"A formal organization," write Rogers and Shoemaker, "is a social system that has been deliberately established for achieving certain predetermined goals; it is characterized by prescribed roles, an authority structure, and a formally established system of rules and regulations to govern the behavior of its members." The formal organization of schools has four policy domains: province or state, district, school, and classroom. Traditionally, the four domains are considered tightly coupled. The decisions made at each level determine the actions taken at the next lower level.

Tight coupling is evident in the organization of education systems in Canada. The provinces occupy a superordinate position, for the Constitution Act of 1867 granted to the provinces control of and responsibility for education. Although the federal government provides funds to support the education system, it does not directly influence educational policy. Education in a province is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, but administratively it is controlled by a provincial Department of Education.

A major responsibility of a department of education is to develop curriculum policy. "A curriculum policy," explains Werner, "defines what students ought to be learning in the various subject areas; it is the prescribed plan of study for each grade, it has 'official' sanction, and each classroom's program is accountable to it." Written curriculum guidelines distributed to the school districts of the province explicate curriculum policy. As Coleman and LaRocque point out, a tightly coupled organization emphasizes control over workers by producing policy statements in the form of a clear set of instructions for subordinates to follow.³

School districts, in their turn, become curriculum policymakers when interpreting provincial guidelines for the local situation. Dickinson explains that "while provincial educational legislation provides for a good deal of central control of curriculum content and materials, substantial scope currently exists for local educators to determine content and material, pedagogical methods, and assessment of students' progress." However, provincial curriculum guidelines serve as the starting point for local deliberations. As Robinson points out, "Guidelines, after all, are the superordinate curriculum policy documents: all else must follow from them in some sense." This is understandable when one considers that a major goal of an education system is "a uniform product of a certain quality."

The ultimate purpose of an education system is to control what happens in individual classrooms. The intention is that teachers base their teaching on the curriculum guidelines produced at higher levels of the system. Elmore implies that teachers, by the nature of their position in the educational hierarchy, are likely to do so:

Teachers are not often expected to develop what they teach. Their work is organized to preclude any serious involvement in that development. Consequently, teachers have little choice but to rely heavily on external sources for what they teach.

In the Canadian context, a major source external to teachers' classrooms is curriculum guidelines produced at provincial or district levels. In addition, Marsh and Huberman cite studies showing that an authority–innovation–decision-making model (basically a tightly coupled system) can enhance the implementation of new curriculums.

Leithwood, Ross, and Montgomery have found that curriculum guidelines play a dominant role in teachers' classroom decisions about curriculum objectives. In a secondary data analysis, MacDonald and Leithwood report:

Teachers' responses indicated that use of complete, varied, well-organized curriculum guidelines (preferably ones that contain a variety of 'proven' assessment tools) saves them time in the preparation of materials, takes the worry out of the sequencing of

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topics, and provides reliable and trustworthy tests. However, teachers reserved the right to deviate from guidelines that seemed to be in conflict with perceived student needs and abilities.10

That last comment gives pause for thought. If an education system is tightly coupled, deviation would be inappropriate or even impossible. Commenting on the autonomy granted to teachers and schools in the formal organization, Bidwell recognizes this anomaly.11 He perceives a conflict between the bureaucracy called for by demands for a uniform product and the professionalism called for by the nature of the teaching task. Other authors, such as Goodlad, Klein, and Tye, have also mentioned the autonomy of the domains in the decision-making structure.12

Weick has pointed out that education systems are more loosely coupled than organizational analysts had realized.13 Boyd and Crowson have cited several studies supporting the view that superordinate individuals or groups "sit atop bureaucracies with many components that are only indirectly and with difficulty under their control."14

In 1983, Meyer and Scott expanded the notion of loose coupling by focusing on the following major points:15

1. The assumption of a strong relationship between the formal structure of an organization and its day-to-day activities applies to some kinds of organizations but not to others. For example, in some organizations, such as factories, it is an advantage to closely supervise the day-to-day activities because the legitimacy of a factory depends on the production of high-quality goods at competitive prices.

2. However, the legitimacy of schools comes, not from a particular product, but from the public's understanding of what a school is. As Meyer, Scott, and Deal point out, "A school succeeds if everyone agrees that it is a school; it fails if no one believes that it is a school, regardless of its success in instruction or socialization."16


3. Educational organizations thus develop rules that cater to the public's view of what a school is. These rules include such matters as teacher categories and credentials, pupil selection, proper topics of instruction, and appropriate facilities.

4. However, these rules do not govern day-to-day classroom activities. In fact, detaching itself from individual classrooms is to the organization's advantage because the daily activities may belie the organization's goals and purposes, causing the public's support for schools to decrease. As a result, "The assumption that formal structures are really working is buffered from the inconsistencies and anomalies involved in technical activities."17

5. Buffering, however, works only if everyone has faith in everyone else. As Meyer and Rowan say, "Effectively absorbing uncertainty and maintaining confidence requires people to assume that everyone is acting in good faith."18 In other words, it is assumed that teachers are professionals who are well able to function in their classrooms according to organizational goals.

The theory of Meyer and Rowan is not without its critics. Willower, for example, questions that schools are as loosely coupled as Meyer and Rowan contend, because teachers know the "rules of the game" and principals know what is happening in their schools.19 A study by LaRocque and Coleman raises questions on the "logic of confidence" assumption of loose coupling.20 Nevertheless, Boyan points out that the closed-traditional models of education systems are clearly being challenged by open-natural systems models, including Meyer and Rowan's loose coupling.21

We have, then, two distinctly different theories of education systems. One provides a picture of a tightly coupled system in which each hierarchical level controls the actions of the next subordinate level. The other describes a loosely coupled system in which each level of the hierarchy has considerable leeway to practice its professional expertise.

PURPOSE

An interview study was recently conducted in Alberta, Canada, to examine curriculum development at provincial and local levels through the eyes of participating teachers. The study yielded data on the work of curriculum committees and on the teachers' responses to participation.

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2Ibid., p. 40.
Toward the end of the interviews, the teachers were asked what effect the work of their committees would have on education in the province (or district or school). Would classroom teachers use the guidelines and materials created by their committees?

The organizational theories of tight coupling and loose coupling of administrative units are brought to bear on the data. It is intended that this approach will offer insights into curriculum development and implementation, as well as into their administrative context.

DESCRIPTION

The study is descriptive in nature. It will not satisfy readers who look for quantitative analyzes and strong generalizability. But it does offer the perceptions of teachers who were actively involved in the curriculum-development process. Their perceptions are valuable because the teachers were reflecting on curriculum development in the context of the total education system in which they worked. They have an insider’s outlook that the rest of us can only approximate.

Study Sample

The study took place in two phases in the province of Alberta, Canada. Phase I focused on teachers who were serving on provincial curriculum committees sponsored by the Department of Education (commonly called “Alberta Education”). Fifteen curriculum committees included full-time classroom teachers as members, and one teacher was randomly selected from each of those committees. Eight teachers were members of Curriculum Coordinating Committees, the other seven teachers served on Ad Hoc Committees created by the Curriculum Coordinating Committees to perform specific tasks.

Phase II of the study focused, for purposes of comparison, on teachers who were serving on local curriculum committees sponsored by a school district or an individual school. It was desirable to include teachers from many parts of the province because Alberta is large, and school districts may differ in their curriculum-development procedures. Broad geographic representation was found among teachers engaged in graduate studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. All sixteen of the teachers who had recently been involved in local curriculum committees were included in the study. Eight had served on committees at the district level, the other eight had been members of committees in their own schools.

The provincial and local groups were similar in two respects. Geographic representation was achieved in both groups, and the teachers were drawn from all three levels of schooling: elementary, junior high, and senior high.

Data Collection

A structured interview was conducted with each teacher. Teachers answered four categories of questions: (1) a description of the committee and how it
functioned, (2) the background the teacher brought to the committee, (3) the
teacher's reasons for joining the committee, and (4) the teacher's reactions to
working on the committee.

The following steps contributed to the success of the interview procedure:

1. The interviews were conducted privately with no interruptions.
2. The teachers were assured of anonymity in reporting their responses.
3. The length of the interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, allowing
   sufficient time to explore the questions in depth.
4. The questions focused primarily on current or recent events that were
   fresh in the teachers' minds.
5. All teachers were asked the same questions in the same order
6. Probing questions encouraged teachers to expand on their responses.
7. The interviews were tape-recorded, allowing the researcher to con-
   centrate on the teachers' responses rather than on taking notes.

Data Analysis

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. Data analysis proceeded
in three steps. First, the responses of each teacher were collated for each
interview question. Second, the meaning of each response was summarized
to simplify compiling the data. Third, responses with similar meanings were
Grouped into the same category.

In a study of this type, consistency of interpretation is a major concern.
Therefore, the researcher set the data aside for several months and repeated
the process of summarizing the teachers' responses. The two sets of categories
were compared, and only minor adjustments proved to be necessary.

Validity of interpretation was established in two ways. During the inter-
views, teachers were given time to answer the questions fully, and probing
questions encouraged them to expand on their responses. During data anal-
ysis, a teacher's responses were studied in the context of the total interview
to determine whether the researcher's interpretation of a response to one
question was supported by the teacher's responses to other questions.

FINDINGS

The findings begin with the provincial level and continue with the district
and school levels. When the study was designed, curriculum-development
committees in school districts and individual schools were considered to be
"local" as compared with "provincial," and the data were combined. The data
analysis showed, however, that while district and school committees had some
things in common, important differences also existed.22 Therefore, the per-

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22Jean Helen Young, "Teacher Participation in Curriculum Development: A Study of Societal
and Institutional Levels" (unpublished manuscript, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1988).
exceptions of teachers serving on district and school committees are presented separately here.

**Provincial-Level Curriculum Committees**

At the provincial level, Curriculum Coordinating Committees established policy for the subjects taught in the schools of the province. They were responsible for examining current curriculums and revising the goals, objectives, and content. The teachers on these committees used such terms as revising, restructuring, and updating to describe their work. As Werner points out, however, “policy needs to be clothed with concrete content and activities.” Therefore, Ad Hoc Committees were created to perform some tasks, such as sequencing content from one grade to another, developing a variety of instructional approaches, selecting resources, and creating an inservice package for teachers. According to the teachers working at the provincial level, their committees were responding primarily to teacher dissatisfaction with current curriculums, but also to changes in public attitudes, to changes in the subject areas themselves, and occasionally, to ministerial edict.

Decisions pertaining to goals, objectives, and content were included in a *Program of Studies* for each level of schooling—elementary, junior high, and senior high. The use of each *Program of Studies* was mandatory in the province. In addition, the province produced a curriculum guide for each subject that suggested various instructional and evaluation strategies, as well as resources for teaching. The use of the curriculum guides was optional. The province took a prescriptive stance on what should be taught but allowed considerable leeway on how it should be taught.

All 15 teachers serving on provincial curriculum committees believed their work was valuable, primarily because the subject areas included in each *Program of Studies* would be brought up to date. New content would be added (e.g., the mathematics curriculum would be expanded to include computer literacy and consumerism). Emphases would be changed (e.g., English would move from an emphasis on literature to an emphasis on communication skills). Relevance to the province would be increased by including Alberta content and examples selected from the Alberta scene.

However, there was far less agreement on the materials' effect on education in the province. Only five teachers believed the work of their committees would have a positive effect, the other ten teachers were hesitant. Their doubtfulness was evident from their comments. “I wouldn't be too optimistic that it would have a great deal of effect”, “It could have an extremely positive effect. Whether it will or not, you'll have to wait. I'm very doubtful right now whether it will.” *Hopefully* and *hope* frequently appeared in the teachers'
statements: “Hopefully, a very positive effect”; “I would hope that the teachers would have a very positive attitude toward it”; “I hope it has a good and far-flung effect. I hope that. I don’t know.” This is a curious anomaly, considering that many curriculum decisions made at the provincial level are mandatory throughout the province.

The teachers’ doubts stemmed from two sources. First, they perceived a lack of commitment to implement changes from Alberta Education:

I’m wondering whether they’ll put the money into it and the time into it. Whether they’re going to do the kind of job that needs to be done. This modular system, as I said, was innovative, but it’s expensive. It is something that can either be extremely successful if it’s done very well or extremely unsuccessful. It could be a tremendous bomb if it isn’t supported with all kinds of materials, all kinds of teacher-orientation centers, you know, seminars. It needs a lot of help.

If somehow proper inservice of the teacher can be accomplished, then I think the new curriculum is going to address itself to some of the problems that the public perceived. . . . What I’m told at this time is that there isn’t the money, and there is a very slim likelihood of that happening. That’s the one part that bothers me.

This is where inservice work comes in, you know. We have to sell it. That curriculum has to be sold, and the curriculum guide. And this is where the great big hue and cry is right now is that there has been no inservice in the language arts. It hasn’t been sold.

A contributing problem, according to some teachers, was that the province and school districts had never worked out their respective responsibilities for implementation. The teachers themselves were uncertain about the roles the province and school districts should play. For example, one teacher felt that planning inservices, at least, should be the responsibility of Alberta Education, another teacher believed that planning inservices was the school districts’ responsibility, and Alberta Education should send out field personnel only to help carry out the plans.

Resistance from teachers in the schools of the province was another major problem identified. The perceived sources of resistance varied. One teacher admitted that “the majority of teachers have never even looked at the curriculum guide.” Fullan cites similar findings. According to this teacher, they use a textbook instead, figuring

if you cover everything from the preface up to [page] 199, then you’ve covered everything that the Department of Education says you’re supposed to cover in this grade. And that’s a fallacy for one thing. That’s why there are so many books on the prescribed list.

We’re also aware of the fact that with the large number of teachers it is not going to make one little particle of difference. They’re going to still go on the way they’ve always done it, and there’s always going to be teachers, no matter even if you stood over them

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with a stick, they're going to say, "The hell with you guys" and "I'm going to teach it my way."

These are interesting perceptions in the light of the teachers' belief that teacher dissatisfaction with current curriculums inspired their committees' work. Why, then, wouldn't teachers jump at the chance to use updated materials? One reason was that teachers may enjoy teaching the current content. For example, one teacher pointed out that, although English teachers perceive a need for more emphasis on communication skills, they enjoy teaching literature (which had been emphasized in the last two curriculums). "I'm willing to accept the fact that most people aren't going to like it," he said. "It's going to take awhile to change some habits." Teachers also recognized that a document alone cannot necessarily bring about changes in teaching:

It boils down to being a piece of paper. . .  I don't think changes happen like that. You know, it's the personality there that's teaching the stuff that is going to have greatest control over what comes out.

Three other reasons were offered to explain teachers' lack of motivation to implement the changes. First, teachers are busy:

I see teachers as extremely overworked. . . Teachers are very busy.

Second, the frequency of curriculum changes discourages teachers:

You change courses, bang, bang, like that. . . There's no consistency, there's no sequencing. Everything is a change from day to day I think that's very discouraging

Third, teachers receive much criticism and little praise:

I think the other part of the problem is what's happening to teachers in general They're not very much respected. They take the brunt of a great deal of criticism. We have a very highly trained professional staff of teachers who never really ever have any opportunity for a pat on the back. Nobody tells them they're doing a good job There's no motivation for them.

**District-Level Curriculum Committees**

The curriculum materials produced at the provincial level are disseminated to all school districts in the province. Then, as Werner points out, "School boards establish committees to produce materials that interpret policy in light of district priorities and perceived needs." Twenty-five district-level curriculum committees. The focus of curriculum work was implementation of provincial curriculums. Some committees clarified what would be taught at each grade level—adding, rearranging, and emphasizing objectives. Other committees developed units of study, gathered resources, and pilot-tested a new curriculum.

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With one exception, the teachers believed the work of their committees was valuable because they were making it easier for teachers to implement curriculums produced at the provincial level (and, in one case, at the district level). The teachers believed they would improve the quality of instruction by drawing more attention to a subject area, by eliminating overlap from one grade to another, and by giving teachers tangible materials to use in their classrooms.

The one dissenter felt strongly that his committee was window dressing and had been established by central office personnel to impress the school board rather than to deal with the problems teachers faced: "This was smoke and mirrors from the perspective of central office staff who could then parade this before the board with their names on it and say, 'This is something that we have done.'"

At the district level, the central office could have required that teachers use the materials produced. After all, the central office had organized the committees, supported most with some release time or extra pay, or both, and anticipated that the materials the committees prepared would be disseminated throughout the school district. The district was also in a superordinate position in relation to the individual schools.

The use of the materials, however, was optional. Although the teachers believed the materials they created should help other teachers implement provincial curriculums, they had no illusion that the materials would be universally used. For example, one teacher, discussing a collection of thematic units developed for teaching English, remarked, "There will be some teachers who will pick it up and, I think, it will be an incentive for them, but I personally believe that that percentage is going to be small."

Whereas the teachers on provincial committees were genuinely concerned that their materials might not be used, the teachers on district-level committees were more philosophical. In the first place, some teachers would not be interested in the subject area. One teacher, for example, explained that her committee was compiling a package of materials that would encourage teachers to integrate environmental education with the language arts. "We knew a lot of people weren't doing anything with environmental ed. So we tried to make it as simple for those nonenvironmental types as we could."

Still, "I think maybe we kind of suspected that, no matter how easy you made it, there were going to be some that just weren't going to have anything to do with it."

Also, as another teacher pointed out, "There just are other sources... I don't think there is any one given book that you can hand out to an English teacher and say, 'Somewhere in here you will find everything you want.'" This situation appeared to be acceptable to him: "I suppose, ultimately, I am saying there is no particular need to value any given resource so highly that it must be used by everyone or must be remembered."
Another teacher was not at all concerned that some teachers may not use the materials:

Not everybody can teach using the same materials. If it gave people the notion of what they ought to do, if it helped to bring out some kind of standardizing of that particular course, if it gave first-year teachers a handle to start with the struggle, I think it's just fine... I think it is a professional choice at the discretion of the teacher to use that resource if it best fits their situation. So, to me, it's there to be used by the individual who does the teaching if they see fit for their class.

Three teachers did not know what had become of the materials their committees developed. It was almost as if, when the materials were completed, they were cast into limbo. Commenting on whether or not the work of his committee would affect education in his school district, one teacher remarked, "I would have to be honest and say I don't have an idea in the world. No clue." Said another teacher, "I think there were a couple of instances where I heard that so-and-so was piloting it, and the teacher next door sort of looked in at it or had flipped through the book. How extensively anyone else used it, I don't really know." Remarked another, "I am hoping that a lot of people would use it, but I don't know. Sometimes I wish that there was more feedback from that aspect."

Even if the materials were used, some teachers thought, the effect would be short-lived. One teacher said, "It may have had some effect the immediate year following completion. Now, I would suspect, very, very little." The teachers ascribed the limited durability of materials to several sources.

- the materials not being revised to any great extent as a result of pilot testing
- interest shifting away from the subject area
- grants drying up at the end of a specified period of time
- a reconceptualization of the subject area at the provincial level

Although the teachers generally agreed that the optional use of curriculum materials was reasonable, they sometimes believed that inadequate dissemination of the materials inhibited teacher choice. They identified four particular problems.

First, teachers were not always reminded that the materials were available. One teacher, for example, said that her committee had sent out a letter asking teachers to pilot-test the materials. But when pilot testing was completed, no effort was made to reach the other teachers. "I don't think we really thought of it," she said. Unfortunately, in this case, teachers received the materials only if they requested them.

Second, when teachers were asked about the materials, it was often by letter. In one case, the district-level consultant called a meeting to explain the purpose of the integrated units the committee had created, but "she didn't have a very good turnout... [so] she put together this letter that outlined everything. Then, again, it's the same old thing. The paper, you get so much
of it, you know.” Another teacher corroborated this point of view when she talked about the deluge of printed materials coming from the central office.

Without an exaggeration, I had a pile of books that high of various guides or curriculum things that I should be reading from the school board, and I could not believe it. They just kept on piling it on, and I kept on sticking it in my cupboard because I didn’t have time to read them all.

Third, without an adequate introduction to the materials, the teachers could misuse them. One teacher said:

I remember I brought my units back, and the reaction was, in effect, “All that’s nice, that looks really good, everything is flowing. . . . Well, gee, I might like this idea, I think I’ll take that idea.” So you are defeating the purpose, like integrated theme units is for everything to go together. So they find one thing they want, so they pull it out.

Fourth, the curriculum materials were usually sent to schools rather than to individual teachers. This was economical, but as one teacher pointed out, “I think it would almost have to go to the teachers themselves in order for it to be effective.” Another teacher supported this point with reference to another project: “The language arts objectives, I think, have a great effect because everybody has a copy of it.”

Fifth, although these comments suggest that new curriculum materials should be introduced to teachers in person rather than in writing, the teachers were not necessarily sold on inservices. “Because many of them won’t go,” one teacher explained. “And, you know, you are tired after school and . . . maybe some would perceive it as ‘Oh, no! Here is another thing they are loading on us.’”

The teachers on the committees were, themselves, unsure of the role they should play in disseminating the curriculum materials. One teacher, who had been involved in developing integrated units for teaching English, met with the other English teachers in her school: “And I said, ‘Well, here are some of the units,’ and actually two of the other teachers used the unit ‘Search for Identity.’” Another teacher served on a committee that was developing materials particularly for beginning teachers. Then, when new teachers joined that teacher’s department, did he give them copies? “I have to be honest and say that we have had one or two new members in the department, and I—no, I don’t recall ever giving them that.”

School-Level Curriculum Committees

The eight curriculum committees in individual schools, like those at the district level, were concerned with implementing provincial curriculums. They straightened out what should be taught at each grade level, developed units of study, gathered resources for teacher use, and pilot-tested new textbooks. The only curriculum work unique to an individual school was developing schoolwide instructional themes, such as “Alberta’s Mosaic.”
The teachers serving on school-level committees were more positive than the teachers working on district and provincial committees. Three major reasons emerged from the data. First, the impetus for the work came primarily from teacher complaints. For example, "A grade 4 teacher would say in the staff room, 'Well, I had to teach this today. Nobody seemed to know it,' and you might hear a comment like, 'Oh! I didn't know that that was supposed to have been taught in grade 3.' " In another case, the reading series used in the school required integrated themes: "You are supposed to take a thematic approach, but they don't provide it thematically in the book." In addition, "The art was supposed to fit in and the phys. ed., but they don't really tell you how to do it; you are supposed to just do it." Another teacher described the situation in her school for teaching science: "We were at a point where we had all the books but no equipment... We sort of had the bare minimum, and it was a matter then of going out and saying, 'You be in charge of finding out what there is and where we can get it.' "

In other words, the teachers knew they were having problems, and, typically, the school principal tuned in to their frustrations. One teacher, describing complaints of overlapping content from grade to grade, said, "It got to the point where the principal was picking up that there was a general consensus that this was happening between grades and felt it was time to really act on it." In another case, "I think enough complaints went to the principal—different teachers saying, 'We need the science equipment. Where is it now, and what are we going to do about it?' "

Second, the work of the committees, arising from teacher concerns, was closely related to teachers' daily classroom work. The teachers sometimes doubted that what they were doing should be called "curriculum work." One teacher commented: "I wasn't thinking of it as going in to do curriculum work. I was thinking of it as a project that we might find fruitful to do." Another teacher questioned that her committee, which was identifying and organizing the equipment needed at each grade level for the science curriculum, was really a "curriculum" committee: "I think it's just one of those things that has got to be done."

Third, the positive effect of curriculum work at the school level may also be attributed to the strong collegial relationships among staff members. These relationships were evident, for example, when certain teachers said they had participated in their committees because they felt an obligation to their colleagues to do so, especially when a committee included all teachers at a grade level or in a subject area. Also, it is difficult to imagine a teacher not adhering to the sequence of skills worked out by a committee without other teachers becoming annoyed, since the work of one teacher may impinge on the work of another. By the same token, teachers would surely lose face if they had complained about the lack of science equipment and then failed to use the equipment that had been purchased and organized for them.
However, a negative side to curriculum development at the school level also surfaced. Specifically, two of the eight committees did not complete their work, a problem that did not occur at the district or provincial levels. Therefore, when these teachers were asked whether their committees' work would have a positive effect on education in their schools, they could only reply, yes, if the work would get done.

These two committees did not complete their work because of personnel problems. In one committee, one teacher did not attend meetings or came unprepared, and another eventually transferred to a different school, a general lack of coordination among members was evident, with meetings held on a catch-as-catch-can basis. Personnel changes, specifically a resignation from the school and a transfer to another subject area, also plagued the other committee. The major problem in this committee, however, was the project's over-ambition. One teacher said, "It was beginning to take much more time to complete than I had envisaged at the beginning."

The teachers working on school-level committees were left to their own devices. District and provincial committees were guided through their work by central office or Alberta Education personnel, but school-level committees received far less assistance. Also, the teachers were seldom given release time for committee work in their own schools. As a result, it was difficult to find a convenient time to meet, meetings were not long enough, and the quality of the work suffered. One teacher explained, "It was really hard to be really thorough a lot of the time because sometimes you just don't have time in your regular day." For some reason, the domain that produced materials most likely to be used by classroom teachers received the least tangible support from the education system.

Addendum

Somewhat belatedly in the series of interviews, when teacher doubts over implementation had created a noticeable pattern, a few teachers were asked why they continued to invest a great deal of time and effort into the work of their committees. The teachers gave three reasons.

First, the teachers felt satisfaction in helping to produce high-quality materials. One teacher, for example, said, "I had some satisfaction in coming up with something that was better than what was there before." Another teacher clearly distinguished between the work of the committee and teachers' possible indifference to the materials:

It's two different things. We have come up with a professional document with a professional set of things that are there for the teachers to use Whether or not they use them is another matter. It's there. We have done it.

Second, the teachers believed they had tried to improve education in the province or in their districts or schools. Their consciences were clear. One teacher said. "You have to say, 'I gave it my best try, and I did everything I
could to make sure that there were inservice packages around for people who wanted to use them. . . We've done everything we can."

Third, teachers gained from participating on the committees. One teacher commented, "I suddenly got access to a lot of interaction and resources that I hadn't seen before." Of the 31 teachers, 28 reported at one time or another during the interviews that participating on the committees had enhanced their work as classroom teachers.

**DISCUSSION**

Traditionally, we have assumed that an organization develops a formal structure to coordinate and control the various parts of the organization. Thus, each level of the educational hierarchy controls the units at the next subordinate level, with the ultimate intent of controlling what happens in individual classrooms.

On paper at least, the education system sponsoring the curriculum committees described here is tightly coupled. The province created guidelines prescribing what should be taught in every subject in the curriculum. School districts were responsible for implementing the guidelines, and individual schools were subject to decisions made at the district level. This chain of command was intended to control what was taught in the classrooms of the province.

But then the data presented here are puzzling. Why would implementation of the curriculums be so uncertain if superordinate levels of the education system carefully control classroom activities? Perhaps the tightly coupled education system is simply not operating as effectively as it could. Fowler, for example, has identified several factors operating at the provincial level that detract from the quality of curriculum guidelines. Robinson has found that statements in provincial guidelines appear at various levels of generality and are vague in their intentions. English claims that district-level curriculum guides are neither quality documents nor "user friendly." Clearly, personnel at subordinate levels cannot adhere to directives they do not understand.

However, the theory that education systems are not tightly coupled at all but operate on the basis of loose coupling between administrative levels may

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more fully explain the data. How can this theory of organizations help us understand the data described here? First, the theory rests on the assumption that the legitimacy of schools comes, not from a particular product, but from the public's understanding of what a school is. Thus, educational organizations develop rules that cater to the public's view of what a school is. These rules include what will be taught in the schools. As Meyer, Scott, and Deal explain, "The teachers apply to the students a curriculum, which is in turn organized into a large number of fairly standardized categories (reading, mathematics, social studies) that are given some specification at the district and school levels, but are rather homogeneous in their meaning and content across the country."  

Almost all the curriculum committees described here catered to public expectations by dealing with standard subjects and by bringing the curriculums for those subjects up to date. At the provincial level in particular, the organization stressed the seriousness of its intent by making the subject-area goals, objectives, and content mandatory throughout the province. Committees at all three levels developed instructional materials to make implementation easier, again showing serious intent.

The provincial Department of Education was no doubt willing to fund the curriculum committees because the payoff in terms of public support was worthwhile. Having catered to the public's perception of schools, however, the provincial department saw no need for further involvement. In fact, as the loose-coupling theory points out, it is to the organization's advantage to detach itself at this point because the day-to-day activities may belie the organization's goals and purposes, thus causing a decrease in public support for schools.

This may explain the conclusion of some teachers that the provincial Department of Education was not interested in implementation, as suggested by the perceived inadequate funding for resources and the unclear division of responsibility for implementation between the province and the school districts. It also explains why the teachers believed the fate of the curriculums they produced at the provincial level was questionable, even though some aspects (goals, objectives, and content) were mandatory throughout the province. Having produced the curriculums, the Department of Education could ignore the problems that are bound to arise when carrying out a new curriculum. In fact, it would be wise to do so, because ineffective implementation could cast doubt on the public's perception of the organization. Thus, as Meyer, Scott, and Deal point out, "There is little organizational inspection to see that this curriculum is actually taught or learned."  

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31 Ibid.
The same points may hold true at the district level. Again, the formation of curriculum committees may prove to the local community that the district organization is doing what the community expects it to do, but the ineffective dissemination of the curriculum materials reported by some teachers suggests that producing the materials was more important than actually using them.

The loose coupling between the formal organization and the day-to-day activities in classrooms depends on faith that teachers are doing what they should be doing. Loose coupling may explain why many teachers felt comfortable that the decision to use the curriculum materials they produced would be left to their colleagues' discretion. They were basically showing faith that teachers would choose the materials suitable for their situation. The theory also explains why one teacher anticipated that, although many teachers would not like the curriculum produced by his committee, "ultimately, I think they will overcome their reservations.... If people know why something is being done—if they have any good will at all—they'll give it a try."

Other teachers, however, were uncomfortable with this display of trust. They were not necessarily convinced that their colleagues would give the curriculum materials a fair try or that they would use the materials well. In other words, the trust in teachers' professionalism may be misplaced. Bidwell, for example, cites research describing teachers as "less well suited to professional autonomy and discretion than to performance in a circumscribed office." Lortie has noted teachers' lack of self-assurance, arising, in part, from the difficulty they have in telling how well their work is going. Meyer and Rowan point out that teachers themselves are not necessarily convinced of their own professionalism. It is understandable, then, that some teachers exhibited little confidence that their colleagues would use the new curriculum materials well (or even at all).

Only teachers serving on curriculum committees in their own schools were confident that their curriculum materials would be used. This finding is also consistent with the theory proposed in Meyer and Scott's 1983 book. In the first place, the curriculum committees at the provincial and district levels were organized by people who were either Department of Education or central office personnel. Their emphasis was on performing in a way that would prove the organization's legitimacy. (The teacher who thought his district-level committee was being used by central office personnel to impress

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The school board rather than to facilitate the implementation of a new curriculum graphically brought out this point.

The curriculum committees at the school level, however, arose from specific teacher complaints and were organized, not to cater to the public's perception of schools, but to solve problems teachers were having in their classrooms. This finding supports Meyer and Rowan's point that loose coupling may be a good thing because it allows teachers to adapt curriculums for their particular students and may also increase teachers' commitment to adapt. The loose-coupling theory explains the data presented here in one final way. When some teachers were asked why they continued to work on their committees, knowing that the materials they produced might not be used, they replied that they felt they had done what they could and had increased their own knowledge in the process. This attitude may be their response to the faith in teachers' professionalism, which is a requirement of the loose-coupling organizational theory. "By agreeing that teachers have instructional competence and by visibly not inspecting instructional activities, an administrator shifts maximal social responsibility for upholding the rituals of instruction to the teachers." The feeling that they had contributed professionally to curriculum development and that they had grown professionally as a result may be an indication of teachers rising to meet the faith placed in them.

In summary, then, the finding that the materials produced by curriculum-development committees may have little effect on subordinate units of the education system may not be as dismaying as it seems at first glance, at least from an organizational perspective. The failure of the education system to ensure that curriculum policy is carried out does not necessarily indicate that the organization is neglecting its responsibilities or is not functioning effectively. On the contrary, the organization may be doing exactly what it needs to do, maintaining its legitimacy in the eyes of the public while giving teachers the leeway to use their professional expertise at the classroom level.

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Ibid., p. 88.