized and encoded during the field study. As the organization grew in size and complexity, the implicit nature of their cultural knowledge came into conflict with their core values of openness and inclusiveness.

Early in the field study, as Maryann met with me and a former Board member, she identified the need to formalize their “open cultural practices.” She explained that this was necessary as greater numbers of new people entered the organization, both as a way to help these new people contribute to Westcoast and as a way to maintain their organizational culture:
Maryann spoke about “a culture of openness” in how the people within the organization worked together. She identified that the “open cultural practices and activities as an organization will need to be reviewed, made explicit and identified in an ongoing way” . . . it was important to her that the personnel policy not leave their practices as an “assumption” but rather that these practices required an ongoing review and discussion with the staff together

(Field notes, 940527).

Nine months after my observation of this small meeting, Maryann formally acknowledged in a Board meeting the need to encode their practices. The organization had just completed a series of strategic planning meetings. As Maryann talked about this organization-wide planning process she indirectly described several learning outcomes, one of which was the need to “encode” their unwritten policies:

Maryann said it was time to begin to encode practices and unwritten policies which not everyone would have the background experience or the history to know. She used as an example that during this planning process, she had “revisited why they had developed a policy that stated there would be no membership fees” and realized that new members did not know the history regarding that choice. She said the “rationale is not always evident” for practices and policies. (Field notes, 950207)
As an unwritten guiding principle, consensual decision making was learned through observation, interaction, and participation. Susan talked about learning the practice of consensus building by observing the founding members as they were engaged in this egalitarian decision rule.

So being a Board member has really, it's provided me with opportunities to learn. There's some very skilled people on the Board and just being in their company and listening to how they problem solve or analyze information and then use their consensus building model to arrive at a decision has been really helpful for me.

As Sue, a new member, described her understanding of "the Westcoast way," she also talked about learning Westcoast's caring values and practices by observing the actions of older Board members, "I've observed it, felt it, seen it in action and people refer to it sometimes."

One founding Board member echoed Sue's acknowledgment of the importance of modeling "the Westcoast way" as she talked about how Westcoast was different from her work organization.

It's not part of the environment [of her work organization] so to speak. It's not visible, it's not modeled, it's not transmitted to other people. So I suppose what I'm trying to say... is it [an interpersonal approach to working with others] could exist anywhere but I note that it doesn't.
Informal learning through observation, interaction and direct experience were integral to the ways new and older members learned about and learned to develop core values. Recent studies (Ilsley, 1990; Ross-Gordon and Dowling, 1990) that examine the learning that takes place for volunteers in nonprofit organizations support the importance of informal learning processes for the volunteer. The researchers found that much of the learning identified by the participants was the result of unplanned or incidental learning events. In Ross-Gordon and Dowling’s (1990) study of the women volunteers in six Black women’s community-based organizations in the United States, the researchers found that, “The informal system seemed to generate much of the more memorable learning [for the participants]” (p. 180). They identify “informal” learning methods as experience, interaction with others, or observation. Ilsley’s (1990) ethnographic studies of 34 American nonprofit organizations support similar findings. He concludes that formal training programs that are skill-based and instrumental in nature are not where most learning takes place for volunteers. Ilsley concludes that volunteers learned most about an organization as they were engaged in everyday organizational problem solving and critical reflection.

However, informal learning methods can leave important organizational dimensions, such as values, beliefs, and practices, to a kind of random discovery by newer members. In an alternative organization that is committed to consensual decision making, it is essential that members do not have great differences in organizational skills and knowledge (Acker, 1995; Ristock, 1990). The Westcoast staff and older Board members were identifying these skill and knowledge differentials between newer and older Board members as the organization grew in size, complexity, and diversity. As
was earlier described, the Board had begun to formalize Westcoast policies and practices. These actions illustrated a desire to openly address potential power inequalities between members, actions that were essential to maintain their caring organization.

Formal Structures and Practices

The Board meetings also possessed the formal elements of traditional organizational meetings. The formalities of the meeting structure included the presence of a large Board table; a call to order by the Chair; the use of a pre-planned, written agenda that followed a regular pattern; the Chair’s facilitation of the agenda and the meeting proceedings; the taking of minutes; the use of motions to move day to day business items; the presentation of verbal reports from each of the organizations’ programs, member organizations and standing committees; and a formal adjournment by the Chair.

A traditional agenda structure that was focused on information sharing narrowed the ways in which the women talked. The agenda began with an acceptance of the previous meeting’s minutes; moved through numerous standing committee, program and member organization reports; and closed with “other business.” The meeting agenda required a minimum of three hours to cover and little time was available for in-depth discussion on emerging issues and future directions. Several Board members, both old and new, described these agendas as “packed.”

Elaine talked in her interview about how the Board’s choice to open up and enlarge the Board size had had a direct impact on the kinds of discussions that could
take place. She explained how the increased Board size coupled with the increasing complexity of Westcoast meant that meetings could no longer accommodate the in-depth discussions that previously occurred and that now took place in the committee meetings:

L: ... the level of discussion is very different in the Board meeting, where that kind of tearing apart [as in the discussions of committee meetings] is happening. Can that happen at the Board level? Is it possible?

E: It happened at the Board level initially when we didn’t have so many services but it would be hard to have them in the Board meetings. They [the meetings] are very long as is. I keep looking around at the faces and I say, okay, who are we losing? Have people had it? So it would be very difficult which is why we sometimes have a single issue meeting. That’s the only time you can really, really spend the time that you need to examine something. It can happen but not, I think, because of the size we are.

Several Board members observed and suggested that the fullness and the rigid structure of the agenda prevented open and lengthy discussions.

With the jam-packed agendas and lengthy meetings, opportunities to discuss issues are sometimes missed. (Quote edited for clarity by respondent)
I do find that at Board meetings, I find the agenda is controlled with predetermined outcomes, sometimes negating open discussion. (Quote edited for clarity by respondent)

I think the monthly Board meetings, they go on a track... Like it's, “Okay, we have this issue to deal with, or this, or that, or these proposals are coming from the government. How are we going to address that?”

Both new and old members described the constraints of an agenda structure that was largely focused on the sharing of information. Their “packed” and traditional agenda format emphasized an information sharing style of communication at the expense of group dialogue and discussion. However, an older member revealed a core value at work that may have contributed to the degree of information sharing that occurred in the meeting agenda. She described the meetings’ information sharing practices as an illustration of Westcoast’s commitment to values of openness and inclusiveness. The paradox that becomes evident is that information sharing was both central to establishing openness and to limiting openness, simultaneously.

There aren’t many organizations the Board gets as involved in a nitty gritty down to the grass roots work with an organization. It’s often just sitting around the table. As I say the paper shuffles by you with “Oh, what’s this about? Oh, okay, it sounds like a good idea.” But you really get involved in what’s happening and I guess that’s why the meetings go on so long, but it’s those sorts of things, that
when those come around on the agenda—that information sharing and feedback.

That's what impresses me.

The Meeting Talk

To analyze what Schwartzman referred to as “meeting talk,” I examine how Board meeting topics and norms of speaking supported the generation of shared values and provided less support for the negotiation of shared values. This section begins by examining the interrelated elements of meeting topics and norms of speaking in order to identify instances of learning related to core values. I conclude the section by identifying “silent” topics and “absent” forms of speaking. An analysis of the Board’s silent and absent meeting talk brings to light the cultural elements of contradiction and ambiguity, therefore offering a more enriched interpretation of “the Westcoast way.”

Meeting Topics and Norms of Speaking

As identified in the previous section, the most frequently used form of speaking in Board meetings was an information sharing communication style. During the field study, the majority of Board meeting topics were framed by an agenda that reported to the members the progress and activities of its various function areas—five standing Board committees, four to five Westcoast program areas or “departments,” five independent member organizations and the occasional staff presentation regarding one of the program areas. These topics primarily involved a one way exchange of information initiated by the member reporting. In most instances these reports or exchanges of information did not require a Board response and so these topics did not
often generate in-depth group discussions. Members often asked questions during
reports, but largely for purposes of clarification and understanding rather than for
purposes of expressing different points of view.

Schwartzman (1989) acknowledges in her research that organizational meeting
topics and discussions “become a vehicle for generating, learning about and ‘seeing’ the
organization” (p. 224). Several Board members confirmed Schwartzman’s analysis as
they talked in their interviews about how the Board practice of information sharing was
an important way for them to learn about the Board and Westcoast.

Well, I think that one of the strengths of Westcoast’s Board is the information
sharing that goes on. Having a focus or presentation by a program or a particular
initiative that’s happening through Westcoast, that’s helpful. It isn’t just sort of a
piece of paper that’s handed around the table but there’s actually some dialogue
and discussion happening and there’s those things. . . I can’t really think of
anything that would be any more helpful. I truly think that there’s a real desire
there . . . to keep Westcoast all the time informed as to what is happening. (Karen)

Now maybe this is what they refer to as “the Westcoast way” . . . one of the
priorities . . . is that they want people who are on the Board to operate with as
much information as possible. . . So what I see happening in Westcoast is the
communication is really a high priority. . . Again it shows that people believe that
there’s a desire, and that people should have this information if they are going to
make sound decisions. (Sue)
Policy Talk

The Board’s primary focus on information sharing as a norm of speaking did not significantly shift to alternate forms of interaction (i.e., in-depth discussion, dialogue or conflict) even when policy recommendations were brought forward to the Board from various ad hoc and standing committees. During the time of the field study two formal policy documents were presented for Board approval. One policy was the revised Personnel policy that had been developed over a period of one year by the Personnel Committee. The second policy was presented by the Ad Hoc Board Review Committee. The committee’s task had been to address ways to improve the Board’s functioning as a result of issues identified in a Board retreat the previous year. The Ad Hoc Committee recommended increasing the size of the Board and formalizing a greater use of the Executive Committee. To examine how policy talk contributed to learning about formalized and taken-for-granted organizational values, I look closely at how the Board members talked about the topic of authorizing the Executive Committee to meet on a more frequent basis.

In order to provide an organizational context to this policy topic, I begin with an examination of how encoded policies were established at Westcoast. The organization did not have written policy regarding policy development. However, at the end of my first Board observation, during an informal conversation, one of the founding members explained to me that the work of the Board was done at the committee level and was “well thought out by the time it was presented to the Board.” Later in the field study, as I began to observe standing committee meetings, I observed that the work of developing and negotiating policy ideas took place in these smaller work units of the Board. In her
interview, Elaine described the committee meetings as an important process for the organization:

You really, really talk about those issues [in committees] and what does it mean to the service and what does it mean for Westcoast and is it in keeping with our principles and is it really the work of Westcoast. By the time a committee makes a recommendation regarding operating policies [to the Board] . . . it’s really been gone through very thoroughly and the Board, I think, feels very confident. I always feel good that they’ve looked at all angles, so it’s where you really, really look at the guiding principles. You really do.

The Ad Hoc Committee’s decision to recommend a policy that authorized a greater use of the Executive committee was possibly not an easy decision for the Committee members. Maryann and Gyda, both founding members, expressed in their separate interviews their personal concerns that such an action might create an “in-group.”

I’m not very fond of Executives that make a lot of decisions because Executives in other nonprofits to me are those places, it’s the “in-group.” They often have fun. They get to talk about all the--they’re the small tight group--small enough so that they can get tight and they have a lot of fun and they discuss all the meaty issue and the stuff’s boring at the Board and the Executive is not necessarily,
particularly interested in what goes on at the Board because they heard it all before. (Maryann)

I think everybody's experience is the more one group of people come together and meet more than any people, or other persons who are not a part of that group, it becomes an inclusive, exclusive—you're in, you're out—and so it was with a lot of hmmmmm, that we actually decided, all right, we'll have an Executive. We'll meet but it does create a little bit of an in circle and an out circle. (Gyda)

The power imbalance that these two women identified is an important issue to pay attention to and address in a caring organization. I can only assume that this topic was discussed in depth in the Ad Hoc Committee because of the level of analysis I observed in other committee meeting discussions. However, once the topic came to the level of the Board, in-depth discussion or analysis did not occur. Alongside the founding members' concern to address possible power imbalances between the Board and the Executive, there still existed a need for some part of the Board to meet more often to address the complexities of their growing organization. I described in my field notes how this policy topic was presented to the Board by the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee and how the members responded to the committee's recommendations.

Polly passed around a typed one page report which she said summarized the Ad Hoc Committee's work over the past six months. Their work focused on the issues which had been identified at the April 1993 Board retreat. Polly spoke to
each of the three recommendations for which she was "seeking Board approval." The second recommendation was "To authorize the Executive to meet on a regular basis." Polly said that the Executive has had to meet more often to address the needs of decision making in between regular Board meetings. Karen asked why this motion was even necessary as she thought the Executive would meet when the need was present. Polly responded saying the committee was concerned about having the Board explicitly authorize the Executive to "legitimize these meetings" to meet on a regular basis rather than proceeding without this issue clarified. Polly mentioned that the members of the Executive are also the members of the Personnel and the New Initiatives Committees. She moved the motion and it was seconded. The motion passed unanimously with no discussion.

(Field notes, 940405)

The policy recommendation did not engage the women in a discussion or a critique of the possible dangers of having a more developed Executive Committee structure. As one newer member identified, the women did not often "ask the harder questions" in their Board talk. The policy passed in a straight forward manner. The one question asked by a Board member even questioned the need for the policy and implied her sense of trust in the Executive’s decisions. This kind of agreeable interaction between the Board members was a common way in which topics were presented and received in Board meetings. The women’s consistently supportive and non-conflictual response to committee policy recommendations seemed to reinforce informal values of
trust, consensus and group harmony. However it might also be interpreted as a reluctance to be critical.

Mansbridge’s (1980) study of a small, non-hierarchical, “participatory workplace” crisis centre can help us uncover the organizational value at work underneath the women’s non-confrontational manner, a cultural practice that on the surface could be interpreted as an uncritical compliance. In her study Mansbridge found that the participants of the crisis centre were using the “unitary democracy” practices of consensus and face-to-face negotiation. They were not using conflictual practices of vote taking to make group decisions because they understood themselves to share common interests. Because the participants shared core values and beliefs, they understood individual interests to be in harmony with group interests.

Reflecting on Mansbridge’s findings within the framework of Westcoast’s alternative organizational context, it can be interpreted that the Westcoast Board members assumed commonly shared interests around the values and practices of care. As identified earlier, it was stated in an annual report, “As a ‘community of interest,’ Westcoast has demonstrated the value of bringing together individuals and groups who share common interests, experiences, issues and hopes” (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1991-1992, p. 7). As Elaine said above, “by the time a committee makes a recommendation ... it’s really been gone through very thoroughly and the Board, I think, feels very confident.” However, Mansbridge identified a potential problem for participatory organizations that relied solely on non-conflictual practices for decision making. She cautioned that “unitary democracies that ignore or
suppress conflicting interests can do much damage to themselves and to their members” (p. xi).

The women’s accounts of Westcoast’s founding circumstances in “the Westcoast story,” reflected collectively shared values, beliefs and interests. As the organization grew larger, more diverse and more complex, an assumption that all members shared common beliefs and interests was no longer necessarily true. Organizational growth and change were challenging Westcoast’s assumed values, beliefs and practices. However, the women constructed their Board meeting talk to sustain organizational order and harmony and to affirm their relationships of trust. This practice tended to submerge conflict.

Silence: Absent Meeting Talk

Within the women’s individual interviews some of the newer members described to me personal perspectives of difference that they had not openly expressed in the Board meetings. These women did not have the organizational experience or the historical social ties that might have supported their open expression of difference. At the same time each of these women had identified an absence of conflict and disagreement in Board meeting discussions. This absence of conflict may have reinforced their reluctance to express difference. I named their silent voices and perspectives “absent meeting talk.” These areas of silence seemed to be tied to the women’s sense of personal agency because they were linked to what they described as their personal areas of expertise, individual skills, expectations or motivations to join the Board.
The absent meeting talk the women identified included the absence of talking about and addressing the lack of racial diversity in the composition of the Board; the absence of an explicit political analysis in Board meeting discussions; and the absence of "ask[ing] the harder questions" in Board meeting talk. Each of the women who identified these areas of absence expressed a reluctance to raise what they perceived as different points of view in the meetings. One member felt she needed to "pay her dues" before she felt comfortable expressing contrary points of view:

... a need to kind of, like pay your dues in some ways. I think people will accept your ideas more when they feel that you have put in something.

A different member tentatively expressed her reluctance to verbalize her political perspectives within the meeting talk because she felt her analysis might be interpreted as disrespectful of the organization's work.

What I'm trying to do is assess in a sense what people are prepared for and what will fit in and there's times where I feel I want to be more political that I am in terms of, sort of, call a spade a spade kind of thing. But at the same time I realize that a lot of people have a long history in child care and I really respect the work that they've done and I feel like I have a lot to learn from them, so I don't want to come in and just say I think we need to be more political, although I do believe that. I think that edge is missing.
Another member described similar feelings of reluctance to raise different points of view:

I think people will accept your ideas more when they feel that you have put in something. I mean if somebody were to directly ask me those questions I would be quite candid about it but I don’t, at this point anyway, it’s not something I would say this is something that I want to bring up because there needs to be a level of understanding of me feeling safe within the group.

This sense of reluctance was echoed by a member as she explained that she had wanted to contribute more to her Board role by being able to “ask the harder questions” in more open discussions:

I feel I could do more than I’m doing, but because, as I say, I’m at a disadvantage by not knowing the core players and their “agenda,” or where they are coming from. This is largely due to the lack of group discussion on various issues. From that point of view I don’t feel I contribute as much as I could. I have a reluctance to open potentially controversial subjects. (Quote edited for clarity by respondent)

Contrary to these women’s feelings of reluctance to express their different points of view, another new member talked about the Board’s willingness to be open to different perspectives in what she called Westcoast’s practice of “dialogue” in the strategic planning meetings.
I: And I've been really impressed with the openness there is to where [Westcoast] is going. It's not that there's a preconceived plan because often you have that . . . there's still an openness to how does this fit.

L: And the openness comes from?

I: Yeah, I think from the process or the dialogue that happens . . . . [later in the interview] I think there's an openness for dialogue around that [the issue of advocacy], as opposed to a set, “this is where we should be going.”

One commonly shared thread of meaning amongst the women who expressed a reluctance to be openly critical was that they had each described ambivalent feelings about their “sense of belonging.” They each referred to themselves as being outside the social network ties of their colleagues. Two women described these feelings of being outside of Board social ties:

I feel because I’m new on the Board and I don’t really know anybody on that level. . . . It’s more business-like even though the people there are very friendly and congenial. It’s just that lack of personal experience that I don’t feel I have. I know I don’t have and maybe the fact that other people do makes me feel left out. But I’m sure there are other people in my situation too, it’s just that I don’t see it.

I don’t know people on a social basis and I haven’t really participated in social things either, mostly just because I just haven’t had time . . . so I miss out on things.
It appears that the values that made conflict invisible also deterred the expression of different points of view within Board meeting talk. Drawing from J. Martin's (1992) integration perspective of organizational culture, one that emphasizes organizational cohesion, it can be understood that the women constructed the general Board meetings to encourage the generation of group cohesion and harmony at the expense of generating difference and multiplicity. I address this in more depth in Chapter Five where I explore the women's reluctance to express difference within a framework of caring practice.

Reciprocal Teaching and Learning Relationships

One of the things that we're going to lose now on the Board, that we have to be comfortable with . . . is this very tight first Board [that we built over time]. No Board subsequently will have that sense of birthing something, right? You can't get it again and what you have to have is something else. So now I'll be very sensitive to the balance between newcomers and people who are, well familiar, with it and then I'll have to let go myself, you know, it'll be scary when [the other founding members] move off the Board and I'll have to be mature enough to cope with that, right? . . . and then allow and watch the leadership develop and facilitate it. And not hang onto the old, and facilitating, that means always being sensitive to two things at the same time. Always, task and process. (Maryann)

Maryann's reflective thoughts on change, particularly changing relationships, captured a significant organizational transition that was taking place during the field
study. The composition of the Board was shifting from a core group of founding and long time members to one that included new people who did not bring a shared experience of Westcoast’s history to the group. Westcoast, as Maryann stated in a Board meeting, was “in a learning curve—we are a learning culture.” The Board was opening itself to the new ideas, influences, intentions and goals that new people bring. In this climate of organizational change and growth all members of the Board, founding, older and new members, participated in teaching and learning interactions and roles that contributed to group and individual learning. Susan captured the importance of this organizational transition when she stated:

   I think we’re getting to the point where some of the founding members are maybe not ready to retire, but ready to let go and let others learn and grow.

   At the newcomers’ first orientation meeting, Maryann confirmed in her introductory remarks that “new Board members were good for the organization because they brought new perspectives . . . and questioned why are we doing this and should we be doing this?” Expressing a belief that was mirrored by her fellow founding members, Maryann talked in her interview about the role new members bring to processes of generating and developing the organization.

   It is time at a certain point to have new people come on and so I say we’re in the middle of that last challenge now because you know for some people they hold dearly and they are loyal and are excited and have felt a sense of both commitment
and perhaps satisfaction to the growth of the organization. They need to move on and new people need to come in and then they’re going to redefine or define the organization according to current needs and their goals and expectations. We’re in the process of doing that right now.

Within the interactions and relationships between founding, old and new members, teaching and learning were occurring interchangeably. Older members taught Westcoast values and perspectives. New members offered new perspectives. Each woman contributed to the learning of her colleagues, blurring the boundaries between the teacher and the learner. Within these teaching and learning relationships, each individual had the potential to contribute to the growth and development of the organization. As Acker (1995) has noted in her research on feminist organizations, “agency resides in people, not in abstractions such as an ‘organization’” (p. 137).

It is these kinds of variable relationships and roles that this section will examine. I focus the analysis on the educative roles provided by three women—one founding member, one older member and one new member. I limit my examination to these three women as I believe their personal motivations, intentions and actions captured what was at the heart of the group’s reciprocal and interactive learning processes—relationships that were shaped by care and respect.

**Founding Member**

Maryann’s teaching role was important not only because of her office, as Executive Director and ex officio Board member, but also because of her facilitative and
educative intentions. In her interview, as she was talking about the Board members’ commitments to Westcoast, she defined her personal intentions:

It’s a real commitment. There’s no sense being on a board if it isn’t a real commitment and then I don’t think being on a board should be a life time sentence. I think a six year cycle is plenty. First two years, get in, get familiar, choose the parts that you’re interested in. Hopefully I have some sensitivity to what it is that people want to do, that facilitates the natural development, the natural leadership. There are always those people who are natural leaders.

In the Board meetings Maryann provided a kind of socio-cultural role of teaching and interpreting Westcoast beliefs, values and actions. Maryann’s articulate understanding of Westcoast and her assertive critique of its social and political environments complemented Elaine’s comfortable, relaxed Chair leadership and “bridge building” language. Elaine, as the Chair of the Board, set an enthusiastic, positive tone to the meetings and effectively moved the women through the “packed” agenda. Maryann, using equally energetic and welcoming manners, provided an instructive interpretation of the agenda topics, always placing issues in a larger context. In these ways Maryann and Elaine worked in partnership as leaders of the Board meeting process--Elaine guiding the tone, process and movement of the meeting and Maryann framing, interpreting and explaining agenda topics and organizational actions.

Maryann was consistently engaged in talk and descriptions that interpreted Westcoast’s past, present and future. She would take an issue or idea raised by a Board
member and shape it into a potential project, a Westcoast “dream” or an organizational response. Maryann saw and articulated potential relationships between divergent social factors that affected Westcoast specifically and the child care field generally. She was able to pull disparate ideas together, synthesizing ideas out loud in various meeting contexts. As Gyda said in her interview, “Maryann is a real vision person . . . she can see the thing without having experienced the thing.”

In my field notes I called Maryann’s regular acts of informally offering background and contextual information to agenda issues her “explanations.” Maryann also interpreted the meaning of particular issues and dilemmas for Westcoast and I called these interpretive talks her “framing.” It seemed to me that Maryann was attempting to educate the women to the nuances and challenges of Westcoast’s internal and external environments. Though her explanations and interpretations often took considerable time, her vigilance in offering her perspectives, unsolicited, helped me as an outsider to understand and thoughtfully consider the challenges facing the organization.

The new Board members also talked about Maryann’s explaining and interpreting roles, roles that they more often identified as her acts of information sharing. Within the meetings Maryann’s teaching interventions provided a way to address the skill and knowledge differentials that existed between the old and new members. Some of the new members were not only new to Westcoast but they did not have the child care background that other members possessed. Susan described Maryann’s personal intention to help others “grow and learn.”
I think many boards sometimes get driven by the ego of the staff and often the executive director. That hasn’t been the case with Westcoast, not to say that Maryann doesn’t have an ego. She certainly has a sense of herself and she takes great pride in what she does. She’s not selfish in allowing other people opportunities to grow and to learn. So I think a lot of the culture has to do with how she has encouraged people to work and that just spills over.

In her role as interpreter, Maryann gave the women a frame for understanding the issues. When items arose for discussion, she would often open the discussion with her interpretation of the issue, including her definition of possible consequences for the organization. For example, on one occasion it was reported to the Board that a survey conducted by one of Westcoast’s program areas had found a growing number of vacancies for child care on the west side of Vancouver. During the discussion that followed Maryann framed the importance of the issue by suggesting it “could be used as a political backlash against the child care community” and therefore it “merited a study group” to explore the issue and how to respond to it.

Maryann would sometimes “flag” what she considered “the critical issue for the night.” One such issue dealt with the immediate need for Westcoast to secure their contingency fund and define their “surplus” funds in their relationship with the provincial government:

Maryann said that she was “flagging this as the critical issue of the night.” She went on to explain to the women that this same item was a significant issue for the...
provincial organization that represented nonprofit social service agencies. She described some background to this issue for the Board saying that nonprofit organizations that receive a government funded "contract for service" to provide a public service are a "third party" and "therefore have the right to make independent decisions." However, government actions try to limit or interfere in this independence. (Field notes, 941004)

Older Member

Along with her financial expertise and business perspective, Jennifer provided a unique cultural role on the Board by giving shape to the voice and the perspectives of an outside learner of "the Westcoast way." Jennifer’s corporate perspective brought into focus the intangible cultural assumptions that informed Westcoast values and practices. Her background, unlike that of most Board members, was not in Early Childhood Education. She brought to the Board professional training and work experience in the for-profit sector. Her differing points of view, as she identified and expressed them in meeting contexts, brought into sharp relief the boundaries of "the Westcoast way." Her inquiring statements and questions in meeting discussions helped me, also as an outside learner, to see and learn about assumed cultural values and practices. My field notes of the Board’s discussion of the revised Personnel policy described Jennifer’s ability to uncover taken-for-granted cultural commitments:

In the benefits section of the policy Jennifer was very involved in the discussion by providing a "counterpoint" or different view to the policy statements regarding
employee benefits. She leaned forward on the table and asked questions of clarification, directed to Susan and Maryann. I had a sense that her business perspective identified areas in the policy which might be defined differently within private business. She first queried whether there would be a problem for the organization financially by offering employees who work more than 17.5 hours per week the employee benefit package. Maryann commented that this was a fundamental commitment of Westcoast to the employees (is this the Westcoast way?). Within the definition of vacation benefits Jennifer again queried “if you make this an issue now, it will be a big issue in 10 years which the government is paying for and the greater the number of people getting this benefit means more time is needed to replace staff on vacation.” Maryann said to Jennifer “this section is generous and is a big morale booster around here” particularly because of the low salaries. . . .[later in the field notes] In the policy section of performance review Jennifer asked, “is employee compensation tied into superior performance?” Joyce responded immediately by saying that such conduct “is definitely an aspect of the private sector but that it was not a practice of Westcoast.” (Field notes 940607)

Jennifer was deliberately recruited by the Board because they needed her financial management skills and abilities to fill the position of Treasurer. The preschool teacher of her children was also a member of the Westcoast Board. This individual invited Jennifer to meet with Maryann to consider the Treasurer position. Jennifer described this initial introduction to Westcoast:
So then I went to lunch . . . with Maryann and talked. I had questions about how Westcoast operated and what my role as treasurer would be, etc. In the initial interview I was quite impressed. I thought, this is an opportunity to participate more globally than I had been previously. It’s not involved with my children directly, which was a first for me . . . but then, from a community perspective and even a work perspective, I thought it might broaden my horizons in nonprofit Board work. I initially took a two year term. (Quote edited for clarity by respondent)

As Jennifer acknowledged, joining Westcoast placed her in “quite a learning curve . . . because I’m not in the child care field, which is sometimes a disadvantage in understanding the Board’s work.” Initially she had to “do a bit of homework” to orient herself to the child care field’s infrastructure, but she quickly was addressing the financial needs of the organization. In her first two years she had helped to identify, define and implement the following projects: initiating the acquisition of nonprofit trustee liability insurance, developing a staff benefit package, reassessing the organization’s changing audit needs and expectations, refining the organization’s financial management systems, reviewing the Constitution and By Laws to initiate a name change for the organization, and recommending changes to Westcoast’s investment policies and practices.

Several of the Board members had acknowledged to me how valuable Jennifer’s contributions had been to the organization. However, one older member also
recognized that reaching out for her skills had been a challenge both for Jennifer and for the Board because of their differing points of view:

I mean Jennifer represents a bit of a diversity branch out for us because her background is completely different in how she fits into the loop . . . when the Executive meets periodically I see the kind of discussion that we have, she’s in a catch-up mode and it’s because she doesn’t speak the same language and she doesn’t have the same experience per se. So when we were looking at the wage review process, for example, it represented a huge increase for some people . . . Jennifer comes from a business background where you were really lucky this year if you got two and a half percent, and so the challenge for me was to try to explain in a new language, to try and explain in market terminology why it was really important to bring the salaries up to the base level and why it’s hard to compare this increase to the general public.

Jennifer echoed her colleague’s assessment of the challenges to herself as an outside person trying to learn how she might contribute in an organization framed by different values and practices, different relationships and a “different language” than her experiences in the corporate sector:

I find that assessing every Board members’ position is difficult to do, as you say there’s “the Westcoast way” which is often a code for maintaining the status quo.
This is quite different from my previous Board experience. (Quote edited for clarity by respondent)

Jennifer had contributed to the Board’s teaching and learning relationships by providing particular skills and knowledge and by asking questions informed by a for-profit perspective. Her motivations and purposes may have placed her in a position of vulnerability because she was “ask[ing] the harder questions.” However, her direct inquiring manner in Board meeting discussions illuminated areas of silence and taken-for-granted cultural knowledge. The answers to her questions and direct challenges were framed by the founding and older members, and these explanations in turn publicly re-defined and re-affirmed cultural values and practices.

New Member

Molly, a new Board member, had joined the Board because she was “excited” about the opportunity to be “part of a dynamic organization” and to work with the founding Board members. In turn she provided new perspectives and beliefs that contributed to the Board’s re-definition of their advocacy role. Molly’s conceptualization of advocacy challenged Westcoast’s informal definition-in-use. Unlike other new members who were reluctant to express difference or older members who assumed a common understanding of advocacy, Molly openly articulated a different point of view regarding the role of advocacy. Molly’s outside affiliations with two of the founding members may have contributed to her greater sense of ease in raising new
ideas and issues. Possibly, as another new member talked about her own need for safety in order to express difference, Molly “felt safe in that group.”

In her interview, Molly talked about not wanting to limit the notion of advocacy to confrontation,

Well, you see because I’ve always believed that advocacy, people see advocacy as something that’s to steer away from because it’s going to be confrontational. . . . I don’t see advocacy as being that way at all.

Molly shared her interpretation of advocacy with her Board colleagues during a strategic planning meeting in which the women participated in small discussion groups to identify organizational needs and gaps in five organizational function areas—coordination of services and policy, training and development, community education, evaluation and advocacy. Molly joined the advocacy group along with Maryann, myself and one other new Board member. In this group she was forthright and clear about her belief that the Board needed to develop a common understanding of its advocacy role.

Molly started the discussion by asking “What is advocacy and how does it impact on how we are perceived?” In the discussion that followed her question, the women talked about a continuum in defining the activities of advocacy that might start as community education on one end and be more radical in activity at the other end. . . . Molly said that she believed that the issue of defining advocacy and taking an advocacy stand was important immediately for Board attention because
“we fail if we don’t take a stand.” . . . Molly said that the Board now “needed to have a solid understanding of advocacy because we are out there.”

(Field notes, 950104)

Other than a few informal comments expressed by Maryann in Board meetings, regarding “not being able to bite the hand that feeds you” and “not being able to say what publicly needs to be said,” the Board’s advocacy role had not been raised as a Board meeting topic prior to the strategic planning process. An older member had even assumed that advocacy was not an issue for the Board because it had not been discussed at Board meetings:

L: I haven’t heard the theme of advocacy debated [at Board meetings].

I: No, like I get a sense that everyone else feels quite comfortable with the [current] role . . . I don’t know. It hasn’t been in a discussion since I’ve been on the Board at all, it’s sort of accepted.

This absence of discussion regarding Westcoast’s position on advocacy is confirmed by Gyda within her interview,

I think to some people there’s maybe been a little bit of a frustration that has emerged that we can’t really put forth a Westcoast position because the Board hasn’t really discussed those and to take a stand might have some awkwardness in it.
However, Westcoast was an effective and successful child care advocate, particularly in the areas of public education, information sharing, building partnerships and influencing government decision makers. Since their beginning, Westcoast had been an articulate child care advocate on behalf of children, parents and child care providers. The advocacy strategies they had chosen, however, were not, as identified in the strategic planning process, ones that required Westcoast to “take a stand.”

Westcoast’s advocacy role, most specifically its role in “taking a stand,” was open to different interpretations and surrounded by different values. Prior to the planning process it appeared to have acquired “a taken-for-granted character” by the Board members. In the context of the planning meetings, Board and staff brought the issue to the foreground and re-negotiated its meaning. In the framework of the strategic planning process, several women facilitated this discussion, Maryann as a founding member, Molly as a new Board member and several staff members. Near the end of the planning process, Gyda echoed Molly’s belief that it was necessary to develop a shared understanding of advocacy, while prior to the planning process she had expressed a reluctance to tackle the issue because of its “awkwardness.”

In the function area of Advocacy, Gyda said that their “advocacy work to date had been”--and she made a hand gesture in the air as she said the sound “pff,” meaning very little. After she used this gesture and expression, she said “in advocacy we haven’t done as much as we might have because we have been focused on stabilizing the agency.” She said that “advocacy has been a bit of a
dilemma because we never wanted to overtake the work of the member organizations.” (Field notes, 950104)

Molly had offered the Board a new perspective that had not been framed by the historical concerns of the founding members, particularly the concerns of “treading lightly.” As both Gyda and Maryann explained in their separate interviews, the issue of advocacy was historically a difficult one for Westcoast for several reasons. First, the organization sought to establish credibility in the field. Second, they did not want to assume that Westcoast spoke for all its member organizations on particular child care issues. Third, as Gyda stated, “we haven’t attacked it [advocacy] in a big time way because the cohesiveness for the health of Westcoast is probably more important than finding those spots where there is some disagreement or discontinuity.” The strategic planning meetings provided the opportunity for Board and staff members, both new and old, to re-define their advocacy roles at a time when the women were ready to re-conceptualize advocacy as an organizational action that did not threaten the “cohesiveness and health of Westcoast.”

Summary

Within the Board meeting’s structure, norms of interaction and decision making, norms of speaking, meeting topics, and reciprocal relationships of teaching and learning, Board members were learning and generating core values of trust, respect, cooperation, caring practice and group harmony. However, the values that created and sustained their caring organization also submerged the open expression of conflict and therefore
the expression of difference and contradiction in Board meetings. Newer members’ privately expressed perspectives of difference illuminated areas of contradiction and paradox. In Chapter Five I continue to examine how we might understand the challenges of conflict and difference in a caring organization.

Learning that occurred as a result of socialization and enculturation processes helped new Board members become “old” Board members, and equally helped old Board members become “new” Board members. Central to these cultural processes were the teaching and modeling roles provided by the founding and older members. The stories they told, the language they used, the ideas and issues they discussed, the actions and behaviours they demonstrated and the feelings they expressed, both intentionally and unintentionally, helped “to bring new people along.” Through these socialization processes the new women were able to see the organization and learn about the values informing “the Westcoast way.”

Learning within Board meetings also had an interactive and reciprocal nature that could not be fully defined by limiting an understanding of learning to processes of socialization and enculturation. New members brought new ideas and perspectives that contributed to the group’s learning and sometimes challenged the older members’ assumptions and perspectives. Board members, new and old, not only learned about the values and practices of “the Westcoast way,” they also learned to re-affirm, maintain and generate organizational values. However, the smaller committee meetings, rather than the larger Board meetings, were the organizational spaces that most supported the negotiation of core values and appropriate actions.
The learning methods that supported learning about and developing core values were largely of an informal nature. Board members learned through observation, interaction and participation. These informal learning methods were not supported by explicit Board goals or policies and yet older members understood the importance of these informal methods in their intentional acts of “bringing the new people along.”
Throughout the field study I found myself returning to the question: Does Westcoast offer an alternative understanding of care in the public and organizational realms of everyday life? I came to interpret Westcoast's practice-based values of "caring, cooperation and collaboration" (Skulski, 1994) and "the Westcoast way" as both a moral and a political practice of care. As a moral idea, care informed the members' private and collective beliefs and practices. As a political idea, care shaped their public purpose, structure, processes and actions.

The strength of Westcoast's purpose and vision and the competence of Westcoast's practices and actions had moved care from the private realms of caring work into the public realms of caring practice. As their caring values and practices were developing, their understanding of Westcoast as a political entity was also developing and changing. One founding member said in her interview, "We don't see ourselves as political," and yet they had created a public face for care that had larger, political implications.

In this chapter I describe and illustrate Westcoast's developmental process of constructing a public face for care within their organizational structures, processes and outcomes. I begin this examination with a review of Joan Tronto's (1993) thesis of care. Her conceptualization of care provides a framework for expanding the concept of care from its predominantly private interpretation to a larger public understanding. By recognizing the central role of care in human life, Tronto defines care as both a
disposition and a practice that can “inform all aspects of a practitioner’s life” (p. 127). Second, I describe how the women used a language of care as they talked about their beliefs and actions. Third, I suggest that Westcoast’s construction of care as a central organizing principle challenged the rigidity of the private and public boundaries of women’s lives. These women had created an organizational culture that had integrated personal values and practices of caring, nurturing work from their private lives—domestic caring work, friendships, and child care work itself—into the public realm of organizational life. Next, I examine how the “soul searching” talk of Board committee meetings developed the public dimensions of care. Lastly, I reflect upon some of the Board’s developmental challenges as they constructed care as a public and, therefore, a political idea.

**A Conceptual Framework of Care**

Tronto (1993) expands the relevance of care beyond Gilligan’s (1982) psychological perspective and Noddings’ (1984) philosophical perspective. Both Gilligan and Noddings have contributed significantly to our understanding of care as a moral concept. Both writers frame caring as fundamentally a relation that is not dependent on universal principles or rules and as a morality that is predominant among women. However, some feminists have been critical of care ethics because of the lack of social and political context and the “relative silence about oppressive social practices and the cultural subordination of women” (Friedman, 1993, p. 143). By primarily focusing on care as individual actions within personal, dyadic relationships, neither
Gilligan nor Noddings challenges the institutional, social and political forces that subordinate women (Card as cited in Friedman, 1993).

Tronto brings a broader analysis to care, taking it beyond private action and placing it in public dimensions of life, such as the realm of organizational activity and practice. Unlike Gilligan and Noddings, she does not align care as primarily a woman’s morality. She argues that care “recognizes the central role of caring in human life” (Tronto, 1993, p. 125). The importance of care is precisely its political, and therefore its public dimensions and implications.

Tronto suggests that caring is best thought of as a practice, expanding its meaning beyond disposition. As a practice, care is able to move beyond the privatized notions of care. Tronto provides a definition of caring practice. This practice has four separate but interconnected phases that included “caring about,” “taking care of,” “care-giving,” and “care-receiving.” She argues that this definition provides “an ideal to describe an integrated, well accomplished, act of care” (p. 109).

The first phase, caring about, requires that one notice the need to care in the first place. In this phase we notice the needs of others and recognize that these needs should be met. The second step of a caring practice is taking care of. This step requires that individuals or a society take some responsibility for the identified need and decide how to respond to it. The third step is care-giving and involves the actual work of care that needs to be done. The final phase of a caring practice is care-receiving. This last step recognizes that the one who receives care will respond to this care and thus will provide the care-giver “the only way to know that caring needs have actually been met” (p. 108).
In each phase of Tronto’s (1993) practice of care she argues that particular moral qualities need to be present. She suggests, as a starting point, four qualities. These qualities are attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. Each of these moral qualities arise from a separate phase of caring practice. Attentiveness, in the phase of caring about, needs to be present in order for the needs of others to be recognized. Responsibility is a central moral concept in the phase of taking care of others. In the phase of care-giving, caring work must be performed competently in order to ensure that one cares for the other. Responsiveness, in the phase of care-receiving, requires that the care-givers remain attentive to the “possibilities for abuse that [may] arise” (p. 136) from the care-receivers’ positions of needing care.

The Westcoast members did not often use “care” as a descriptor of “the Westcoast way” or of their ways of working. However, the women articulated a “word and language consciousness” (Katzenstein, 1995) regarding their beliefs and practices. They were identifying and creating a caring-based language to describe what they believed, how they worked and what they were collectively constructing. In the next section I illustrate how the women’s language, meanings and actions reflected elements of Tronto’s caring practice and moral qualities of care.

A Language of Caring Practice

L: What are those little “wonderful” pieces of Westcoast?

E: I think part of it is the soul searching that goes on all the time. The consideration before things are done. Projects are not undertaken, things are not
done willy nilly or because they are there. It’s really thought about. Things are measured against who Westcoast is and what its principles are.

The founding and older Board members, such as Elaine quoted above, used a moral language to describe the challenges they struggled with as they defined guiding principles and negotiated organizational actions. As Elaine reflected in her interview upon the beginning stages of Westcoast, her description captured the women’s moral intentions of “doing the right thing.”

So every, sort of every step of the way there’s been, not almost, every step of the way there’s been this soul searching and are we doing the right thing? Can we remain ethical and do this next thing?

Elaine talked about the women developing guiding principles for their programs and services. Though she acknowledged that the concept of “guiding principles” was new to her at the time it was introduced by her fellow founding members, she still understood their “soul searching” discussions as being reflective of a simple moral imperative:

We have guiding principles for everything . . . Well, definitely, every move we make is considered from all angles. Each step is quite deliberate. Having guiding principles is actually not a term or concept that I was particularly familiar with . . . I guess it was Gyda and Maryann who then identified what we were doing, gave it
a name. "We are developing guiding principles, right?" I just thought we were
talking about doing the right thing.

Maryann as a founding member also talked about a commitment to operationalize
caring practices as the "right thing to do" as she talked about aspects of their Personnel
policy.

We try to build in very progressive policies around compassionate leave and
family leave . . . Now I still expect the work to get done but I always appreciated
that kind of flexibility when my children were younger and I'm more than prepared
to do that with anyone here, do anything I can to value staff. And you always get,
it's not that you do it just for this. You do it because you respect the people and
it's the right and good thing to do. But what you get back from it is the most
incredible loyalty and hard work.

During the field study the Personnel policy was renewed by the Board. The policy
revision had been researched and developed by a committee of the Board and staff and
had come forward to the Board for their deliberation and approval. It was a progressive
policy in that it recognized the cultural and domestic realities of employees' lives by
establishing and encoding the organizational practices of flex time, compassionate leave,
personal leave and an employment equity action plan. These formalized practices
comprised what Susan named as the Board's "compassionate" understanding of the
relationship between the work and the personal needs of the people who performed the work.

I think we're trying to demonstrate some compassion and people, most of the work that the staff are doing is people work. It's work related to people and I think we're trying to be a fair employer... In another world, there isn't always attention paid to employee needs. Like sorry, 9 to 5 you're supposed to be here, you're not here and you are docked your pay, whatever. So there's that kind of work ethic. I think the Westcoast Board tried to listen with some compassion so that people felt supported in their personal needs so they could still do the work.

As Susan talked about "the Westcoast way" she started her explanation by describing a "basic tenet" that reflected the "compassion" that Westcoast was enacting in their ways of working.

I think one of the basic tenets [of "the Westcoast way"] is it starts with respect and really listening to people. So a lot of it is, it's a way of communication I think, and it's also taking care that you are really listening.

Susan's description of "really listening" reflects Tronto's (1993) moral quality of attentiveness. Tronto has defined attentiveness as the attitude necessary to enact caring about, "One needs, in a sense, to suspend one's own goals, ambitions, ... and concerns, in order to recognize and to be attentive to others" (p. 128). The act of "really
listening” by “suspending” one’s judgment was not an instinctive or unconscious act of care, but rather it was a caring practice that required conscious and deliberate attention.

Susan continued in her description of “the Westcoast way” by identifying “simple” caring gestures as practices that acknowledged and addressed the needs of others, particularly new members and users. These simple organizational practices could be understood as examples of the everyday work of care-giving.

The whole food thing, right? I mean that’s part of the Westcoast way. So that’s making sure that in whatever work you do your basic needs are taken care of. You are comfortable in your meeting space. It’s not too hot, it’s not too cold. There’s a place where everybody can see one another, etc., etc. . . . So right from the very beginning if a new Board member is coming or if you’re just new to the whole thing and there you are checking out the library you are always welcome, made to feel welcome and somebody always makes sure that you’re not parked in a place where you are going to get ticketed or towed away. Just real simple things like that. We know where you can hang your coat and find a couch so that you can have tea or juice or whatever, so that’s all part of it.

The newer Board members did not use the language of “guiding principles” nor had they shared the older members’ experiences of “soul searching” discussions. Instead, the newer women talked about the older members’ caring attitude and behaviour: As previously explored in Chapters Three and Four, the new members talked about Westcoast beliefs and practices by using the words and language of
openness, sharing, collaborative processes, being listened to, respect and caring.

Though they had not shared the founding and older members’ history, relationships or experiences, the newer women spoke about particular actions that made them “feel welcomed” and helped to establish their “sense of belonging.” As an example, several of the women, as they spoke about “the Westcoast way,” acknowledged and appreciated the gesture of having food present at each meeting. This practice, as one new member identified, established a sense of being cared for, “I think that it’s those little kinds of things that you put out that make people feel cared for . . . if people feel taken care of they are able to put out.”

As Sue, a new member, reflected upon the meaning of Gyda’s playful gift-giving at the end of a long strategic planning session, she described this gesture as an enactment of Westcoast’s belief system that “came from the heart.” She understood this simple gesture not as a “manipulative” management practice but rather as a manifestation of a caring practice.

L: Actually an example [of how the founding members “motivate people” and build in “things that are nice” in the meetings] that comes to mind is after that strategic planning meeting when Gyda brought out those little gifts, do you remember?

S: Yes, that’s like for me part of the ECE [Early Childhood Education] way. Those kinds of things, just thinking about people, right? Yeah, having a lot of empathy and consideration and validating people and simply saying thank you.

L: It goes a long way doesn’t it.
S: Yes, it really does and I think it comes from the heart. It’s not manipulative. It’s not like “Oh, we’ll just buy them a present and that’ll keep them happy.” No, it’s much more fundamental than part of the way the organization works or people in the organization work.

The Work of Child Care Informs a Practice of Care

Though Tronto (1993) argues against framing an ethic of care as simply a women’s morality, she acknowledges the appeal a women’s morality has offered our “popular culture, in everyday conversation and in some scholarly circles” (p. 2). This popular appeal arises from the particular caring values upon which a women’s morality is based—values that are in contrast to the dominant socio-political concerns for productivity, progress and profit. These alternative values are found in the everyday lives of women as they do caring and “sustaining” (Hart, 1992) work.

Tronto (1993) invites us to re-consider the values attributed to a women’s morality and to women’s private lives, values traditionally considered outside the public realm, as values that can be potentially transformative in the public dimensions of life. She argues that the values of caring, “attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion and meeting others’ needs” (p. 3), can be re-conceived as public dimensions of care. As I observed the women of Westcoast and came to interpret their beliefs, structures, practices and actions as both a moral and a public practice of care, I found myself asking what life experiences, whether public or private, might they commonly share that contributed to their innovative work in constructing a caring organization. The women themselves named one commonly shared public and private space that
informed their democratic sense of "collectivity, common action and shared purpose" (Wolin, 1993, p. 468)—this space was the work of child care itself.

The founding and older members talked about particular values of the child care field that were commonly shared and practiced in the organization. Elaine understood that the women who volunteered to serve on the Board often shared pre-existing commitments to the values and beliefs of child care work.

The whole child care field though is very, is very different from other fields. In the main, people who chose to go into child care are a certain kind of person. More in touch with feelings. More concerned with bringing people along. . . . I think the field attracts certain kinds of people and then Westcoast from that group attracts certain people. So we’ve got it made because we’re already drawing on a field of caring, feeling people . . . we’re looking at people who care about the next generation.

Gyda on several occasions acknowledged the fundamental relationship between the "value system" of child care work and the culture of Westcoast:

G: Those same skills that early childhood purports to foster, value and so on aren’t just and shouldn’t be only things we do with children. It’s sort of a pervasive way, it’s a way of being and I guess when you hear people joking about, “Oh, well it’s the Westcoast way,” it’s the ECE [Early Childhood Education] way. That in my mind is what that phrase means.
(Later in the interview...)  

L: So you’re saying that actually it’s fundamental that the work of child care has something to do with the way this organization is?  

G: I think so and I’d like to think so. I think early childhood attracts people who really have a commitment to that kind of value system, that kind of approach with other people, that way of being. Maybe that’s not something that they are in touch with at the beginning but it becomes a talent after time and then I just always think it’s important to point these things out to people, right?  

As Susan and Elaine, both older members, talked about “the Westcoast way” they described the difficulty some individuals had had in adjusting to Westcoast because they had not shared the caring values described above by Elaine and Gyda. As Susan explained, the commonly shared values of openness and sharing stood out in relief when someone brought to their job a different way of working, framed by a different value system.  

We haven’t had a lot of philosophical differences [amongst staff] but we have had a few and when they happen, it’s usually because their way of working is very different. It’s very ego-centered and it’s hard for some people to work in an open, sharing space. (Susan)  

Then that magical thing about, in the main, people coming on staff who just are part of that same culture. Here we go, culture. There have not been too many
people who have not shared that and as long as the staff can continue to have the same principles and the Board continues to be thoughtful about decisions it makes, it's just wonderful. (Elaine)

Two Board members, who did not have a background in child care work but had been parent volunteers in their children's child care centres, also identified a relationship between Westcoast's culture and the work of child care. One woman spoke about the common assumptions shared by the child care field that she had had to learn when she joined the Board.

L: Do you think there are certain assumptions . . .
I: I think that's part of it, there are assumptions made because most of the Board members are ECE [Early Childhood Education] trained, and all speak the child care language. Although I recognize the language, I don't speak it. (Quote edited for clarity by respondent.)

Sue, a new member, suggested that the collaborative ways in which the Westcoast staff and Board members worked were informed by the work of child care itself.

I get the impression that people try to work collaboratively and I think because there are a lot of women who are working there and have a certain consciousness around, a lot of people do come out of working with kids in one way or another, know how important it is to have good working relationships and good processes.
As the founding members separately talked in their interviews about the elements and qualities of “the Westcoast way,” they each acknowledged how their work at Westcoast had integrated aspects of their private and public lives as women. As Gyda talked about “the Westcoast way” she described the “interpersonal approach that people adopt” in Westcoast as being attributable to women working together.

L: How much does [an interpersonal, caring approach to people] that have to do with it being predominately women?

G: I think it has a fair bit to do with it being predominantly women and I’m becoming more and more aware of this. I guess I haven’t spent a lot of time thinking because I’ve just been working, that my work both paid and volunteer is almost exclusively with women. I’ve come to see and accept that as the norm. . . .

(later in the interview) . . . I think it has more to do, as you say, with it being predominantly women and I think it has a lot to do with leadership and I think it has a tremendous amount to do with the fact that, Maryann and I have discussed this, a life that’s personally and professionally congruent.

Elaine also spoke about a relationship between “the Westcoast way” and the predominance of women in the organization. However, her explanation challenged essentialism by recognizing that though Westcoast was a female dominated organization, several male staff had been “superb,” and had “fit in well.” What was different about Westcoast from traditional “male dominated” organizations was not
solely its predominantly female composition, but the members’ shared caring values--values that recognized the importance of human relationships.

L: I look at Westcoast and it is predominantly women and I wonder what that has to do with ["the Westcoast way"]. . .

E: Oh, I’m sure that has a lot to do with it. I think there’s a lot to do with it. . .

[Elaine names a male employee], of course and he is, well he’s just superb. And there was a male . . . who did not fit in very well . . . he was not part of the Westcoast culture for sure. Now we have [Elaine names another male employee]. He fits in beautifully and [a third male employee] fits in well. So I think of course it’s mainly women, it’s different and the men who fit in well with women’s organizations, what to say? I don’t know what to say about that. I think that because it’s predominantly women there is a different feel about it. I’m just thinking of any male dominated situations I’ve been in. Well, there was my work. Very male dominated. There’s just a difference, there seems to be more of an emphasis on how do people feel about things and again, should we be doing this, or what are the ethics of doing it? Are they female things? Probably. . . I think what we’ve been saying is “the Westcoast way.” I think consideration of feelings, I think examining things before they’re done from all aspects is “the Westcoast way.”
As Maryann reflected upon herself as a feminist, she also spoke about the importance of integrating private dispositions and practices of care into her public organizational roles and responsibilities.

You constantly feel the pressure of being a role model [for younger women in the organization] and I don't believe feminism means that one needs to lose sight of the caring, nurturing part that has been the most important thing of all women, of all women's lives . . . I would not want to think of myself as the kind of hard edged feminist that had lost sight of that caring and nurturing. I don't think that needs to happen and I'm very sensitive to that here and at home.

"Soul Searching" Talk Develops the Public Dimensions of Care

The values identified by Tronto as the basis of what is called a women's morality, "caring and nurturance, of stressing the importance of human relationships" (p. 2) were evident in the women's language, actions and relationships, whether in the context of formal Board meetings or in the context of smaller, more intimate committee meetings. These women-centered values were not simply commonly shared private dispositions and feelings the participants brought with them when they entered Westcoast. These values were re-constructed and negotiated in the context of Board meetings. Board meeting talk, Board interactions and Board relationships were the principal ways in which the members learned to develop and negotiate their organizational values of care.

As previously examined in Chapter Four, the Board meeting's time constraints, the large number of participants, the reporting-back agenda structure and the lack of in-
depth discussions better supported learning about the organization than they supported a more dialogic form of learning “that involved problem solving and critical reflection” (Ilsley, 1990, p. 70). However, this kind of dialogic learning did take place in the “soul searching” talk of Board committee meetings. Elaine talked about committee meetings as the setting in which an organizational “ethic” and “guiding principles” were constructed and challenged.

E: What does it mean to have a guiding principle? What does it really, really mean? Well, that’s where it happens [in the committee meetings].

L: So when you talked before about that consciousness of deliberately, thoughtfully, reflectively looking at the ethic, that’s where it’s happening?

E: Committees, be they ad hoc or standing, yeah. That’s where it happens.

After observing an Executive committee meeting early in the field work, I reflected in my field notes upon how the talk and atmosphere of that particular meeting had a qualitative difference from the previously observed monthly Board meetings. I identified a more at ease meeting style in which all the women participated. The issues being discussed were analyzed in greater depth than what I had observed at Board meetings.

The participants are all seasoned veterans of Westcoast... all the individuals showed a comfort level in being together. The conversation flowed easily with no uncomfortable lapses or topics that excluded input by anyone ... . By the way this
group of women talk and by their expressed understanding of the issues at hand, they seem to have a high level of mutual understanding about how the organization works. They know the organization in a way that the new Board members may not. Thus the conversation amongst this group jumps to a level of analysis that I have not seen at the Board meetings. This could be influenced by the number of people, the different ways of talking and interacting as well as the level of knowledge, trust and confidentiality. . . . The talk during the evening moved fast and furious, at times I had difficulty keeping up with the context, possibly like new Board members . . . . The level of questioning and discussion were more intense than any Board meeting, lots of free flowing talk amongst the women [regarding organizational issues]. (Field notes 940920)

When I asked Elaine about this difference between Board and committee meetings, she described a committee talk that enabled the women to wrestle with and address the challenges of Westcoast’s growth and development.

L: What’s happening there [in committee meetings] that is important that Board members be part of and that’s different than the bigger Board meetings? How would you talk about the difference between those two?

E: Okay, well just my experience with [she identifies a particular Board advisory committee] it’s where you talk about the service in great detail and you make decisions regarding, I’m hesitating because I know that there are decisions that can’t be made at the committee level that have to go to the Board. But pretty well
those, "What shall we do? Shall we provide this service? Shall we apply for this money? How do we respond when the parent says or the centre wants us to do X? Is that something we want to do?" You really, really talk about those issues and what does it mean to the service and what does it mean for Westcoast and is it in keeping with our principles and is it really the work of Westcoast.

The Board’s processes of negotiating which actions best represented their values and guiding principles were conscious, political processes. It cannot, once again, be assumed that the articulation and negotiation of Westcoast’s caring values were the natural acts of women’s caring. Meetings, particularly committee meetings, provided the space to interpret and negotiate organizational meaning and appropriate action regarding the public dimensions of care and caring practice.

As previously examined, newer members did not use the older member’s moral language of “doing the right thing,” applying “guiding principles,” and determining “ethical” actions and yet these ideas did not appear to be unfamiliar to them. As Elaine had previously identified, possibly new members entered the organization with pre-existing commitments to Westcoast’s core values. Such a pre-existing belief in common values might explain why the Board members did not have an in-depth discussion regarding the more progressive aspects of the revised Personnel policy. It seemed that their collective approval of the practice of supporting staff flex time in order to accommodate both the needs of the organization and the private domestic responsibilities of their employees was an unproblematic issue. My field notes captured a taken-for-granted acceptance of this progressive organizational policy.
Under the policy item of “Terms of Employment,” core hours of work were identified. One member asked “What does it mean core hours of work in real terms?” Maryann responded to this by saying that defining “core hours starts with what is our commitment to service to the community.” Once the coordinators set the basic hours of service, “then employees may flex their hours around them.” She concluded her explanation by saying “work hours are an issue for women, based around children’s needs.” Maryann’s explanation regarding the establishment of flexible hours did not receive any discussion, questions or challenges by any members of the Board. (Field notes, 940607)

The final product of their reflective and “soul searching” discussions of the strategic planning process was a written document that defined their mission statement, their guiding principles and their organizational goals. This document captured Westcoast’s operational purpose, commitments and actions for the next three to five years. In this document they identified eight guiding principles (see Appendix B). Each principle was written in a language that reflected the caring moral imperative that was at the heart of their work and the political commitments they commonly shared to address their constituencies’ caring needs.

The Challenges in the Development of a Caring Organization

The members of Westcoast were developing care as a moral idea through their practice of care and as a political idea through their collective construction of a “public space” for caring practice. Their shared intentions of “doing the right thing” in their
private practices of care had moved care into the larger public sphere of organizational actions. The values of care and the values of friendship—trust, respect, equality, mutually shared interests—had shaped and nurtured their organization. However, the central challenge in re-shaping care as a public value was how to move the private values of care into the public domain without hindering care’s transformative potential. Constructing a caring organization was a developmental learning process for the women of Westcoast—as Maryann acknowledged during a policy discussion, “we are in a learning curve, we are a learning culture.”

In the sections that follow I examine the elements of Westcoast’s caring practice that challenged its transformative capacities. These elements include maternalism, the potential for friendship to become exclusionary, and a reluctance to openly express conflict in Board meeting talk.

Maternalism

In Tronto’s (1993) socio-political analysis of care she identifies maternalism as one of the potential dangers of caring practice. She explains that maternalism occurs when care-givers come to understand their interpretation of what is necessary to meet the need as more authoritative than the care-receivers themselves. Tronto argues that this danger arises out of the very nature of care itself as she sees care as an activity between those who have needs, and who are therefore in a position of vulnerability, and those who provide for those needs. However, maternalism in the context of Westcoast is best understood as a danger to be avoided in Westcoast’s caring practice rather than as an inherent weakness of care itself.
One aspect of the founding members' good intentions to "bring the new people along" can be understood as an act of maternalism. The founding members' historical relationships gave them a unique sense of moral ownership and personal responsibility for Westcoast. As both Elaine and Maryann identified, "Westcoast is our baby." One outcome of this personal commitment and sense of responsibility was their practice of meeting informally after each Board meeting to consider the process, the relationships and the "feeling" dimensions of the evening's Board meeting. The intent of these post meetings was one of goodwill as the founding members used the meetings "to reflect on the [Board] meeting processes." However, these informal post meetings may have unintentionally constructed an inequity between the founding members and the newer and older Board members. My field notes from a meeting with Maryann and Elaine reflected on how the women described the intent of these meetings.

Maryann said that they meet, "because we are concerned with feelings and issues, in that order. Feelings are important to us." She explained that they focus on the group process within these meetings. She said they discussed how people might be feeling part of the group and what they might do to support or to encourage the women's involvement. She said "there is a balance between progress or content and process and we believe process is important". . . . [later in the field notes regarding the post meetings] At that time I said that Gyda had mentioned to me her concern as to when was the right time to move off the Board so new members could move into the organization. Maryann said that this is one reason why they meet after the Board meetings, to help "bring new Board members
along. There is this feeling that Westcoast is our baby.” Maryann said they were conscious of this sense of ownership and it could not be denied. (Field notes, 941020)

By using an informal, private space to discuss Board feelings and meeting processes, the founding members were unintentionally creating a power imbalance between themselves and their colleagues. This maternalistic practice took the responsibility for assessing and nurturing group relationships and meeting processes out of the hands of their fellow Board members. In the Board’s transition from a founding, more homogeneous group, to a new, more diverse group, the women were challenged to remain attentive to illegitimate inequities that may arise in their caring practice. The founding members had been aware of such power imbalances when the Board formally approved a legitimate “inequality in power” through a more frequent use of their Executive Committee structure.

The Challenges of Friendship

As the Board was deliberately moving from a more socially-connected and child care-affiliated membership to a larger, more diverse and less socially-affiliated membership, their commitment to caring values and practices was challenged by potential inequities between new and old members. Both new and older Board members tentatively described the exclusionary potentials created by established friendships and social network ties.
As acknowledged in previous chapters, Westcoast rose out of the friendship relationships of a group of women. The significance of friendship as an organizational ingredient in the creation of Westcoast was recognized and articulated by all the Board members. Maryann and Gyda spoke about the importance of friendship to the work itself as they talked about the history of Westcoast.

I guess in my mind I just put it together as one of those fabulous examples of women who are good friends, who care about the same issues and just find it really exciting to be together and dream up ideas. (Gyda)

Maryann said, “that is important to us, sharing values and commitments, possibly with goals of social change, with people who are friends and with whom you have developed trust and friendship.” She said that “learning within a social setting is important but developing trust and friendship makes a difference to the work.”

(Field notes, 941020)

The women’s established friendship ties both nurtured and challenged the Board’s development of care as a moral practice. The Board supported values of diversity as it served a racially diverse community and employed a diverse staff. Yet the Board was not a racially diverse group. Members of Westcoast’s staff represented differences in race, class, gender and sexual orientation, however, the Board was far more homogeneous in its composition. Acker’s (1995) critique of the homogeneity of some feminist organizations can help us understand a possible source of this challenge.
In the women's/feminist organizing described here, homogeneity along lines of class, race, political position, and sexual orientation is pervasive. One reason is that all the organizations were local; organizing was done through pre-existing networks of friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, or colleagues in other religious, political or social groups. Local communities tend to be homogeneous in societies that are race and class structured; friendship networks rarely stray across lines of class and race (p. 142).

The Board’s lack of representation of the broader community’s racial diversity was an unexamined issue within Board meeting talk. As Acker suggests above, this inequity in racial representation may have been created by the women’s common social, racial and cultural ties. As some of the older members talked in their interviews about the lack of racial diversity within the Board, they explained that this situation was representative of the field of licensed child care itself.

The vast majority of care givers that you’ll find in licensed preschool and group centers are White, English speaking, not necessarily middle class. . . . So it’s probably not that much different on the Board than it is out there in the bigger world.

However, two of the newer members interviewed talked about their personal observations and concern for the lack of racial diversity in the membership of the Board. As one woman said, “It certainly is noticeable, it’s noticeable. . . I know that
given the make up of who lives in the Lower Mainland, that it's not represented within the Board." A new member, who was the only non-White woman on the Board, talked about this concern with a quality of authority that she had not expressed in the Board meetings:

I: I think Westcoast as a staff, they have, I think, you know it is more reflective probably of the community that is served in terms of staff than in some organizations. But I know on the Board it isn't.

L: Why do you think that might be?

I: I don't know why not because I know the users are from a wide range of ethnic groups. I don't know. Maybe women need to be invited to be on the Board. You know, like when they--I can talk about sexism. You know when they say this is an equal opportunity board, I think people have to realize that when you first start to say this is an equal opportunity Board you're not playing with a level field. . . . [later in this explanation] So I think that if you are offering, I think that if you are looking to diversify then you need to be, like people on the Board need to be actively encouraging women of color to join the Board. You know like seeking them out.

The lack of Board diversity was a challenge to the Board's development of care as a moral practice. Just as the Board's re-definition of advocacy, by recognizing its political capacities, had enlarged care's public dimensions, so would their resolve to address the absence of diversity enlarge care's moral capacities. Though the
exclusionary nature of friendship ties had contributed to the existence of a racially homogeneous governing body, friendship itself may be the “only appropriate intention to understand women of color within their experiences and communities” (Lugones and Spelman, 1983, p. 573). Lugones and Spelman (1983) argue that friendship is the only motive that can help White/Anglo women to understand the lives and voices of women of color as they work together to develop feminist theory:

So the motive of friendship remains as both the only appropriate and understandable motive for White/Anglo feminists engaging in the task described above [of developing theory with women of color in respectful ways]. If you [White/Anglo women] enter the task out of friendship with us [women of color], then you will be moved to attain the appropriate reciprocity of care for your and our well-being as whole beings, you will have a stake in us and in our world, you will be moved to satisfy the need for reciprocity of understanding that will enable you to follow us in our experiences as we are able to follow you in yours (p. 581).

Westcoast had acknowledged and supported inclusiveness and diversity in its core values, its guiding principles, its cultural practices, its staff composition, and its public programs and services. Their public commitment to these issues was reflected in their work to develop anti-bias and multi-cultural child care resources, skills and knowledge. Though this commitment to diversity had not yet penetrated the social network ties of the Board itself, the values and motives that inform friendship—trust,
mutual respect and equality—are the same values and motives that would help the
Board address this moral challenge to their caring practice. Lugones and Spelman
(1983) insist that only “out of friendship” can White women commit themselves to the
“extraordinary difficult” task of understanding the voices, lives and experiences of
women of color.

Though the topic of Board diversity was not talked about in Board meetings, it
was not an invisible issue to the women as they spoke privately in their interviews.
Maryann described the Board’s need to be attentive to and sensitive to this Board
“challenge.”

Now around cultural and ethnic diversity we have to work at that and we’re
going to have to work at it in a very planned way. Like you can’t do it in a
phony way. . . . [later in her explanation] You know, and equity issues are going
to be a challenge for us. I suppose what we have to do is be aware of them and
be sensitive to it as we balance the Board.

The Submersion of Conflict

The invisibility of conflict in Board meeting discussions, as described and
interpreted in Chapters Three and Four, challenged the Board’s development of care in
the public realms of organizational life. Conflict, as described by the individual Board
members, was embedded in a knot of implicit meanings and diverse understandings.
Some members perceived conflict as potentially divisive, threatening group harmony
and cohesion. Other members were reluctant to express conflict because they
perceived conflict as disrespectful of Westcoast’s caring practice. Whereas other members saw conflict as an organizational resource that could help the women “ask the harder questions.” The Board’s challenge was to unravel these implicit meanings in order to explicitly support the use of conflict as an organizational resource in their development of care.

Conflict may have been avoided by some members because, as one Board member said, “we are nice people.” Within a self-concept of niceness, conflict is not nice and therefore it is avoided. However, within the concept of care as a moral practice and a political idea (Tronto, 1993), conflict serves as a way to identify and wrestle with the internal and external forces that challenge the construction of a caring organization. The use of conflict as a resource and as a learning tool can help the Board move toward a greater unity of organizational values and actions. As a tool, conflict can assist the Board to uncover areas of difference, ambiguity and multiplicity in order to help them integrate these paradoxical dimensions into their caring organization and practice. Naming and integrating the submerged and hidden elements of such a caring culture can more fully illuminate the oppositional potential of an organization structured by care rather than by profit or production.

Summary

Westcoast was on a learning path; its members were learning to live up to the demands of the caring culture they had created. Throughout this process the women were developing, both deliberately and unintentionally, the moral and the political dimensions of care. They were learning to shape a public face for care that would not
diminish or deter their moral and private values of care. They were at times hesitant, as in their re-negotiation of advocacy, and yet they were committed to “doing the right thing.” As Maryann questioned, “How do we maintain the way we are as we grow larger?”

The founding members’ commitment to “let go” in order to allow new members the opportunity to shape Westcoast was a difficult challenge to face. The women were learning to let go of their influence in the organization they had helped to birth and nurture. Their private friendship values of trust, respect and equality had provided the founding values for this caring organization. The challenge they each described in their interviews was how to separate themselves from the creative process of creating and re-creating a caring organization, a process that had also nurtured meaningful relationships and friendship ties. Gyda’s and Elaine’s voices capture the essence of this challenge:

How can the new people come on and bring their shaping to it? I sort of thought, it’s absolutely right and true. It is theoretically and philosophically [true], but I don’t want to be off. I mean, I would like to think it’s not so much an ego thing. . . . So I’ll have to come to that. . . . So maybe I’ll have to come off the Board. . . . But you see, if you miss the work and the Board, you miss your friends. I don’t know. It’s going to be like a major transition. (Gyda)

And who knows because it’s a very different experience to carry on something, than it is to create something. And you could have the same pride and dedication when you are carrying it on as you can when you started. I don’t
know. But maybe there are new things or new directions for Westcoast and then the next generation will be part of that branching out or changing course or something and then they can feel the same commitment and pride. It’s off on a good foot. It’s off on a really good foot and I can go away and say that was great and that was wonderful. (Elaine)

The challenge that faced the Board was how to retain the private values of friendship and care and yet remain attentive to the inequities that may arise in caring practice as they developed care’s public capacities. In this process of developing care as a moral and a political idea, the Board was challenged to recognize that the use of conflict in meeting talk was not a threat to caring practice and that the expression of organizational difference and ambiguity was not a threat to organizational cohesion. By naming and integrating these processes and cultural elements, the Board would strengthen care’s moral and political dimensions. In this process they would recognize that the lack of racial diversity within the Board itself was a moral challenge to their development of care as an organizing principle.
Chapter Six
Conclusions

The purpose of this study has been to describe and to illustrate how the members of the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre have constructed and sustained a caring organization. In the study I have sought to answer several ethnographic questions that framed the research purpose and focus: What are Westcoast's core values? Where, when, how and by whom are they articulated? How do the participants enact these core values in their practice? What is the role of learning in an alternative organization? What does the notion of care look like in Westcoast? I have answered these questions by focusing my attention on three aspects of Westcoast's organizational culture—first, the women's embodiment of care as an organizing principle; second, the role Board meetings provided in the construction of their caring culture and third; the learning that was taking place in the process of creating and developing a caring organization.

In this chapter I reflect broadly on the study's contribution to nonprofit practice. The purpose of this focus is to facilitate nonprofit managers' and practitioners' reflection on the informal and formal Board values and policies that guide their practice. First, I discuss the study's implication for practice in the development of nonprofit Boards that support caring practice and caring work. I begin by identifying the characteristics of the Westcoast Board and staff members that contributed to their work as organizational creators and innovators. I identify the informal policies and practices that supported their learning and development in the context of Board meetings. I also suggest a framework that provides a way to conceptualize how to formally support
Board learning and development. Second, I discuss the importance of nonprofit organizations like Westcoast for society. I argue that nonprofit organizations, like Westcoast, are a source of social innovation, social advocacy and the furthering of citizen participation and education.

Implications for Nonprofit Board Development

There has been little systematic research on nonprofit boards and studies that have investigated what boards actually do are rare (Herman and Van Til, 1989; Kramer, 1987). Studies that have looked at board roles and behaviours suggest there is frequently a gap between the predominantly prescriptive Board literature and actual Board practice (Fink, 1989; Herman and Van Til, 1989). Herman and Van Til (1989), as advocates of the social change function of nonprofit organizations, identify a fundamental question that has previously not been given research attention and yet it describes the general focus of this study: They ask, “What sorts of people holding what values and operating with what procedures are required of nonprofit boards if they are to [remain a source of creative social innovation]” (p. 1). Westcoast, as an alternative nonprofit organization structured by care, provides a way to answer this question.

“What Sorts of People Holding What Values”

The Westcoast Board and staff members, and the relationships they shared, were the fundamental resource of this organization. Their leadership skills and competencies, along with their mutually shared vision, values, principles and practices of care, as one founding member acknowledged, “made a difference to the work.” Though it was not
the purpose of this study to determine which of the Board members' (or staff's) characteristics contributed to the construction of a caring organization, I suggest that some combination of the following characteristics informed their commitments to care: a) Westcoast was a female dominated organization, b) the members of Westcoast possessed exceptional leadership abilities and skillful leadership processes, c) the majority of members were also members of the child care field and were trained in Early Childhood Education, and d) the founding and older members had shared personally enriching friendships as they had collectively created and sustained their organization.

Though the study did not focus on the Westcoast staff, the respectful and trusting relationships between Westcoast staff and Board members were an important element in sustaining and developing this caring culture. The Board and staff worked together as partners. Some of the traditional power struggles that can exist between Boards and staff were not evident between these two groups at either the formal or informal level. The Board actively sought out the ideas, analysis and skills of its staff. They included staff representation on all Board ad hoc policy and planning committees. They regularly acknowledged the contributions and accomplishments of their staff in both informal and formal ways—even by the simple gesture of thank you cards.

The Board was not reluctant to work alongside competent, articulate staff. The staff members, specifically the Executive Director and the women who coordinated Westcoast's program areas or departments, were themselves thoughtful, skillful leaders. Several of these women called themselves feminists even though, as one founding member said, "I honestly don’t think [feminism] is . . . peoples’ first and foremost way of knowing themselves around here. I think the child care piece takes precedent."
It is important to acknowledge the roles Maryann provided the Board as Executive Director and as ex-officio member of the Board. Maryann was both an inspirational leader who helped the Board to “keep the dream alive” (O’Connell, 1985, p. 48) and an effective manager who helped the Board to shepherd their resources. Her abilities as a leader, a teacher, a mentor and a dreamer were important qualities that contributed to the trusting and supportive relationship between herself, as Executive Director, and the Board. The description in Chapter Four of her teaching and facilitating roles illustrates her commitment to accomplish these roles. Maryann talked in her interview about her commitment to Board leadership:

I have to be respectful of the fact that where the ultimate decisions are made are at the Board. If I really want a board that is more than a rubber stamp, right? A board that is empowered, that really feels it has to take responsibility for the leadership of the organization.

The question posed at the beginning of this section, “what sorts of people holding what values,” also helps to expose the value dimensions that challenged Westcoast’s development of care as a transformative idea. As described in earlier chapters, the cultural elements of congruence, unity and group harmony appeared to have greater expression and support amongst Westcoast Board members than the cultural elements of conflict, contradiction and difference. This explicit support of harmonious values is partially attributable to culturally-determined definitions of care within women’s lives rather than to the idea of care itself. Women struggle with the subordinating oppression
of "nice" in their private and public lives. To be privately or publicly critical and assertive, such as one Board member defined, "to take a stand," is a difficult stance for women who have internalized the tyranny of "nice." This struggle limits women's capacities as both a citizen and a public person and limits care's potential to be a transformative element in the restructuring of social institutions.

In caring organizations, members must remain attentive to the organizational values and elements, both internal and external, that limit care's potential capacities as both a political idea and a democratic practice. Lugones and Spelman (1983) argue that within the feminist struggle to address the issues of difference, "we [women of color] have to fight our own niceness because it clouds our minds and hearts" (p. 575). A moral and a political practice of care can help caring organizations overcome the tyranny of nice without losing their capacity to care about human needs.

The Informal Policies and Practices that Support Board Learning and Development

Learning was an essential component in the process of creating Westcoast. Just as change itself is "the rule" (Weick, 1979) rather than the exception in the everyday life of organizations, so was learning "the rule" in Westcoast. Westcoast was "a learning culture" even though this learning was largely informal. The women's caring values and practices had created a work climate that demonstrated commitment to cooperative and respectful processes and practices. They had created a climate of sharing; they shared information, problem solving, decision-making, knowledge construction and mutual support. All of these qualities contributed to creating conditions and opportunities for learning. Their learning environment was fundamentally shaped by care.
In the Board's governance work of constructing, sustaining and developing an organization, the traditional adult education notions of learning—teacher, learner, content, and context—were challenged and reshaped. Learning was primarily an informal, social interactive process. The participants learned in the everyday talk and interactions of Board meetings, using the informal processes of observation, interaction and participation. Board meetings provided the learning spaces for the women to define, interpret, negotiate and develop values, principles, policies and practices. As the women were engaged in this work, the boundaries between teacher and learner were blurred. Each member contributed to the learning of her colleagues, and in turn the group learned and ultimately the organization learned. It was through the participants' shared learning and knowledge construction that Westcoast changed and developed.

The implication for practice that Westcoast's experience brings to the foreground is to consider the ways that the informal elements of their "learning culture" can be sustained as they move from their historical Board membership to a newer membership. One way to accomplish this support would be to formalize their informal beliefs and practices, possibly by developing formal policies that articulated and maintained the central elements of their learning culture. These elements might include: 1) their learning beliefs and commitments—"bringing new people along;" 2) their learning methods—observation, interaction, and participation; 3) their learning content—the leadership of a caring organization; and 4) their learning contexts—routine Board meetings.
A Framework for Formalizing Board Learning and Development

Kornbluh and Greene (as cited in Welton, 1989) offer a framework for learning in organizational life. This framework can support the development of nonprofit caring organizations. They argue that work settings can be conceptualized and supported as "educative work environments" that value both "individual and group learning as highly as any other aspect of the productive process" (Kornbluh and Greene as cited in Welton, 1991, p. 36). In their survey of the literature on participation, empowerment, and learning in the workplace, four central themes emerged. They found that in order for people to learn in workplace settings, they must be able to: 1) unlearn their deference to authority, 2) be nurtured in this process by an enabler or mentor, 3) exercise their new understanding and competencies in a spiral of increasing responsibility, and 4) learn within a framework of interdependence and mutuality (Kornbluh and Greene, 1989).

These four themes offer a framework for understanding the informal learning that was occurring in the Board’s “work” of governance and trusteeship and for thinking about ways these informal learning practices might be made explicit or formalized. The first theme, unlearning deference to authority, was a developmental challenge for the founding members, as they were learning to “let go” of their influence and authority, and for the newer members as they were learning to become “old” Board members. As the Board members were learning to re-define conflict as an organizational resource, one that was compatible to caring practice, they were also learning to critique and challenge authority without threatening the values of care.

The second theme, being nurtured in the process of learning by an enabler, was occurring within the Board’s informal teaching and learning interactions. The founding
members were committed to helping new members learn to become old Board members, however, these intentions and actions largely operated at an informal level. These learning relationships could be formalized by identifying the enabling and mentoring roles that founding and older members might provide to newer members. Formalized mentoring relationships can replace the maternalism of caring practice; such relationships openly and respectfully recognize and address any knowledge and skill differentials between new and old members. Such relationships also nurture new members' sense of belonging and old members' sense of purpose.

The third theme, exercising their knowledge in a spiral of increasing responsibility, was occurring at an informal level as the Board members did the work of Board governance. Through this direct experience and their active participation they gained, and eventually constructed, organizational knowledge. A formal recognition of this informal learning could help the women develop their Board meetings and Board structures (i.e., its various kinds of committees) as a progressive and supportive learning path, consisting of many learning opportunities within increasingly greater organizational responsibilities. In her interview Maryann described such a learning path that was mutually sensitive to Board members' abilities, interests and learning and to Westcoast's development:

M: It's a real commitment. There's no sense being on a board if it isn't a real commitment and then I don't think being on a board should be a life time sentence. I think a six year cycle is plenty. First two years, get in, get familiar, choose the parts that you're interested in. . . . Then work through in the second
two years taking on . . . leadership roles. Taking on additional responsibility, moving on to the executive, taking on some special project, whatever, and then winding it down.

L: What other things do you see as activities that help the movement of Board members in those six years through a leadership contribution?

M: Well, we’re just learning about that aren’t we, in terms of where we’re at now . . . . Now I don’t know how much of this I’ve talked about. Isn’t this interesting? That’s why this is like professional development for me. I imagine what one of the things we’ll do at Westcoast is develop a “Friends of” association of former staff and Board members. . . . and then we’ll ask for those peoples’ help and advice and support from time to time on particular committees, around particular kinds of work.

The fourth theme, to learn within a framework of interdependence and mutuality, reflected Westcoast’s core values of “caring, cooperation and collaboration” (Skulski, 1994, p. 10). A commitment to relationships of interdependence was also a central principle in the notion of care as a moral and a political idea. As Westcoast was constructing a caring organization they were also creating a learning environment that informally supported learning within interdependent, caring relationships. These informal caring and learning relationships could be more supported by identifying the learning principles (e.g., that both the intellectual and the emotional elements of learning are recognized and supported, and that the primary vehicle for learning is the group) and
the learning methods (e.g., developing enabling learning roles such as mentors) that addressed members' learning needs and Westcoast's developmental needs.

The Importance of Nonprofit Caring Organizations for Society

Nonprofit organizations play significant socio-political roles in North American society. They provide the organizational structures that advance social purposes "with a clear aim toward a chosen form of social embetterment" (Van Til, 1988, p. 8). Nonprofit organizations have historically provided collective voices that advocate social change in public policies, public institutions and social structures. However, in the socio-political and economic climate of the 1990's this transformative potential of nonprofit organizations is besieged by changing structural forces. As traditional philanthropic giving has diminished and governments have increasingly shifted social welfare services to the nonprofit and private sectors, nonprofit organizations are becoming increasingly dependent on government support (Rekart, 1993) and influenced by government agendas (Ng, 1990; Schreader, 1990; Wolch, 1990).

Kramer (1987) identifies the fact that social researchers have not seen as important the factor of whether traditional social welfare services are most effectively sponsored by government, nonprofit or for-profit organizations. Kramer argues that the "widely held belief that the dysfunctional consequences of agencies receiving public funds of dependency, co-optation, a dilution of advocacy and autonomy, goal deflection and increased bureaucratization" (p. 247) are exaggerated. He cites evidence collected in several independent studies that would suggest that the impact of government funds
in controlling the structure, processes and outcomes of voluntary organizations is less than commonly believed.

Wolch (1990), however, argues that in order for nonprofit organizations to maintain their progressive potential they may need to adopt alternative forms of organization and organizational practice in order "to resist the imposition of incompatible state mandated agendas" (p. 4). Westcoast is such an organization. The caring organization they have constructed, in spite of their "reluctance to be critical," has political consequences. Westcoast resists some of the significant external threats to autonomy identified by Kramer (1987)—goal deflection, co-optation and increased bureaucratization. The threats of dependency and the dilution of advocacy were two areas they were addressing in order to develop the political capacities of their caring practice.

Rifkin (1995) offers a vision of the nonprofit sector that also recognizes the transformational potential of nonprofit organizations during our socially turbulent times. He argues that as governments pull away from their traditional social and economic responsibilities, and as the private sector becomes increasingly globalized and therefore not accountable to any specific community or locale, the nonprofit sector must become more socially responsible. Rifkin defines the nonprofit sector as the "caring realm." He suggests that the third sector offers a caring vision of society, one in which people understand themselves as citizens rather than as "first and foremost, 'consumers' of goods and services" (p. 246). This vision of the nonprofit sector "offers an antidote and an alternative to the materialism that has dominated 20th century industrial thinking" (p. 246).
Westcoast contributes to this vision by providing an alternative view of how to construct organizations as caring structures and how to support work that meets real human needs. As organizational creators and innovators, Westcoast offers practitioners an idea of what can be--how we might envision and shape our organizations and social institutions as compassionate places that support and empower caring work.

Westcoast also offers alternative definitions of the concepts of progress and development. Westcoast's success in developing caring practice and supporting caring work within a progressive organizational setting challenges the notion that progress and development are predominantly the territory of science and technology. Rather, Westcoast provides “different entry points for practice . . . [that] lead to a changed definition of what is considered ‘progressive’ and ‘revolutionary’” (Hart, 1993, p. 25). The notion of care as a moral practice and as a political idea frames the concepts of progress and development in terms of human relationships of care, concern, and interdependence rather than in terms of production, profit and gain. Westcoast provides a vision of work that sustains life rather than one that threatens our sustainable development.

Lastly, during this uncertain time of major social, political and economic restructuring, nonprofit organizations are succeeding in “forging new bonds of community, new commitments to active citizenship, to social responsibility, to values” (Drucker, 1989, p. 93) and to meaningful work. As governments and corporations withdraw their political and economic support from the fabric of people’s daily lives, nonprofit organizations can offer an alternative understanding of our relationships to one another--one that recognizes our interdependent relationships as workers and as citizens
of a “community of place” (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Annual Report, 1991-1992, p. 7). As caring organizations like Westcoast continue to develop care as a moral and a political idea, they also develop the practices of democratic citizenship and in so doing they contribute to our becoming “more caring and more moral people ... and better citizens in a democracy” (Tronto, 1993, p. 167).


Ng, Roxana. (1990). State funding to a community employment center: Implications for working with immigrant women. In R. Ng, G. Walker & J. Muller (Eds.), *Community organizing and the Canadian state* (pp. 165-183). Toronto: Gavamond Press.


Dear

As the focus of a graduate thesis in Adult Education, I am doing a study of learning within the setting of a nonprofit voluntary board. The study is titled, "Nonprofit voluntary boards: An exploration of a learning culture." The purpose of the study is to investigate how women trustees learn, within the routine interactions and practices of board meetings, an organizational culture and vision. The study would seek to explore the activities and interactions that influence learning. This study is also part of a larger research project entitled, "Caring for children: An exploration of the meaning of women's work" which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The principal investigator is Dr. Allison Tom and the co-investigator is Ms. Gyda Chud.

The study will take place over a 12 month period in which I, as the study investigator, will collect information by attending Board and committee meetings and events, conducting interviews with Board members, and examining agency materials. As part of the study, I am requesting your permission to interview you once during the period of the study. This interview will last 1 to 2 hours and it will be tape recorded. From time to time information will be provided to you about the project and what the investigators, myself or Allison Tom, are finding.

I hope you will be supportive of this study. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you may change your mind about being in the study at any time. The information that is gathered in the observations and interviews will be kept confidential. The only people who will see the information will be myself and the principal investigator of the research project "Caring for Children." I will only share information with your name identified if you give me permission to do so, otherwise I will use codes to represent your name. Information gathered during this study will be used for a Master's thesis and to develop articles and reports that the principal investigators, myself and Allison Tom, will submit to academic journals.

Please sign this letter if you agree to the following items:
- I agree that the study can observe (interview) me.
- I agree that the study can write about these observations (interviews).
- I have a copy of this letter for myself.

Signature ___________________________ Date __________

Appendix B

Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre
(Draft Document, May 1995)

Mission Statement

Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre is committed to the development, provision and promotion of affordable, inclusive, quality child care resources and services throughout British Columbia.

As a provincial, nonprofit society, we support families, children, child care providers and child care related organizations through networking and training opportunities, consultation, information, resource and referral services.

Guiding Principles

A. Children have a right to quality child care.

B. Quality child care is a vital support to families, children and society.

C. Child care is everybody's responsibility. Governments, business, labour, voluntary groups, institutions, service providers and families must work together in meaningful partnerships to support accessible, affordable, inclusive, quality child care.

D. Services which actively value diversity including race, gender, age, religion, culture, sexual orientation, ability, socio-economic class and preferred language benefit families, children and caregivers.

E. Families require information about quality child care, the range of child care settings and criteria for selection and placement, which respect their choices and best meet their needs.

F. The community needs access to current information and education about child care policy, research, management and exemplary practice.

G. Child care providers should have the right to compensation, working conditions and professional development opportunities commensurate with education and responsibilities.

H. Services for child care providers must be ethical, accountable to the community and must meet unique community needs.