

**“It’s Farcical!”: Theories, Models, and Recommendations to Improve Public  
Consultations During Ontario School Closure Reviews**

by

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**Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

School closure review processes in Ontario are highly contested and deeply divisive. Though schools are central to their host communities, the closure review process largely ignores the community impacts. Existing research largely agrees the public consultation component of school closure reviews is flawed and insufficient. The general research question of this thesis asks, Why is there a continuation of conflict in the consultation process for school closure reviews? The thesis aims to take the models and theories of consultation from the field of planning and elsewhere to understand the problems and provide viable recommendations, but ultimately finds that the conflicts continue because school reviews are practices of governmentality that severely constrain the effect public inputs have on final decisions.

Interviews were conducted with nine people involved in the consultation process during two school closure reviews. These interviews reveal that much of the planning literature on consultations is only somewhat applicable. To help think through the deeply flawed and often hostile consultation process, this thesis presents a sustained engagement with the theories of Michel Foucault and to a lesser extent Jürgen Habermas. Habermas provides the foundation for the optimistic “communicative turn” of collaborative planning, which is a worthy if idealistic goal for planners. Foucault’s historical analysis allows us to see how planning and consultation are caught up in power, power-knowledge, governmentality, and biopolitics. While this thesis finds that planning and consultation are practices of governmentality and biopolitics, this is a critique, not a criticism. Understanding school closure reviews as a practice of governmentality allows us to identify what aspects of these reviews are predetermined and not open to consultation. It also allows us to see an area irreducible to the logic of governmentality, namely the meaning of a school to a community, and it is this aspect that should be subject to community consultation.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ever since formal planning<sup>1</sup> began as a response to the horrendous cities of the Industrial Revolution, plans to shape and define cities were, until relatively recently, executed in a top-down manner (Lane, 2005). When planners imposed a gridded street pattern (such as we see in older parts of many Canadian cities), designed a Renaissance-style partial radial street network (such as Washington, DC), or developed a large-scale public transportation network (such as in Toronto or New York), the public was rarely, if ever, consulted. The large-scale public works projects of the 1930s, inspired by Keynesian economics, were perhaps the last major planning projects done without some public consultation. Planning historians often point to the late 1950s when Jane Jacobs helped organize her community to successfully stop Robert Moses' plan for the Lower Manhattan Expressway as the decisive moment in the relationship between planners and the public (Shiple & Utz, 2012). Indeed, Jacobs' seminal 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* opens with the line, "This book is an attack on current city planning" (Jacobs, 1961). However it was not until the mid- to late 1960s that citizens began to push back against planning experts in a more concerted way (see: Davidoff, 1965). Today, public consultation is enshrined in planning policy. The Ontario Planning Act mandates the form of public consultation (Section 15) and how it is to be advertised (Section 17), but this engagement is quite minimal compared to the extensive public consultation required in Britain and Europe (Shiple & Utz, 2012).

Aside from being enshrined in legislation, this normative sentiment of public consultation as an inherent good is now presented as self-evidently true, as evidenced by the following statement by Jean Monteith: "This one thing is true, only solid consensus building results in a vision and a plan that the community will buy into and call their own ... only then does it work" (Steil & Grant, 2015). It is now commonplace in the planning

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<sup>1</sup> Rather than, "town planning" or "urban planning," this thesis uses the term "planning" to capture both the urban and rural and the various aspects of the field.

profession that plans must have public support to have any form of success (Burby, 2003).

## 1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC

While planning has largely shifted from an expert-based practice towards one that increasingly facilitates the public through strategies of consultation and engagement, the consultation process during school closure reviews has not kept up.

While public consultation is enshrined in government policy, near universally embraced by planners, and seen as an obvious necessity by those looking in on the planning profession, when examining the consultation process for Ontario school closure reviews, the story is much different. The literature on the community impacts of school closures repeatedly notes the hostile and antagonistic community consultation process (Bondi, 1987; Doern & Prince, 1989; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2005; Seasons, 2013).

Put another way, there is a disconnect between the Ontario Ministry of Education's public consultation policies during school closure reviews and the public engagement strategies formalized in the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs' land-use planning legislation policies, not to mention the even higher level and degree of public engagement practiced by contemporary planners.

School closure review processes in Ontario are highly contested and deeply divisive. Though schools are central to their host communities, the closure review process largely ignores the community impacts. There is a growing body of research into these community impacts, and this research largely agrees the public consultation and engagement component is flawed and insufficient. However, there is little research into the effects of the consultation process on the community or recommendations for appropriate consultation models and engagement strategies.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overarching research question of this thesis stems from the review of literature on school closure reviews in Ontario and beyond: why is there a continued history of

contention and conflict with school review consultations? Despite a series of updates in school review policies, the consultation process is still mired with problems: why is that? To attend to this broad question, the thesis will address the following research questions:

- During the consultation period of a school closure review, what are the main issues for concerned stakeholders?
- What are the main points of dissatisfaction with the consultation process?
- Are there models of public consultation and engagement from community planning that can address these concerns?
- What analysis can be provided by engaging the underlying theories of public consultation?
- What other benefits to the community result from meaningful public engagement during a school closure review, even if it is determined a school should close?

The thesis will fill a gap in the literature on school closures by focusing on consultation models and theories appropriate for school closure reviews and the value of public engagement to the community affected. A sustained discussion of the theories of Michel Foucault and to a lesser extent Jürgen Habermas reveal the fundamental issues at stake during the consultation process. The thesis concludes with a set of recommendations on appropriate consultation and public engagement strategies for school closure reviews.

Ultimately this thesis argues that the consultation process during school closure reviews is mired in conflict because school boards approach these reviews primarily as practices of governmentality with biopolitics as its technique. What I hope becomes clear by the final chapter is that governmentality, as a rationality of governance that produces populations through series and rates (i.e. statistics that result in speculative outcomes of the population), delineates and constrains what can be genuinely debated during consultations, but also points to aspects beyond the logic of governmentality that ought to be the focus of consultations.

## 1.3 THESIS STRUCTURE

### 1.3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Following this brief introduction, the thesis presents a review of literature, which covers five main areas:

- The role of local schools in rural communities and the history and effects of their closure;
- Ontario's evolving policies on school closure reviews;
- Consultation models and strategies from the field of planning;
- Public consultation theories; and
- The underlying theories of public consultation.

### 1.3.2 METHODS

Following the Literature Review, an overview of possible and appropriate methods are discussed. This thesis relies exclusively on qualitative methods. These methods, and the possibility of including the discussion of underlying consultation theories in the Methods chapter, are critiqued in the final chapter. Two case studies are used to focus the qualitative methods used in this thesis, i.e. interviews with people involved in school closure reviews. The thesis also briefly relies upon an analysis of a Judicial Review of the closure decision that occurred in one of the case studies.

### 1.3.3 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Findings and Analysis chapter consists of a presentation of the interviews organized by the following main themes:

- Time;
- Consultation process did not feel genuine;
- Flawed decision-making process;
- Dispute over facts and data;
- Money;
- Trustees hostile to parents;
- Positive outcomes; and
- Interview participants' recommendations.

Most themes are further organized with subthemes. This thesis provides considerable space to allow interview participants to fully express their arguments and opinions. A summary and analysis based on sources in the Literature Review is presented for each theme. Additional analyses are presented to provide a more sustained discussion of the underlying theories of Habermas and Foucault.

#### 1.3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The thesis concludes with a brief Recommendations and Conclusion chapter which concisely outlines recommendations that are justified by either the literature or the interview participants' responses. Other recommendations were considered, but only those that connect to the literature or the interviews are presented and discussed. This chapter also discusses some shortcomings and uncertainties of the thesis.



## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is structured in the following way. First, it provides an outline of how and why local schools are more than just places of learning and instruction, but are important to the broader community. The review then examines the current Ontario school review policies in a historical context, with a focus on the role of public engagement and consultation. The review then provides a review of consultation models and theories of consultation from the field of planning, and concludes with a discussion of Habermas' and Foucault's theories which are presented as underlying theories of public consultation. There are many other theories of consultation not addressed here, but it is Foucault's theories that directly address the general research question guiding this thesis: Why is there continued conflict during school review consultations?

### 2.1 ROLE OF LOCAL SCHOOLS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Before examining the consultation and engagement strategies of school closure reviews specifically and in land-use planning more broadly, it is important to outline why local schools are central to rural communities and more than just places of learning and instruction.

The importance of local schools to their host communities has been noted as far back as John Dewey's seminal work on the relationship between democracy and education (Dewey, 1964). Recent studies looking at rural schools find they provide a positive impact on both the economic and social well-being of rural communities (Lyson, 2002). The importance of local rural schools for the creation and on-going development of community is so great that it spawned what is arguably (Claridge, 2004) the first use of the term "social capital" (Hanifan, 1916). Social capital refers to the levels of trust, norms, networks, and relationships between people that lead to positive outcomes (Szreter, 2000). Research shows that local schools continue to play an important role in developing and maintaining social capital (Basu, 2004a).

Local schools provide communities with an array of social benefits (Seasons, 2013). They help communities develop and maintain a distinct identity (Downey, 2003; Harmon & Schafft, 2009; R. Irwin, 2012), and they contribute to increased community participation (Sell & Leistritz, 1997). Rural schools play a lead role in community development (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). Rural schools are a community's source of stability, pride, and central to their identity (Sher, 1981).

School closures, conversely, result in a lack of human capital and contribute to the decline or death of a community (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006). Among other things, the loss of a local school contributes to families feeling disconnected from themselves and from the broader community (Oncescu & Giles, 2012). Meanwhile, the presence of a local school contributes to community resiliency (Oncescu, 2014), meaning that communities can deal with adversity and reach a higher level of functioning (Kulig, 2000; Kulig & Edge, 2008; Kulig, Edge, Joyce, & Deer, 2008).

## 2.2 PLANNING IGNORES SCHOOLS

While some school boards have planners on staff, the literature shows that, despite the importance of local schools for their host communities, community and land-use planning virtually ignores local schools (Vincent, 2006). School boards are tasked with delivering curriculum, hiring staff, and planning and managing school buildings and land – but they are not responsible for the health or vitality of a community (B. Irwin & Seasons, 2012; R. Irwin, 2012). Municipal governments are unable to challenge decisions made by school boards because each fall within different legislative powers that have their roots in the Canadian constitution (Doern & Prince, 1989). Although municipalities existed prior to the provinces (Magnusson, 2005), a municipality is “wholly a creature of the [provincial] legislature, it has no abstract rights – it derives all powers from statute” (*Smith v London (City)*, 1909). In other words, municipalities are empowered by and subordinated to provincial legislation; they are “creatures of the province.” Schools also existed prior to the creation of provinces (or the federal government), but the implementation and management of schools remained in the

hands of townships until relatively recently (Cameron, 1972). Now, education is also directed by provincial mandates (Government of Canada, n.d.). Although both municipal government and education are now mandates of the province, these two areas have been kept separate. Section 92 of the Constitution of Canada outlines the powers of Provincial Legislatures, and lists “Municipal Institutions” as just one of many areas of jurisdiction. Section 93 solely concerns education and states that provincial legislatures “may” make laws regarding education within their own provinces. As shown below, the Province of Ontario left decisions regarding education and schools largely in the hands of local councils until relatively recently.

### 2.3 HISTORY OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

The context of current provincially mandated school closures in Ontario can be traced back to 1997 with two bills introduced by Mike Harris’ Conservative government: Bill 160, *The Education Quality Improvement Act*, and Bill 104, *The Fewer School Boards Act*. This cemented the centralization of power of education decisions: what was once largely in the hands of municipalities and local school boards came into the purview of the province (R. Irwin, 2012). The Harris government shifted the power of levying education taxes from municipalities to the province, which significantly contributed to reducing local school board autonomy when reviewing schools for closure (Kerr, 2006).

However, education “funding formulas” drastically changed in the decades leading to these two 1997 bills. Prior to the 1970s, educational costs were largely borne by municipal property taxes and, it follows, municipalities had a larger say in school closures and openings. In the late 1960s, the so-called “Smith Committee” recommended that the province fund 60% of educational costs with only the remaining 40% to be met by municipal property taxes (Mackenzie, 1998). This recommended funding formula was adopted by the Ontario government and from 1972-1975, they did, in fact, contribute 60% of education costs. While this eased the financial burden on municipalities, they lost some of their decision making autonomy.

Beginning in the late 1970s, successive governments, through a scheme called “recognized funding,” reduced actual funding year after year until the 1990s when it was revealed the province was only funding 37% of real costs (Mackenzie, 1998). This meant school boards were relying more and more on property taxes. The implication was that, since municipalities vary greatly as to how much property tax they can raise, some school boards, such as those in Toronto, were able to provide significantly more funding for schools than those in less affluent and less populous rural communities. Thus, in this context, the Harris government’s new funding formula based solely on enrolment was presented as “common sense.” This funding formula based on the number of pupils largely remains in place and therefore schools with lower enrolments receive less funding and are thus more likely to be subject to closure.

Some have blamed so-called “neoliberal” ideology for the school closures (Basu, 2004b; Sattler, 2012). Sometimes the term is used as a catch-all for the push towards efficiencies, but this hides how deep neoliberal ideology has been engrained in contemporary society. Respected political theorist Wendy Brown (2015) provides a compelling and theoretically informed definition of “neoliberalism”: a rationality in which everyone is “economized” so that human beings are understood and reckoned with as market actors and little else. It is not simply the Marxist notion that everything has become commodified, but that non-wealth generating spheres such as exercise, dating, and indeed education are understood and governed through metrics, techniques, and rationalities that were once solely for the private market. Neoliberalism developed in tandem with financialization, meaning that value is not understood in simple exchange terms but in their speculatively determined value (Shenk & Brown, 2015). Education has succumbed to neoliberal ideology not simply because of a push towards spending efficiencies, but when, for example, schools are ranked based on a variety of indicators that are used to determine the value of the school based on their speculated ability to retain and attract future enrolments. As shown below, the review criteria for a school closure is largely predicated on a school’s speculative value as determined by calculations based on financial rationalities.

## 2.4 ONTARIO SCHOOL CLOSURE CONSULTATION POLICIES

This section covers the various school closure review guidelines the province has released in 2006, 2009, 2015, and current changes released in 2018.

### 2.4.1 2006 POLICIES

In 2006, the Ministry of Education released a Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) that replaced the previous School Closures Guideline (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). This guideline was issued under the authority of paragraph 26, subsection 8(1) of the *Education Act*. This PARG was meant to ensure that the affected community would be involved when a school board reviewed a school for closure and that the review recognized the importance of schools to their host communities. As the title suggests, this guideline is just that: a guideline for school boards to create their own accommodation review policies, but there are requirements that school boards must follow. It outlines a “School Valuation Framework” which includes four categories of consideration: the value to the student, community, school board, and local economy. Priority is to be given to the student.

This 2006 guideline also states that school boards are to appoint members to an Accommodation Review Committee (ARC). Members are to be drawn from the school community, and from the broader community. It is the ARC’s responsibility to ensure all relevant information is available to the public, and it is the ARC that is responsible for the consultation process. The PARG states that consultation must be based on the four categories of the “School Valuation Framework” and “seek input and community feedback” relevant to the options for accommodating students of the school subject to review (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p4). While there are no specific guidelines for how the meetings are to be publicized, the PARG states meetings are to be “well-publicized in advance,” 60 days notice is to be given before the first meeting, and there are to be a minimum of four public meetings. The PARG only states the meetings are to be structured to encourage an open and informed exchanged and that minutes of the meetings are to be kept and made public. Conspicuous in its absence is any mention of the influence the public’s comments have on the final decision. That is, while public

meetings are to take place, there is nothing to suggest that these are actual consultations since there are no mechanisms for the public's concerns to be considered when a decision is made.

#### 2.4.2 2009 POLICIES

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a revised version of the PARG which makes minor changes to the 2006 version (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This new Guideline contains a paragraph that encourages school boards to take a long-term view for speculated enrolment and capital planning, and take into consideration opportunities for partnerships with other school boards and public organizations. This revised PARG also states that school boards are to provide ARCs with a "Terms of Reference" to outline the ARCs mandate. It also changes the "Valuation Framework" to a "School Information Profile" (SIP) but keeps the four categories of valuation (to the student, school board, community, and local economy) and keeps the priority on the student. Though there is nothing to suggest the other categories have more or less importance, it is worth noting that "school board" now comes before "community." School boards must now present at least one alternative to closure to the ARC, and the ARC is now permitted to provide its own alternative accommodation options, so long as it adheres to the Terms of Reference.

The 2009 revised PARG also makes changes to the consultation procedure. This PARG is the one in effect during the closure reviews in the two case studies outlined in section 3.8. A brief discussion of the consultation process is presented here, with more details given in section 4.2. It gives some detail as to which stakeholders are to be involved, and that it is the ARC's responsibility to ensure they are invited. Not changed is that the meetings are to be well publicized and there are to be a minimum of four meetings. Notably, though, there is some direction as to the content of the meetings: the ARC is to consult stakeholders about the SIP prepared by the school board administration and, importantly, can make changes based on these consultations. The ARC is also directed to seek input on the accommodation options and the subsequent Accommodation Report the ARC will present to the school board. Discussions, however, are confined to

the SIPs and the ARC's Terms of Reference. Further, the ARCs and school board administrators are directed to respond to questions "they consider relevant" but are not required or even suggested to give credence to the public's concerns (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 5). Clearly, the main goal of the revised PARG regarding public consultations is to make them more structured and confined to the parameters laid out in the SIPs and the Terms of Reference.

### 2.4.3 2015 POLICIES

In 2015, the Ontario Ministry of Education released two guidelines to govern "pupil accommodation reviews," which occur when it is apparent that enrolment is low and there is underutilized space in a school. One guideline is a revised PARG (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015c) and the other is a Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015b). These two guidelines replace earlier versions and are meant to address a number of issues raised during stakeholder consultations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a), and they are discussed below.

The 2015 guidelines were released in the context of the 2014-15 School Board Efficiencies and Modernization (SBEM) strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), which was based on a series of consultations with stakeholders and were directed by a set of guidelines (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The SBEM strategy was developed in response to fiscal pressures and a general trend of declining enrolment. The strategy included making better use of space in schools and partnering with co-terminus school boards and community partners. One of the policies released in 2015 was a CPPG (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015b). This replaced the 2010 Facility Partnerships Guideline, which outlined how school boards were to make use of partnerships with co-terminus school boards or local community partners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Interestingly, the SBEM addresses ARCs, but only from the perspective of school boards, which is likely the result of the consultation process not involving community members. The SBEM strategy suggests changes to the ARC to shorten the review

process because school boards find closing a school “unnecessarily difficult” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 4). In the memo accompanying the release of the new policies, it states the PARG is revised so “school boards have a more effective tool to address their needs to close and consolidate facilities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a).

The new PARG (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015c) is more than twice the length of previous PARGs, which indicates the increasing contentiousness of school closures. Overall, the new PARG is clearly designed to make the review process and the closure of schools easier and more efficient for school boards. There are changes to the role and structure of ARCs, the focus of the SIPs, the guideline for the initial school board report, the introduction of a “transition plan” if a school is closed, and a new optional modified accommodation review process. There are also exemptions – for example, there is no need for a full review if the school in question does not have any students or if a school is being built within the same attendance boundary. The ARC may provide other accommodation options than what was initially proposed by the school board, but the ARC must include supporting rationale for the alternative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015c).

The 2015 PARG makes a major change to the SIPs introduced in 2009 (what was known as the “Valuation Framework” in 2006). As noted above, in 2006 and 2009, there were four categories of valuation (to the student, school board, community, and local economy), with priority on the student. The 2015 PARG eliminates the latter two and focuses solely on the value to the student and school board. This is clearly a controversial move, as the individual school reviews up to the release of the 2015 PARG heard many concerns about the impact of a school closure on the broader community and local economy. But, rather than seeking clearer guidelines on these impacts, the Ministry simply removed them from consideration.

As regards the consultation process, the main highlight of the 2015 PARG is that school boards must consult with local municipal governments and community partners on



capital and accommodation planning relating to underused space (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a). While this might appear as compromise for dropping impacts to the community and local economy, the scope of consultations with local municipal governments and community partners is limited only to those bodies that expressed an interest in accommodation reviews *prior to* the accommodation review – before the school board makes its initial report. And the municipal government and community partners, once “invited,” must provide a written response before the first public meeting (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015c).

The 2015 PARG drops the minimum number of public meetings from four to two. There are new minimum requirements for the first meeting: an overview of the ARC orientation session along with the presentation of the initial staff report and SIPs. The 2015 PARG also drops any guideline about the content or focus of meetings or which stakeholders should be involved. However, the 2015 PARG states that the final report by the school board must include feedback received from the public meetings. While this might appear to give the community a say in the review, there is nothing in the PARG that directs the school board to take the community’s concerns into consideration – just that it needs to note and include their concerns as an appendix to the final report.

It is clear, then, that the 2015 PARG made the review process and closing of schools easier for school boards, and it reduced the required or suggested level of public engagement. Tellingly, the 2015 PARG contains a definition of “consultation”: “The sharing of relevant information as well as providing the opportunity for [stakeholders] to be heard.” As the following sections will make clear, providing information and simply hearing concerns do not constitute meaningful engagement. In fact, just giving the public a selection of information and asking for input only to simply acknowledge it and not make any impact on the final decision is likely to only antagonize the public and create more hostility and division.

#### 2.4.4 2018 POLICIES

From April to June 2017, the Ontario Ministry of Education conducted a series of consultations with ten rural communities which looked at the sustainable use of school space, decision-making around school closures, and education in rural communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017a). These consultations ended with an announcement for a new Rural and Northern Education Fund and, most notably, a moratorium on school closures (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b). While this review ultimately ended up with a moratorium on school closures, there are findings from the consultations regarding the consultation process during a closure review. Namely, the review process needs to offer the community more flexibility, the process needs to address the impacts on the community, and school boards should communicate with the public early and continuously throughout the review process. The consultations also found that the majority of the respondents were disappointed in the review process, specifically that communication between the school boards and stakeholders needs to be substantially improved (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017a).

In early March 2017, Patrick Brown, then leader of the Official Opposition Conservative party called for a moratorium on school closures (The Canadian Press, 2017). In May 2017, the lobby group, People for Education, released a report (2017) that claimed the number of schools slated to close was around 600, which is double the government's claim of 300 (Gordon, 2017). In the following three years, it was estimated that 121 schools would close, mainly affecting rural communities (People for Education, 2017). The moratorium on school closures came into effect on June 28, 2017, through an announcement by the governing Liberal party.

With the school closure moratorium in place, from October 12 to December 6, 2017, the provincial government consulted with a range of stakeholders to develop a new draft of a PARG and a CPPG. In February 2018, the Ministry of Education released a memo outlining changes to the PARG and CPPG (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018b). While a draft of the CPPG was not released, a draft of the PARG was provided (Ontario

Ministry of Education, 2018a). On April 27, 2018, a final version of the revised PARG was released “quietly” without a press conference or promotion (Reycraft, 2018).

This newly completed PARG (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018c) largely follows the draft released a few months earlier. This new PARG now requires the initial staff report to present at least three “scenarios” (and the status quo is not a required scenario) instead of “one or more options,” and that this report must follow a Ministry-approved template, which is to be released in the fall of 2018. For each of these scenarios, the staff report is to outline the anticipated impacts to student programming, student well-being, school board resources, and (revived from the 2009 PARG) the local community. This impact on the local community must also address the impact on the local economy if one of the schools under review are eligible for money through the Rural and Northern Education Fund, but school boards are free to include economic impact in all cases. If the impact to the local economy is to be addressed, then it must follow a Ministry-approved template which is still under development.

There are a number of changes to the consultation process. The minimum number of meetings increased from two to three, and the final staff report must include a section that contains feedback from the ARC and all public consultation meetings. The new PARG also adds a requirement that the final report contain a summary of the feedback received from secondary school students if the review involves a secondary school, but it is left to local school boards to decide how to elicit that feedback. School boards are also required to invite responses from local municipalities (both lower and upper tier) and other “community partners” within five days of the school board’s decision to conduct a review. This meeting, and the inclusion of the feedback, must be conducted and included prior to the first public meeting. This first public meeting cannot occur until 40 (up from 30) business days from the day the school board decides to conduct a review. In addition, the minimum time between the first and final of the three public meetings has increased from 40 to 60 business days.

## 2.5 CRITICISM OF ONTARIO SCHOOL CLOSURE CONSULTATION PROCEDURE

Even with the recent changes (perhaps improvements) to the consultation component of the PARG, we can anticipate some criticisms. These will be discussed in subsequent chapters, but it is worth noting that the consultation process starts only after a school board has decided a school should undergo a closure review, and that feedback from municipalities and the public is only to be included in a section of the final report, with nothing enforcing or encouraging the school board to take that feedback into account when making a decision. Thus, during school closure reviews, there is still a need for a more meaningful consultation process (Seasons, 2013). Arguments that the closure process has limited flexibility and manipulates the public participation process (Doern & Prince, 1989) are still valid. And even older studies that find instances where the public participation process is manipulated to fragment opposition to the closure (Bondi, 1987) are still of concern. Fredua-Kwarteng's (2005) more recent study of Ontario school closures is still relevant since it found communities feel ownership of their local school and the closure review process was a one-way communication process rather than a public participatory experience. Fredua-Kwarteng (2005) notes that the public participation process was used simply to give the appearance of public involvement in a decision that was made by school boards without any public influence, which is her interpretation of Foucault's theory of "governmentality."

One of the main purposes of this thesis is to see if the problems in the consultation process during a closure review can be addressed through models of consultation from the field of planning. The following section outlines the broad shift in planning from an expert-based 'top down' practice to a participatory 'bottom up' model and the associated models of public consultation.

## 2.6 PLANNING FROM TOP-DOWN TO BOTTOM-UP

Until relatively recently, planning has been done in a top-down manner (Lane, 2005). Along with the work of Patrick Geddes, the earliest and most famous example of this form of top-down planning was from England: Ebenezer Howard's Garden City (Hall,

1992; Lane, 2005). Howard's plan was to establish settlement areas that separated land uses so that factories and their pollution were of a good distance from residential areas (Howard, 2003). Garden Cities would, as the name suggests, provide ample greenspace and fresh air, but also provide the urban aspects that draw people to cities. Lewis Mumford praises Howard's proposal for achieving a proper balance of urban and rural, and for its "sound sociological conception of the dynamics of rational urban growth" (1938, p. 398).

While Howard did not use the term, his Garden City is an example of what came to be known as the "comprehensive model" of planning. The "comprehensive model" of planning refers to developing long-range plans for an entire city or region that address and account for every function that makes the city or region work or affect its physical form (Goodman, 1968; Innes, 1996). There is also the "rational comprehensive model" which follows the framework of the "comprehensive model," but insists that objectives be clarified and all competing objectives are evaluated, and then the best method is chosen (Innes, 1996; Lindblom & Braybrooke, 1963).

The comprehensive model, "rational" or not, casts such a wide net that it captures just about every community plan from the turn of the century to the post-war era and beyond. This model is predicated on a type of "scientific" knowledge held by "experts" who claimed to be in a position to know what is best for all people affected by their plans. Unsurprisingly, just as proponents of this comprehensive model began articulating its purpose and value, it was subject to a devastating critique. In the 1960s, Altshuler (1965a, 1965b) argued that comprehensive planning is not practical or politically viable and comprehensive planners lack professional legitimacy and would need much more knowledge than most can reasonably claim in order to provide a plan that accounts for all functions of a city and all possible ways for objectives to be met, now and into the future.

The critique of the comprehensive model led to other forms of planning, such as advocacy (Davidoff, 1965) and the "mixed-scanning" approach (Etzioni, 1967). These

approaches move away from the expert-based comprehensive models. Public consultation and engagement models, however, are essentially opposite to the comprehensive models. Whereas the comprehensive models rest on a foundation of expert knowledge and a scientific method to address the issues of community planning, public consultation models look to the community for guidance and support of community planning decisions (Dalton, 1986). In a different light, comprehensive models of community planning stem from a notion of the intentional subject who seeks to control, arrange, and discipline the inherent messiness, joys, and pain – the life – of the community. Comprehensive models are attempts to “calm down” the life of cities. In contrast, planning with public consultation models affirm the complexity of human social life.

As noted in the Introduction, planning historians often point to the late 1950s when Jane Jacobs famously spearheaded the movement to stop Robert Moses’ plan for the Lower Manhattan Expressway as the pivotal moment between planners and the public (Shiple & Utz, 2012). However, Lane (2005) argues that in the mid-1990s planning literature was still replete with complaints about the limited opportunities for public involvement in planning, but that within a decade the shift to public participation models was well underway.

Whereas the comprehensive model was once just what planning was, now the normative sentiment of public consultation as an inherent good is presented as self-evident. As Jean Monteith puts it: “This one thing is true, only solid consensus building results in a vision and a plan that the community will buy into and call their own ... only then does it work” (Steil & Grant, 2015). It is now commonplace in the community planning profession that plans must have public support to have any form of success. Burby (2003) argues that plans which do not sufficiently engage the affected citizenry are “dead on arrival,” meaning they do not have enough public support for elected officials to endorse.

Thus, in broad strokes, there has been a major shift in planning. Of course this historical shift is not total, nor is there a complete break with the past. In fact, the practice of planning often draws from a variety of the approaches noted above; depending on the situation, planners still draw from the rational comprehensive model, while also consulting with stakeholders (Day, 1997). Nonetheless, whereas planning was once largely practiced by individuals as a particular knowledge-action (or “power-knowledge” as discussed below) that seeks to know, arrange, separate, and discipline all land uses, planning now largely eschews that practice in favour of consulting, engaging, and collaborating with the public to either initiate or incorporate their stated needs and desires into land use planning decisions. In short, “government has been replaced with governance” (Lane, 2005, p. 283). And the primary role of the community planner has shifted from expert to facilitator, from output to input, from knower to learner, while engaging in mutual learning (Friedmann, 1987; Friedmann & Hudson, 1974).

As planning has largely shifted from an expert-based, top-down practice to one that consults and engages with the public, the following section outlines some of the more well-known and often-used models of consultation.

## 2.7 PUBLIC CONSULTATION MODELS

A common phrase among practicing planners involved in consultations is “consult early and consult often.” Unfortunately, there is little academic literature on this maxim. Some authors briefly touch on the idea that those consulted ought to be brought into the process at an appropriate, early time (Arnstein, 1969; Burby, 2003; Gray, 1989). However, there are non-academic sources that discuss the issue (Association for Project Management, n.d.; Javaheri & Boyco, 2016). These non-academic sources do not delve deeply into why it is worthwhile, just to state that it helps to build relationships and trust, which will likely be of value if conflict arises. However, the trouble with the first part of the maxim (i.e. engage early) is that it does not provide a precise time-frame that can be applied. Javaheri & Boyco (2016) suggest that consultation begins at the beginning or early stages of processes, which does provide a general guideline.

If planners do not involve the various “publics” in their consultations, it is very likely that they will only be talking with other planners and/or experts. This has the consequence of plans and discussions being laden with jargon and taken-for-granted assumptions (Burby, 2003). If forced to explain a plan or project to the general public, planners will have to make their case clear and understandable. This means planners will have to approach their own plans as an outsider and explain and justify ideas and arrangements that planners and other experts take for granted.

Aside from encouraging planners to clarify their plans, public consultation also allows the planner to tap into the “local knowledge” of citizens (Burby, 2003). So, while increasing the possibility that the plan will go forward, consulting and including the public also has the advantage of making the plan better by drawing on these local knowledges. This is particularly important when a plan affects the sense of, or attachment to, a specific place (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). While many are quick to dismiss those who oppose locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) as selfish NIMBYs (Not In My Backyard), those who care about and cherish their neighbourhood can be powerful allies for planners. While BANANAs (Build Absolutely Nothing Around or Near Anything) are not particularly helpful to planners or the community, those who care about the fabric of their community can often provide creative solutions to planners that will not only gain support by community members but also work to strengthen the character and livability of neighbourhoods and cities (Schively, 2007). Put simply, those who oppose a particular project or land use often have a valid point and should not be dismissed as self-interested or short-sighted, and, if their concerns are addressed, the project will benefit.

Shiple and Utz (2012) provide a nearly comprehensive overview of 154 articles and books that discuss various techniques and models for public consultation. They note that, at the time of publication, the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) hosts a database with 211 entries; less than a dozen of those are discussed in their study. Furthermore, the 154 articles and books are from the ten to fifteen years prior to their 2012 study. All this is to say: there is an overwhelming amount of literature



on models and techniques for public consultation. Shipley and Utz (2012) organize the 154 articles and books into three categories: theory and rationale for public participation, approaches to conducting consultation and facilitating participation, and analysis and evaluation of participation. In the following sections, this thesis will discuss some of the broader underlying theories, and while the evaluation of various consultation processes is beyond the scope of the study, the focus in this section will be on the second category, particularly the approaches to conducting consultations that would be appropriate for school closure reviews.

Shipley and Utz (2012) find eleven approaches to public consultation. The first approach concerns the role power plays when consulting with, or getting participation from, special groups. Thus, planners need to be mindful of what groups or individuals are included in the consultation process, and that everyone involved is able to express their interests and opinions. The profiling of participants can help lend an understanding of those who are interested in the issue, but also those who may be interested but lack a level of education to understand the process or issues, and there may also be those whose socioeconomic background may discourage them from participating.

Shipley and Utz (2012) note that many practitioners attempt to have a variety of participation strategies for a single issue. Thomas (1995) recommends greater participation when the acceptance of the decision is important, and less participation when the quality of the decision is more important. Berman (1997) argues that a greater number of participation strategies results in less cynicism from those involved. Public meetings are the most common strategy of participation (Shipley & Utz, 2012). Section 17.15 d) of Ontario's *Planning Act* requires only one public meeting before adopting a new official plan (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 1990). Many (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005; G. Brown & Chin, 2013; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2005; Yiftachel, 1998) criticize public meetings for being ineffective and lending themselves to unnecessary conflict. Even supporters, like Adams (2004) can only say they offer a good way to convey information to the public (not receive the public input) and help set political agendas.

Citizen juries and focus groups are other consultation approaches that can make up for the limitations of surveys and public meetings (Shiple & Utz, 2012). A citizen jury is much like a court jury, which hears evidence from various “witnesses” and either makes or contributes to the final decision. While citizen juries present the problem of moving away from full public participation in favour of selecting a few people, focus groups are also limiting because they are used to collect data on more general or abstract planning issues, not a specific issue at hand (Vogt, King, & King, 2004).

In terms of categorizing those involved in a consultation, Toews (2013) offers a “tier system” in which those involved are “sorted” into groups based on established criteria such as their level of knowledge, their degree of interest in the project, or the degree to which they will likely be affected by the project. Once sorted into tiers, participants would receive appropriate notifications and levels and kinds of information.

Shiple and Utz (2012) discuss scenario workshops and visioning, but more appropriate to school closure reviews is the model of collaboration. According to Gray (1989), collaboration is an approach to consultation in which participants are to explore the issue, understand problems, and search for solutions that are beyond their own interests. The purpose is to have participants understand the issue from multiple perspectives and seek resolutions that are mutually beneficial. Similarly, consensus building approaches are those that seek to bring together people with disparate interests and diverse viewpoints. Based on the work of Innes (1996), we will see below how consensus building follows the Habermassian belief in communicative rationality and seeks an ideal or best possible decision.

Lastly, Shiple and Utz (2012) express hope that internet-based models of consultation would more fully democratize public participation. Evans-Cowley (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010) is one of the leading researchers on new communication technologies for public consultation, however the rate of technological change has far outpaced the process of academic research and publishing. While many articles (Ertiö, 2015; Horelli, Saad-Sulonen, Wallin, & Botero, 2015; Kleinhans, Van Ham, & Evans-Cowley, 2015;

Sieber, 2006; Tayebi, 2013) express various forms of technological utopianism, the current political climate does not live up to the hope of social media simply “allowing” people to engage the political process, but rather we see the political process distorted and manipulated (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017; Graber & Dunaway, 2017). Nonetheless, Facebook groups and email lists continue to allow groups of likeminded individuals to discuss and share information and organize to advance their interests (Ertiö, 2015; Innes & Booher, 2004; Kleinhans et al., 2015).

The vast majority of scholarly articles on public engagement or consultation examine subjects such as the processes or strategies of engagement (Renn, Webler, Rakel, Dienel, & Johnson, 1993; Rowe & Frewer, 2005), how to increase participation (Clary & Snyder, 2002; Patten, 2000), or provide the underlying virtues of participation in the process (Innes & Booher, 2004). Seldom are the outcomes or decisions investigated to determine the degree to which the public’s input affects the final decision (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005; G. Brown & Chin, 2013; Yiftachel, 1998). Unfortunately, when the public’s influence on the final decision is studied, it is often found to have little force (G. Brown & Chin, 2013). Loh (2012) suggests the disconnect between public input and final decision rests in the movement from one document or agency to the next during the entire process. However, more starkly, Bedford, Clark & Harrison (2002) argue that the political realities of the planning system inhibit decision makers from integrating the public’s input into final decisions.

Halvorsen (2003) finds that well-designed, quality public participation meetings are more likely to produce participants who trust the final decision was responsive to their concerns. However, Halvorsen (2003) does not include any data as to whether or not these final decisions did or to what degree they were shaped by the public’s input. Other studies (Kathlene & Martin, 1991) show that longer, more sustained engagement overcomes the limitations to public participation and lends itself to more fully incorporating the participants’ input into the final decision. Thus, while various jurisdictions and decision-making processes contain minimum thresholds for consulting the public, few have explicit rules for how the public’s input is to be addressed in the

final decision (Shiple & Utz, 2012). This has led some (Metzger, 2017) to voice skepticism of the consultation process as a marketing ploy or feel-good exercise to justify final decisions. Bickerstaff and Walker (2005), critical of the Habermasian ideals of communicative rationality, conducted research into the outcomes of public consultation and deliberative strategies. They determined that, although public consultation rhetoric and processes are on the rise, there is little change in implemented policy because participants' input is not incorporated into those decisions. The authors blame this on permanent power relations in which the government officials performed the process of consultation as though they were forced by legislation and did not incorporate the public's concerns into the final decision.

When seeking to provide a clear set of rules or guidelines for consultations, the general consensus is clearly summarized as "We find it neither feasible nor advisable to generate 'rules' or a step-by-step design template for organizing public participation" (Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2012). This conclusion is the result of a wide-ranging review of available models and strategies. Instead of set of rules or templates, these authors find the best practice is "iterative," meaning that the process itself is continually revisited and improved. While these authors suggest they do not have a set of rules, ensuring consultation processes and models are iterative is sound advice for other planners.

## 2.8 PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT THEORY

This section looks beyond the models of consultation and digs into the underlying theories of public consultation. This section first provides a justification for theory itself, then discusses some theories of consultation from the field of planning. Since Habermas is the touchstone theorist for nearly all planning consultation theory, a deeper analysis of his work is presented as well as "collaborative planning" theorists who are explicit in their allegiance to him. The discussion follows contemporary criticisms of Habermas in planning scholarship that have turned to the work of Michel Foucault, which is aligned with an established trend in philosophy known as the

“Foucault/Habermas debate.” Furthermore, a sustained discussion of Foucault’s theories is presented in anticipation of the interviewees’ responses in the Findings and Analysis chapter below (that the school review consultations were far from collaborative, but rather full of conflict).

Put another way, the consultation models presented above, and the Habermasian “collaborative planning” theories discussed below are only of limited help in understanding the consultation processes in which the interviewees participated (as discussed in the Findings and Analysis chapter). As well, this thesis argues there are other aspects of Foucault’s theories not addressed by planning literature that are more appropriate to explain and understand the consultation process in school reviews and in planning consultations more broadly. Foucault’s theories allow for a much more compelling account of what consultation means, situated in broad historical shifts. Foucault illuminates how the “public” that is consulted is not simply “identified” as though it were simply there, but is produced in specific ways, and this knowledge can inform and guide the practice of consultation. This section ultimately finds that planning and public consultation are partly practices of governmentality with biopolitics as their techniques.

### 2.8.1 WHY THEORY?

The underlying theories of public consultation are important. A central argument of this thesis is that theories can provide a means of understanding consultation models, such as categorizing models that assume consensus as a goal, in contrast to those that note inherent and possibly unresolvable conflict. Theories can help to illuminate why public consultation has become important to planning. Theories also lend themselves to our understanding of why certain consultation models seem to “make sense” to us while others raise a level of skepticism or concern. All consultation models, whether explicitly stated or not, in fact rely on theories of community, communication, outcomes, decision making, and more.

Kant addressed the role of theory on a more fundamental level in his often-cited 1793 essay “On the common saying: ‘This may be true in theory but it does not apply in practice,’” in which he writes: “It is therefore not the fault of the theory if it is of little practical use ... The fault is that there is not *enough* theory” [emphasis original] (Kant, 1970, p. 61). His point is that a theory which does not work in practice is missing experience and experimentation to improve or perfect the theory. He continues:

No-one can pretend to be practically versed in a branch of knowledge and yet treat theory with scorn, without exposing the fact that he is an ignoramus in his subject. He no doubt imagines that he can get further than he could through theory if he gropes around in experiments and experiences, without collecting certain principles (which in fact amount to what we term theory) (Kant, 1970, p. 62).

While Kant’s remarks are somewhat humorous, the point is nonetheless valid. Experiences, experiments, and points of data require interpretation and organization based on a set of principles or an integral whole. Moreover, when points of data do not align with previous data or experience, this is when theory is necessary for interpretation and explanation.

It is worth noting that the general shift from comprehensive to participatory models of planning (and continued debate between the two) is fundamentally connected to the basic philosophical question of politics: How do we want to live and organize ourselves? It is somewhat striking that this shift in planning from the rule of experts to the rule of the community mirror the Ancient Greek debate between the rule of the elites (*ἀριστοκρατία*) and the rule of the people (*δημοκρατία*) – between aristocracy and democracy. The comprehensive models tend towards control, efficiency, and order, whereas the participatory models embrace the complexities and contingencies of human life (Baum, 1999).

If one were interested in philosophically informed arguments for and against the rule of the people, an analysis of Plato’s *Republic* (1991 [380BCE]) and Aristotle’s *Politics* (1988 [330BCE]) alone would provide enough material for a book-length study. A

different and more sustained analysis of democracy is found in various Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu (1989 [1748]) and Rousseau (1997 [1762]), along with the rights of “man” as articulated by Locke (1988 [1690]).

Philosophy and theory can help us step back from the models that are intended to produce good public consultation, look at what is at stake, and question why consultations happen at all. As suggested above, school closure consultations are connected to a democratic impulse to involve the community in the decision-making processes.

However, the existing literature on models of public consultation, particularly those based on Habermasian theory, are only of limited help to explain the school review consultation processes in this thesis’ two case studies. Far from “collaborative” or attempting to come to a common understanding, these consultations are mired in conflict and disingenuity. Turning to the underlying theories of consultation proves of some help, but theories that cut to the heart of how the public is constituted and of rationalities of governance provide a much more compelling account of the situations and lend themselves to more relevant and practical recommendations.

#### 2.8.2 PLANNING’S CONSULTATION THEORY

This thesis argues that the theories of Habermas and Foucault are, or at least should be, central to the debates around consultation, but other planning theorists have taken different and worthwhile approaches. This thesis will provide a sustained discussion of Habermas and Foucault in relation to planning and public consultation, but the immediate focus will be on literature that, while theoretically informed, focuses on consultation strategies and models.

Arnstein’s (1969) ladder metaphor is normally cited as one of the earliest instances that outlines the degree or depth of citizen participation. At one end of the ladder is full citizen control, and at the other end is manipulation of the citizenry by planners and politicians, with 6 “rungs” between the two. As will be clearer below, Habermas’ goals of communicative action and Healey’s collaborative planning are at one end of Arnstein’s

ladder, with the Foucauldian “dark side” at the other. Clearly, few wish to fully manipulate the public but, despite what Habermas might lead us to believe, full citizen control of the planning process is not usually viable nor desired. While this full control of stakeholders might work well for something like a housing co-op, when it comes to city plans, it is the municipality that is ultimately responsible for funding the project and ensuring public safety and well-being (Hodge & Gordon, 2014). Thus, it is on one or two of the rungs between these two extremes that most public participation occurs. The rung of “informing” is only two steps from manipulation, which should remind planners that public consultation meetings need to do much more than simply inform the affected stakeholders of what is going to happen. Closer to full citizen control are “delegated power” and “partnership,” the latter of which seems to be the ideal that planners wish to reach. In examining the history of public participation in decision making, Lane (2005) finds that the level of public participation in planning is largely determined by the nature of the project being undertaken. For example, advocacy planning has always involved the public a great deal, whereas the development of official or comprehensive plans have only recently begun to formalize a process of involving the public, sometimes still in limited ways.

However, Arnstein’s ladder metaphor has its limitations. Conner (1988) outlines some of these limitations and provides a different set of “rungs,” which include “mediation,” “litigation,” and “resolution/prevention” as the top three rungs. While this engagement with Arnstein is helpful, Conner’s criticism stems from a claim that the original ladder distributes power too neatly, and that it ignores the imbalance of “power holders” (1988, p. 250). However, as discussed above, there is little evidence or theoretical reasoning to support the notion that power is an object that can be held or possessed. While this might seem like a minor point, the role of power in public consultation is paramount, and it is necessary to insist that power be treated as a relation, not as an object to be possessed. Power is not something external to the consultation process, but inherent to it.



Developing a “partnership” with concerned citizens can be achieved in a variety of ways, and recent practices have become increasingly creative and effective. When we think about developing a partnership between planners and stakeholders, two terms often reappear: “dialogue” and “relationship.” “Dialogue” emphasizes that planners need to refrain from simply informing the public of their plans and instead spend more time listening than speaking to concerned stakeholders (Sandercock, 2004).

That planners need to develop a “relationship” with those affected is more difficult as it something that takes time to develop. At a panel at the 2016 OPPI Symposium on the duty to consult with First Nations, the notion of relationship arose over and over again. Those on all sides of the table insist that coming to a First Nations community to “inform” them of a new plan, development, bylaw, etc. would not generate desired outcomes. Instead, long-term relationships need to be established so that First Nations are not blindsided by a new project but are instead consulted from the very early stages and continue to be consulted throughout the process. While First Nations have a different status than others involved (i.e. they are not merely stakeholders but sovereign nations, as enshrined in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution), planners ought to build long-term relationships with other stakeholders whenever possible (Sandercock, 2004; Shipley & Utz, 2012). These would include, for example, the politicians that seek out and consider planners’ advice, along with members of the development community, resident and neighbourhood associations, and other groups planners expect will have a stake in their plans and proposals.

A short article (1997) by the influential geographer David Harvey provides a broader overview of the role of consultation. While his argument that “cities” are largely ignored by academic social analysis is no longer the case, his attempt to re-introduce the importance of cities into social analysis addresses the fundamental role of consultation. He discusses this through the concepts of “process and form” (Harvey, 1997, p. 20). He argues that process takes precedence over form and that process determines form. Furthermore, he, following Giddens (1979, 1995), argues that space and time are not simply constituted by, but are rather constitutive of, social processes.

What does this have to do with public consultations? Harvey argues that a decision of urban construction (i.e. a *space*) is one that has consequences for a long *time*. Harvey gives the example of a nuclear power station. The decision to build one ought to be made by the entire community, for it is a use of space that will have long-lasting consequences. However, he rightly notes that if something goes wrong with the power plant, we cannot “discuss democratically what to do about it” (Harvey, 1997, p. 23). Were such a thing to happen, and it likely will, it will be a decision left to expert knowledge and expert decision-making. Harvey’s ultimate point is that the decision to build a nuclear power plant is undemocratic, no matter how it is arrived at, because it entrenches a non-democratic social process to support it.

We may disagree with Harvey’s characterization of such a decision, but he does force us to consider the limits of public consultation. That is, there are certain social processes (such as the establishment of a school system) that lend themselves to a non-democratic social process. More simply, the establishment of a school system depends on expert knowledges that ensure its survival. Certainly, there are some aspects of the school functioning that could be democratically decided, but it is also an institution that is founded on, and can thus be terminated (closed) by expert knowledge. As shown above, there is a plethora of models and strategies for public consultation, but it is worthwhile to keep the limits of public consultation in mind.

### 2.8.3 HABERMAS AND THE COMMUNICATIVE TURN IN PLANNING

As planning has come to accept consultation as the desired form, many have turned to the work of Jürgen Habermas – not for theoretical justification, but for analysis of public participation (Harris, 2005).

In 1995, planning scholar Judith Innes (1995) identified the emergence of a new paradigm of planning theory. By “paradigm” she meant a body of work in which scholars refer to each other’s works, address common concerns, and agree on some fundamental principles. The bulk of this new paradigm extends from the work of Patsy Healey (1992) and John Forester (1989) who, Innes argues, developed a

communicative action approach to planning based on Habermasian theory. Healey (1997) termed this “collaborative planning,” a broad notion in which segments of the public participate in a variety of policy developments. In an attempt to assist the extraction of planning from the modernist rationalist paradigm, Healey (1997) offers the collaborative model to rethink the three forms of planning: economic planning, physical development, and policy analysis. Healey (1998) has utilized her collaborative planning model to engage with the placemaking tradition. She has also analyzed placemaking policies through “institutionalism,” which refers not to the structures of formal institutions, but rather to the established ways of addressing certain social issues, including planning (Healey, 1999). Much of Healey’s earlier work involves the analysis of communication in planning, such as how those involved in spatial planning come to understand the complex environments in which they work (Healey, 1996). Specifically, she has analyzed development plans to identify the meaning-making systems within them to show how the discourse of a community is reflected in development plans (Healey, 1993).

As Innes puts it, earlier planning theorists like Healey and Forrester “map the future terrain of planning” (1995, p. 183). While Innes appears to express some satisfaction in this “mapping,” it is worth noting this is indeed “a fundamental shift in the world view of planning theorists” (ibid): planning theories related to public consultation became somewhat confined within a Habermasian discourse. That is, aspects of Habermas’ theory came to dominate planning theory and had an enormous effect on what types of questions and concerns planning theorists would pursue and the parameters and forms analysis and answers could take (Harris, 2005).

#### 2.8.3.1 HABERMAS’ THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Habermas’ theory of communication is what planning theorists have been drawn toward, so it is worthwhile to explain his theory and why planning theorists have picked it up. This section discusses Habermas’ theory of “universal pragmatics,” which concisely outlines his theory of communicative action.

Habermas has written on topics such as ethics, pragmatics, science, and was once part of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Arguably, his most well-known work is *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), which is, in fact, a wide-ranging history of sociology. While his philosophy of communication underpins his interpretation of the history of sociology, English readers can find his theory of communicative action articulated in precise, if dense, terms in his *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979). As shown below, planning theorists, particularly those concerned with collaborative planning, have focused on his philosophy of communication, not his historical analysis of sociology.

For Habermas (1979, p. 1), the purpose of universal pragmatics is to identify the universal conditions of understanding. Part of his theoretical framework is the fundamental principle that all social actions, such as conflict, competition, ritual, etc., are really about people seeking a common understanding, and this understanding is primarily, if not exclusively, reached through language-based communication. Universal pragmatics captures his theory of how language is to be used to reach understanding. Under the concept of “the validity basis of speech,” he argues that anyone seeking genuine communication and understanding must follow these four validity claims: uttering something understandable, providing something to understand, making themselves understandable, and coming to an understanding with another person (Habermas, 1979, p. 2). Habermas is very clear that the speaker “must” be comprehensible to the other, and that the speaker “must” intend on speaking a “true” proposition, and speak those things so that the hearer can come to clear understanding of the utterance (ibid.). All of this is done within a recognized normative background (i.e. a *formal* set of preconceptions regarding truth, reason, and reality) and a “background consensus” (generally, that both parties follow the four validity claims). The goal is for the speaker and hearer to come to an understanding, and to bring about an agreement of reciprocal understanding.

### 2.8.3.2 THE INFLUENCE OF THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION ON PLANNING

It is unsurprising that this type of ideal communication appeals to those interested in collaborative planning or public consultation and engagement. Habermas provides an ideal type of communication and discussion that many planners would readily welcome in their practice. Along with his universal pragmatics, Habermas (1990) also provides a rigid theory of what became known as the “ideal speech situation” – a set of circumstances and principles within which people may debate to achieve understanding and further the principles and aims of democracy. Habermas (1984) also went to lengths to critique the rise of instrumental rationality, how this rationality overtook our essential ability to reason, and how power and money distort social communication. These critiques and ideals of Habermas stuck a chord with some very influential planning theorists, most notably Forester and Healey. Forester (1989) developed a theory of communicative planning which blends together Habermassian ideal speech and later theories of language and meaning. Healey (1992, 1997, 1998) took up Habermas to develop her theory of collaborative planning to prescribe how communication ought to occur when segments of the public participate in a variety of policy developments.

Harris (2005) argues that this “communicative turn” in planning reflects the broader shift from the classic rational model to models that involve or depend on public consultation and input. Healey (1992b) uses this phrase “communicative turn” to emphasize the shift that has occurred in planning *theory* – i.e. how to develop and establish meaningful communication between planners and the public, rather than develop a planning theory which might complement or be an alternative to top-down rational planning models. Put another way, the communicative turn in planning is not so much presented as a theory but as a world view, or as Healey (1997, p. 7) herself puts it, a “form” of planning. That is, collaborative planning that resulted from the communicative turn is understood as a sort of neutral practice, as a non-political, non-debated form of planning. As with anything that appears to have escaped criticism or is not subject to debate, we ought to be suspicious. As Butler (1994, p. 4) puts it, anything presenting itself outside the

possibility of debate is an “authoritarian ruse,” or politics *par excellence*. Indeed, Sandercock (1998, p. 96) has questioned whether Habermassian communicative action really is a departure from the rational comprehensive models of planning, and Taylor (1998, p. 152) argues that it is, in fact, just a continuation of these rational models.

Harris (2005) outlines some of the lines of critique of collaborative planning. One has been to level the same critiques against rational planning to collaborative planning, and others have disputed the interpretation of Habermas by planning theorists. But on a much more basic level, one may take issue with collaborative planning informed by communicative action, ideal speech situations, and other Habermassian ideals because they are just that – ideals. Habermas is clear that he is not concerned with “strategic action,” only communicative action that sets rules for discussion, and that parties involved *ought* to aim for understanding. This *might* be a good ideal or goal for planners (although we could rightly question why Habermas gets to set the rules), but his model of communicative action is rarely followed during planning consultations. Rather than arguments based on evidence and sound reasoning with an attempt to reach common understanding, public consultations are often plagued by obstinance, disingenuity, manipulation of facts, appeals to emotion, rhetoric, and sophistry (Baum, 1999; Berman, 1997; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 1996) – what Habermas dismisses as “strategic action” or laments as the guiding features of rationality that trades in power and money.

Nonetheless, Habermas’ ideal form of communication is an admirable benchmark. Granted, the rules and procedures are subject to critique and can be improved, but planners would do well to *aim* for such communicative action in their work, at least on their end. Planners would find it useful to take this Habermassian position when engaging the public, even if members of the public do not. That said, as with all universal positions, planners ought to be aware of who or what these Habermassian rules and procedures exclude and seek to alter the rules and procedures to limit exclusion.

### 2.8.3.3 CRITICISMS OF HABERMAS' THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

This communicative action, whereby two people seek to come to an understanding, is much different than strategic action, whereby a speaker does not follow the four validity claims and seeks to alter the other's understanding through falsehoods, exaggeration, rhetorical persuasion, or other such methods. Habermas simply states he is "leaving aside" strategic action and does not discuss it (Habermas, 1979, p. 4). He does, however, make it clear he is concerned with the "formal processes of language use from the viewpoint of formal analysis" (Habermas, 1979, p. 7). By this, Habermas is referring to a structural understanding of linguistics and language, not to the *content* or actual use of language. As Habermas puts it, he is looking at language through a "formal analysis," not the "empirical-analytical procedures" (Habermas, 1979, p. 8). In simpler terms, he is concerned with the formal, not actual, processes of language. Even simpler: the *ought*, not the *is*.

While we might forgive or understand Habermas' narrow focus here, more difficult to accept are his assumptions about intention and meaning. He states, without any qualification, that "by using a sentence that reports an observation, I can describe the observed aspect of reality" (Habermas, 1979, p. 10). Making such a claim in the late twentieth century ignores hundreds, even thousands, of years of serious philosophical debate on human understanding of reality and the relation between intention and reception. Moreover, he appears to be dismissing the prevailing European philosophical positions of the time: that one can never be sure that what is intended is what is received – that the letter arrives at its destination (Derrida, 1975) – let alone whether the subject is fully aware of, or even has, such a specific intention (Lacan, 2006).

### 2.8.3.4 THE LIMITS OF HABERMAS AND THE TURN TO FOUCAULT

The obstacles to communicative action during consultations (obstinance, disingenuity, manipulation of facts, appeals to emotion, rhetoric, sophistry, etc.) are described as uneven power relations by Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2005), which they term "the dark side of planning." Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2005) argue that Habermasian planning theory is too idealistic and misses the "reality" or role of power in planning. Generally,

this line of critical inquiry states that while we might want a Habermasian consensus, this consensus is rarely achieved. That we “strive” for consensus betrays that we do not often achieve it. Thus Flyvbjerg and other similar planning theorists turn to Foucault to understand this aspect of planning and consultation – i.e. where there is debate and disagreement, where communication is not neutral, and where there are power struggles at work.

Employing Foucault in a critique of Habermas follows an earlier, broader trend in philosophy: the so-called “Foucault/Habermas debate,” even though they never actually debated. In the early 1980s, the two did intend to debate in person, but Foucault passed away in 1984. Habermas’ essay “Taking aim at the heart of the present” (1986) was originally meant to set up the debate, but it was edited in light of Foucault’s passing. The context and issues of the debate are well-documented and discussed in the discipline of philosophy and in relation to theory more broadly (Kelly, 1994). Kelly’s edited book presents writings from Foucault and Habermas along with other contemporary thinkers on the major points of disagreement between the two theorists. For those interested, Allen (2009) clearly outlines the contours of the debate (and even questions if it is worthwhile having).

Essentially, the debate concerns the theorists’ responses to Kant’s essay “What is Enlightenment?” in which Foucault casts Enlightenment as a historical attitude while Habermas sees it as a universal foundation for morality and ethics. Flyvbjerg (2000) himself has intervened in the debate, arguing it presents a split between the ideals of consensus and the reality of conflict. The “debate” is almost as old as dichotomies themselves: whereas Habermas argues there are universal formal conditions of human understanding and communication, Foucault sees such conditions as historically and culturally specific ontological and epistemological positions masquerading as formal truths; they are the products of power-knowledge.

As Allen (2009) shows, the disagreements sometimes led to interesting discussions, but also led to entrenched camps, partisanship, and even petty attacks. But this thesis is



focused on planning and consultation, and in the field of planning, the debate is set up as a set of formal principles for consensus and agreement on one side, and on the other, an insistence on the role of power and unequal relations. Put another way, some planning scholars bank on Habermas to provide a universal foundation for open and honest consultation in which there is clear communication and understanding between the parties, while other planning scholars see this as too ideal or utopic and take up Foucault and Foucauldian scholars as a way to understand the conflicts and relations of power at work during public consultation processes. And this is partly why this thesis focuses on Foucault: his theories are more appropriate to understand the long-running conflicts in school closure review consultations.

The following sections discuss this power/conflict aspect of Foucault's work, but also present additional aspects of his work that, I argue, provide a rich and compelling analysis of the consultation processes in the two case studies. Foucault's theories of biopolitics and governmentality provide an explanation of how the provincial government and school boards frame, understand, and value schools when reviewed for closure. This helps to define what is – and what is not – up for debate in school closure reviews.

#### 2.8.4 FOUCAULT'S INFLUENCE ON PLANNING

Following Flyvbjerg's earlier analysis (1996), Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2005) show that the rationality of planning is one of conflict so that the focus should shift from what *ought* to be done to what is *actually* done. To gain a better sense of this "reality" or what "actually" happens, one might turn to Yiftachel (1998) who, using some of Foucault's theories, argues that planning is a practice of control and oppression. However, as shown in the following sections, Foucault's theory of power is not (or at least not wholly) about control and oppression. In a more recent article (Masuda, McGee, & Garvin, 2008), Foucault's work is deployed to demonstrate how consultation processes work to prescribe the terms of reference during consultation and how forms of citizenship are legitimated.

The following sections provide a sustained discussion and explanation of some of Foucault's theories. While there are some aspects of Foucault's work that have been picked up by well-known planning consultation scholars, this thesis argues there are other avenues of his thought not fully explored by planning scholarship. As has been hinted, and will be fully discussed in the final chapter, Foucault's theory of governmentality and biopolitics are what most satisfactorily answer the general research question of this thesis: why is there a continued history of contention and conflict with school review consultations? Efforts will be made to provide recurrent groundings of his theories, but time will be taken to provide something like an "exegesis" of Foucault's theories. If we are "consulting" Foucault on this topic, we ought to let him speak and complete his thoughts. It is hoped that returning to the primary texts of Foucault will help to counter what are arguably mis-interpretations of his theories (e.g. Fredua-Kwarteng, 2005) and inspire new avenues of research on consultation and planning more broadly.

#### 2.8.4.1 FOUCAULT'S THEORY OF POWER

What is likely Foucault's most well-known theoretical contribution is his theory of power. The term "power" (much like "politics") is commonly used, but has a rather nebulous definition. Foucault (1990) famously defines power as a relation, not an object. It is not something that a person can possess, but rather, it is inherent to all social relations. As Foucault puts it, "Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1990, p. 93); that is, power is not something external that latches onto social relations, but is what makes up social relations. Power is the "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate" (1990, p. 92), meaning that resistance to power is not located outside the power relationship (for there is no "outside of power") but resistance is rather inherent to the power relationship. When Foucault writes that power ultimately "comes from below" (Foucault, 1990, p. 94), it is in reference to the oft-quoted line of Mao: "Political power grows out the barrel of a gun" (Mao, n.d.). Foucault's point is that there is no binary extending top down between rulers and ruled, but rather there is a multitude of relations

of force and power which take shape “in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions” (Foucault, 1990, p. 94).

While we might be skeptical of this omnipresence of power, this “monadology” of power, we are nonetheless confronted with an account of power that insists on its status as a relationship, not an object to be possessed, and that everyone involved participate in the concretization of power. It speaks the role that power plays in the seemingly minor day-to-day interactions between people and how these relations work to reinforce processes, families, institutions, and other forms that power takes.

To help understand Foucault’s theory of power, we can turn to one of Foucault’s main influences, Hannah Arendt. In *On Violence*, Arendt (1970) defines power, strength, force, authority, and violence. “Power” is the ability to act in concert, and it is never the property of an individual. When we say that someone is “in power,” we mean that person is empowered by a group of people, and that when we refer to a “powerful person,” we are actually referring to strength. Arendt defines “strength” as a property inherent to an object or person, which may reveal itself in relations with others, but is essentially independent. “Force” she reserves solely for the energy released by social or physical movements, and should not be confused with violence, which is defined by its instrumentalist character. “Authority” is something that can be vested in persons or institutions, and its hallmark is an unquestioned recognition by those who obey; to remain in authority requires respect for the person or institution. Since contempt is essentially the opposite of authority, she argues that the best method to undermine authority is through laughter.

So, rather than saying a certain person involved in a consultation process “has” more or less power, we would do better to look at the relationships between people to see how power dynamics play out. We might still insist that a person with decision-making abilities “has more power” than others, but we are actually referring to Arendt’s notion of authority or an institutional support that grants a person authority, not power. In fact, a contemporary and influential planning consultant, Jay Pitter, has taken up this theory of

power to point out, among many other things, that marginalized communities do not need to be “given a voice” or “empowered” – these communities already have a voice which has been marginalized through an existing power relationship (Pitter & Lorinc, 2016).

Nonetheless, it needs to be emphasized that Foucault’s theory of power, which is “everywhere,” is in the context of his theory of power-knowledge or discourse. Power is “everywhere” partly because it is in discourse.

#### 2.8.4.2 FOUCAULT’S THEORY OF POWER-KNOWLEDGE

“Power-knowledge” is a term Foucault only used a handful of times, and it is the same thing as his concept of “discourse,” i.e. “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (1990, p. 100). However, using the term “power-knowledge” helps to keep it distinct from all the other theories and uses of “discourse.” The theory of power-knowledge shows us that the means by which “something” is understood produce that very thing. More simply, *how* we know does not simply *affect* what we know – it *effects* what we know. Much like how Foucault refuses the notion that power is external to social relations, knowledge is not external to the object known. The ways in which we understand an object produce that very object. This philosophical argument is what distinguishes Foucault, and, I argue, reveals that his main target is Kant. Perhaps the clearest example comes from *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995), in which Foucault demonstrates that a whole series of knowledges from doctors, priests, psychologists, and eventually criminologists *produces* the “delinquent.” Someone who was once a simple “offender” (i.e. one who committed an offence) becomes, through these power-knowledges, the “delinquent” (i.e. one who is *inclined* towards criminality, whose “deeper states of mind” can predict future criminality, and is in need of normalizing reform). Through practices of knowing, the “object” claimed to be known is in fact retroactively produced as an object of knowledge by those practices of knowing. Again, this is Foucault’s fundamental contribution to philosophy and it is through the “method” of power that the production of knowable reality occurs.

This emphasis on the positive aspects of power, rather than seeing it as singularly oppressive, is a fundamental ontological and epistemological position of Foucault's thought. It stems from the influence of Nietzsche and especially Heidegger (1977), who argued that a "tree," for example, is "revealed" for what-it-is-to-us depending on the form of knowledge one takes to know it. "Enframing" reveals the tree as "lumber" whereas *poesis* reveals a tree as something richer and in relation to our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1977). This is also essentially a response to Kant. Kant (2003 [1781&1787]) argues we only know things because we have 'hardwired' abstract concepts of Time and Space that allow us to know things in specific times and spaces. These abstract concepts are the "categories of the mind," which is reason itself. But rather than being able to "actually see" things in time and space, these concepts actually limit our experience of reality. It is not so much that we *have* these universal concepts, but that we are *had by* them. For Kant, we do not have access to reality and only catch a glimpse of it. For Foucault, we do not have access to reality, we only have power-knowledge (or "discourse") to create or produce aspects of what we call reality.

Below it will be clear how power-knowledge is at work in planning consultations by knowing/producing the "public" in particular ways. However, power-knowledge is clearly on display in the common planning practice of zoning. Just as early cartographers created a completely different understanding of the concept of the world as an object – a divided globe (Willinsky, 1998) – the practice of zoning, insofar as it segments parts of the world into two-dimensional discrete units based on permitted uses, is one way in which planning is implicated in power-knowledge (Fishler, 1998; Ong, 2004; Pickles, 2004).

#### 2.8.5 WHAT IS THE 'PUBLIC'?

While public consultation and engagement often presents itself as engaging with or consulting a "public" that is simply "there," deeper analysis shows the notion of "the public" has a history and is itself a product of power-knowledge.

#### 2.8.5.1 HABERMAS' THEORY OF THE PUBLIC

Habermas begins *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) by pointing out the confusion that surrounds the term “public.” Initially, we might think “public” has to do with an eighteenth century notion of “civil society,” which refers to the “realm of commodity exchange and social labour governed by its own laws” (Habermas, 1989, p. 3), but Habermas is right to note that concepts of public and private go back much further, to at least ancient Greece. Following Aristotle (1988), in the Greek *polis*, there was a strict separation between *oikos* and *bios politikos*. *Oikos* is the realm of the private – the household. If a man (and only a man, not a woman) has his household in order, he may then enter into the public realm of politics. Put another way, the concerns of bare life (reproduction, health, survival, etc.) were strictly of the private realm. Once that realm of life was secure, the patriarch could then enter into the public life of politics which had little to nothing to do with these bare life concerns (Agamben, 1998). Habermas’ main argument is that this public sphere of politics proper, due to bourgeois revolution, has “been caught up in a process of decomposition” (1989, p. 4). This “decomposition” of the public sphere is referenced in different terms in the title of his work (“structural transformation”). Habermas lays blame on capitalism, in which members of the public eventually become one of two categories: human and property owner. While Habermas (1989, p. 55) simply points out that the sphere of the family lost its signifier “private” to the sphere of the market, but only says they are “profoundly caught up with” one another, Foucault’s theory of governmentality provides a much more compelling account of this shift. To have a theoretically informed understanding of public consultation, it is imperative we understand how contemporary governance understands the “public” it is consulting.

#### 2.8.5.2 FOUCAULT’S THEORY OF THE PUBLIC AS POPULATION (GOVERNMENTALITY)

Foucault’s concept of governmentality has had quite a bit of currency in English political theory since it was the subject of one of the few lectures leaked, translated, and published before its official release in *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault, 2009) as part of the *Lectures at the Collège de France* series. A first transcription of this lecture

appeared in the Italian journal *Aut-Aut* in 1978 and was then republished in a few other journals. The first English translation of that Italian version appeared in the journal *I&C* in 1979 and later reached a large, English-speaking audience when this translation was re-published in *The Foucault Effect* in 1991 (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991). Not surprisingly, much of this lecture had been lost or altered, and thus interpretations of the concept of governmentality have understandably been varied and sometimes rather questionable. The main lecture on governmentality, as it appears in *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault, 2009), is based on the many cassette recordings of his lectures in consultation with Foucault's own lecture notes. Like Habermas' brief history of the changing notion of the private sphere, the concept of "governmentality" refers to the changing role the family plays: from a model of government to an instrument of governance, with the public sphere recast as population.

Whereas Habermas blames the bourgeois and capitalism for the loss of a "true" public sphere of politics, Foucault identifies the shift much earlier. He notes that after the publication of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (first distributed in 1513 then published posthumously in 1532), a wide movement emerged of those writing and thinking about government in an effort to distance themselves from Machiavelli. This movement shared an insistence that there must be more to government than simply maintaining one's territory. In *The Prince*, the only "art of governance" to be found is to identify dangers to one's grip on a territory and manipulate relations to ensure that grip. By the seventeenth century, Foucault argues there are separate realms of government: self-governance or morality, governing the family, and the science of ruling the state, which is politics proper. But this creates the problem of how to reintroduce morality and the family into this new science of state ruling. Seventeenth century thinkers took up Guillaume de La Perriere's 1555 text *Miroir politique*, which states "government is the right disposition of things so as to lead to a suitable end" (Foucault, 2009). Whereas for Machiavelli the only "things" to be arranged are the territory, for those reading La Perriere in the seventeenth century, state governance concerns a long list of "things": people and their relations, including wealth, resources, climate, irrigation, customs, habits, etc. This type

of government came be expressed in the well-worn metaphor of the ship: much different than Plato's use of the metaphor (Plato, 1991, 488a-489d), here the captain (sovereign) must not only account for the ship (territory) but also the crew (subjects) and cargo (traded goods or the economy).

In order for government to arrange and manage all these various "things," it begins to develop its own rationality. However, as found in Aristotle, the family was still the primary model of government – run the state like a good patriarch rules a household. Here we ought to clearly note that the ancient notion of "ruling a household" is, as Habermas hinted, the ruling of the realm of *oikos* or *oikonomos* – literally, "economy." In the seventeenth century, "economic government" meant running a government like a household. But for a government to concern itself with the proper arrangement of people and their relations, the family is no longer an appropriate model. As government begins to concern itself with this multitude of "things," it finds their relations are not reducible to the family structure. Government begins looking at *series* and *rates*, developing a new science of the state (statistics), which, as a power-knowledge or discourse, transforms the public into the population. The population has its own laws and patterns or regularities which, like birth rates, marriages, death rates, or illness, are produced by statistical analysis and are not meaningful at the level of a family. As government begins to "arrange things to lead to a suitable end" through this new rationality of governance, the ultimate end of government is population, not maintaining a territory. Government is no longer concerned merely with its grip on a territory, but the purpose of government is the welfare and production of populations – the improvements of its conditions, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, reproduction, etc. Foucault invents the "ugly word 'governmentality'" to refer to this newly emerged art of governance or governing rationality (Foucault, 2009, p. 108 & 115).

This new rationality of governance, "governmentality," targets the intersection of the interests of the individuals that make up this new "population" and the interests of this new rationality of governance. More simply, governmentality is form of governance which seeks to create individual desires that complement and support the interests of



the state. The easy example is vaccinations: they secure the life of the individual and the health and longevity of the population. Another example is bodily fitness: it is good for the individual and, insofar as it helps keep populations healthy, it is good for the state. Below will be discussed Foucault's theory of "biopolitics" as a technique of this governmentality, but first we need to address what governmentality has to do with planning or public consultation. Planners might recognize something familiar in Foucault's partial definition of governmentality as "the right disposition of things so as to lead to a suitable end" (Foucault, 2009). A comprehensive definition of planning originally developed by the Royal Town Planning Institute is "the scientific, aesthetic, and orderly disposition of land, resources, facilities and services with a view to securing the physical, economic and social efficiency, health and well-being of urban and rural communities" (Canadian Institute of Planners, 2016). This is not meant as a criticism of planning, but is rather evidence of Foucault's historical argument.

#### 2.8.6 GOVERNMENTALITY AND CONSULTATION

Governmentality as it emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produces the "population" that is now consulted as "public." Analyzing the term "collaborative planning" through the lens of governmentality might have us ask, "is the purpose of collaborative planning to align the interests of individuals with that of government?" Governmentality might also outline the contours of the criteria for what public input is acceptable, i.e. whether or not it agrees with the interests of the government. For example, the public's demands for active transportation or sustainability (environmental, social, or economic) are welcomed by government because it shares similar goals.

Huxley (2005) argues that planning is a form of governmentality insofar as it seeks to "shape the actions of others" and "manage populations." However, as has been made clear, governmentality is more nuanced. There are plenty of governmental and other strategies that seek to affect the actions of others and manage populations, but governmentality partly refers to a form of governance that seeks to align individual interests with those of the state. Moreover, it does not *affect* the actions of others, but *effects*. And it does not merely "manage" populations, but through specific practices of

knowing (power-knowledge), governmentality creates the very concept of “population” as distinct from earlier and current notions of “the public” or, as Marxist theorists like Habermas’ Frankfurt School colleagues Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) put it, “the masses.” As shown below, the implication is that when planners consult with the public, they are “knowing” – that is, producing – “the public” in specific ways. Foucault’s discussion of how “population” was invented sheds light on why the phrase is not “population consultation.”

Huxley (2005, p. 142), like many others, presents Foucault’s theory as one of “control,” and she also suggests governmentality concerns the practices for regulating the “conduct of conduct.” This emphasis on control is, I argue, an interpretation that misses Foucault’s central idea: that power is positive insofar as it *produces* (Foucault, 1995, p. 27). To claim that Foucault’s theory of governmentality is to “control” or “manage” populations suggests that “populations” are there prior to power-knowledge, whereas Foucault is very clear that governmentality is the practice of producing the very notion of “population.” The older Marxist notions, including those that come from Habermas’ colleagues in the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002), think of power in negative terms: that it oppresses, controls, and limits otherwise free subjects – the free individual emerges only if we remove the oppressive powers of capital, the media, and the state. But, as shown above, Foucault understands power as positive in the sense that it creates and produces objects of knowledge.

So, when planning or public consultation is considered in terms of governmentality, we should be noting how the practices of planning and consultation do not simply “control” populations or the public, but how these practices work to produce or reveal population *as* population, or public *as* a public. This is particularly apparent when consultations determine who counts as “relevant stakeholders,” which in turn sets the parameters of problems/solutions. This power-knowledge is apparent when deciding which publics are invited or encouraged to attend meetings. Even recording who attended meetings, who spoke, for how long, etc., is a power-knowledge practice that works to constitute rather than simply “know” participants.

As for “conduct of conduct” (Huxley, 2005), the phrase appears to have gained currency from Colin Gordon’s use of it on page 2 of *The Foucault Effect* (Burchell et al., 1991). As noted above, this text contains that early imprecise version of Foucault’s governmentality lecture. The common use of the “conduct of conduct” phrase is understandable considering the history of the lecture’s publication, and its unclear meaning has made the alliteration attractive to theorists who use it in a variety of ways. But we cannot dig deeper into Foucault’s works to provide an accurate explanation since it appears he never used the phrase (however, see Palacios, 2018). Instead, what is more helpful to understand the role of conduct as regards governance is Foucault’s theory of *biopolitics*, a term he *did* use and explains very clearly.

#### 2.8.7 FOUCAULT’S THEORY OF BIOPOLITICS

The concept of biopolitics was introduced to English readers in the last section of Foucault’s (1990) *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* in a chapter titled “Right of Death and Power over Life.” English readers were later provided with a translation of a lecture that preceded *History of Sexuality*, which contains essentially the same arguments, reasoning, and evidence (Foucault, 2003). Foucault sketches a historical shift from a medieval period in which a sovereign had the right to take life, to the modern period in which the sovereign has the right to produce life through assisting in the development of the health and longevity of populations. Foucault outlines this new power over life that evolved, starting in the seventeenth century and becoming concrete in the eighteenth century (Foucault, 2003, p. 242).

This new “power over life” consisted of two “poles” that were linked together (Foucault, 1990, p. 139). One pole centered on the body as machine, with the disciplinary techniques outlined in great detail in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995) and which concerned the optimization of the body’s capabilities, the use of its forces, the increase of its usefulness and efficiencies. Foucault calls this the “anatomy-politics of the human body” (Foucault, 1990, p. 139). The second pole focused not on the individual body, but the body at the level of species, the biological processes of the species: propagation, births, mortality, levels of health, life expectancy, and all the conditions and variables

that affect these. This pole he calls the “biopolitics of the population” (Foucault, 1990, p. 139). This form of power revolves around the management of life rather than the menace of death. As Habermas pointed out, for Aristotle the private household, with its concerns for bare life, was completely separate from the public sphere of politics. Foucault is telling us that, for the first time in history, biological life became a political problem and a sphere of intervention. While it is understandable that many see biopower (and disciplinary power as well) as forms of control, it needs to be emphasized that the forms of power at work here are positive in the sense that they work to create, produce, optimize, increase, etc. Foucault’s chosen topic of sexuality saw biopower become a field of government intervention to regulate (which, granted, can be seen as a form of control) and not to strictly suppress but to ensure the increase in the numbers and health of the population. We may or may not agree with that aim, but the *effect* of power is productive, not oppressive.

#### 2.8.8 PLANNING AS A PRACTICE OF BIOPOLITICS

When we consider governmentality as a rationality of governance that seeks to align individual interests with the interests of government and targets populations, the concept of biopolitics reveals itself as a technique of governmentality. We can easily see planning as a biopolitical practice. The first and most basic aspect of planning is zoning to separate incompatible land uses. While we might see this as a means of disciplinarian control, through a biopolitical lens we might see “incompatible” as being about ensuring the health and longevity of the population – as in the Garden City, where the factories are kept away from the houses to promote the health of residents. And when we consider nearly any aspect of planning, we are very likely to find its main purpose is biopolitical – to increase the health, strength, and longevity of the population. While this suggests a positive (at least in terms of production) interpretation of biopolitics, it does have its own ‘dark side.’ Foucault argues that ensuring the health of the population is what led states to argue for a purity of their population and, though the state seeks to increase life, it is through this threat of impurity that the state could ask its citizens to die for it in modern warfare (Foucault, 2003, p. 257). Furthermore, Foucault

argues that biopolitics is what defines modern forms of state racism (Foucault, 2003, p. 258-259). Biopolitics can explain why zoning can exclude or find “incompatible” certain types of people rather than land uses – the people are perceived as a threat to the larger population and require containment.

If we recall Habermas when he cites Aristotle’s distinction between *oikos* and *bios politikos*, between the private sphere of the family and the public sphere of politics, we will remember that Habermas laments the “decomposition” of that public sphere of politics. But for Foucault, the shift is much more stark with much different implications: “For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence [*zoon politikon*]; modern man is an animal whose politics places his very existence as a living being in question” (Foucault, 1990, p. 143). Put another way, bare life was once not of the political realm and, through its exclusion, initially defined the public as the sphere of proper politics (Agamben, 1998), whereas now bare life is the fundamental concern of politics, or at least biopolitics.

When we understand planning as a biopolitical practice, we see public consultation in a much different light. Public consultation is caught up in the practice of governmentality and its technique of biopolitics since we may find the purpose of public consultation is to align the interests of individuals with those of government. As Lane (2005) states, consultation in planning means “government has been replaced with governance” – or we might now say, “government becomes governmentality.” Nonetheless, we might find governmentality and its technique of biopolitics are just a *part* of planning and consultation. Perhaps planning and consultation provide the possibility of that other sphere of politics, that public realm of politics beyond the concerns of bare life. This is the realm of politics that Habermas (1989) argues has been decomposed, and it is a realm that Foucault does not address, except for a brief comment on not saying “yes” to sex but rather to bodies and pleasures (Foucault, 1990, p. 157). This public sphere of politics is where we still ask ourselves and one another how we want to live and organize ourselves. Perhaps we can note the biopolitical aspects of planning or consultation and say “yes but also...” There are questions of politics beyond the bare

life, beyond the statistics of demography. Along with *zoe*, bare life, there is *bios*, the qualified life, and man might still be revealed as *zoon politikon* – an animal with the *additional* capacity for politics. (Yes, Foucault’s term “biopolitics” should really be something like “zoepolitics.”) In planning consultation, this arises when looking at how a plan affects the quality of life of those involved. It arises in school closure reviews when we consider the role a local school plays in the vitality of the community – all the various “factors” that elude calculation and statistical representation. As should now be clear, I argue that an attempt to create measurable indicators of community value is a practice of governmentality.

Furthermore, I argue that these theories can be used to define and delimit what aspects of a school closure decision are caught up in practices of biopolitics and governmentality and which are beyond it. In the Recommendations chapter of this thesis, it will be argued that biopolitics and governmentality can be used to delimit what is up for debate in school closure review. School boards often frame a school closure review through a governmentality and biopolitics position. That is, they claim to know the school and determine its future through statistical analysis and speculation of student and population trends. As will be seen below, in the Zorra case study where the community was able to convince the school board not to close their school, the victory was partially won by the community engaging with the school board on their terms, i.e. the logic of governmentality and biopolitics. Furthermore, as noted above, there is a meaning (not “value”) of a local school that is beyond or outside the concerns of governmentality or biopolitics – i.e. the meaning a school has to a community that cannot be reduced to statistical analyses.

#### 2.8.9 THE IRONY OF FOUCAULT

Before leaving this sustained discussion of Foucault, it needs to be noted that using Foucault’s theories to think through the consultation process for school closure reviews is somewhat ironic, but it also lends itself to a comment on the uses and abuses of theory in research scholarship. To use Foucault’s theories to critique school closures is ironic because Foucault is rather famous for comparing schools to prisons. He did so in

his historical analysis of the disciplining practices born in the military and taken up, not just by prisons, but by hospitals and schools (Foucault, 1995). One can imagine that if Foucault were asked to provide theoretical support to those involved in school closure debates, he might very well support school closures – or at least advocate for a very different kind of school. However, and this is a very important point, this should not in any way discourage anyone from taking up Foucault’s theories when advocating to keep a school open. Theory and philosophy are open to interpretation and can be deployed in a wide variety of ways. No one needs to adopt a theory or theorist wholesale; we need to keep a critical perspective. One can, for example, find value in Kant’s moral philosophy without adopting his racism, but we ought to maintain a critical perspective to identify any aspects of his philosophy that necessarily lead to a racist position. This critical perspective or analysis plays an integral part in how we might use and abuse theories: we have the capacity (perhaps responsibility) to find useful and productive aspects and reject other aspects or implications.

Foucault’s theories of governmentality and biopolitics are clearly critical readings of western society as it developed from the seventeenth century onwards. While it is likely Foucault meant these analyses to be an indictment of the history of society, these theories can be read in different lights and for different purposes. Biopolitics outlines how state governments seek to strengthen themselves; this is done by increasing the health and longevity of the population. While this understanding of “population” has its own “dark side,” few would see having their health and longevity increased as a bad thing. Similarly, while governmentality is a rationality of governance, it is hardly the worst rationality of governance the world has seen. And as I have shown above, governmentality and biopolitics can be useful tools in determining what is up for debate in a public consultation of a school closure review, something Foucault would perhaps not appreciate.

## 2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This literature review served a number of purposes. It outlined the role of local schools to their host communities, the history of school closure reviews, and the changing review and consultation policies of the Ontario government. This chapter presented a number of commonly cited consultation models and some consultation theories from the field of planning. The chapter also presented a discussion of how Habermas' and Foucault's theories have been taken up by planning scholarship. A large portion of this chapter was devoted to a deeper analysis of Foucault's work, some of which has been incorporated into planning scholarship and other aspects of which largely have not. This work of Foucault's was outlined here in anticipation of the interview participants' responses and as a means to address the underlying research question guiding this thesis: Why is there a continued history of conflict during consultations with school closure reviews? As should be becoming clear, I argue that governmentality and biopolitics can be used to delineate what aspects of a school closure consultation are not up for debate. School boards claim to know a school and determine its future through statistical analysis and speculation of student and population trends. To consult the public on this, aside from ensuring the facts are correct, is a disingenuous consultation process. Instead, school boards ought to consult with communities on the meanings of the local school in terms beyond statistical analysis and projections.



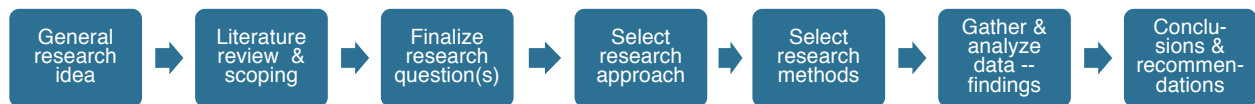
## 3.0 METHODS

This chapter provides an outline of generic research design, a discussion of research approaches and methods specific to the social sciences, and then an explanation and justification of which specific research approaches and methods this thesis will use. As will be discussed more fully, this thesis uses qualitative research approaches because there are methods (namely interviews and document analysis) within this approach that are best suited to the research questions of my thesis. These interviews and document analysis will be situated in the context of two case studies.

### 3.1 GENERIC RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design generally consists of choosing a topic, formulating a research question or hypothesis while reviewing the relevant literature, selecting appropriate research methods and approaches, gathering all the data, and then presenting the findings.

Seasons (2017b) has outlined this in the following graphic:



However, research rarely goes this smoothly or linearly, and there is often a back-and-forth between the stages (Edelson, 2002). A researcher might have a general topic in mind and, as the literature review progresses, that topic will shift and sharpen in focus. The literature review ensures the researcher has a comprehensive knowledge of the topic and can then create a clear set of research questions to address an aspect of that topic not fully covered in the existing literature (Boote & Beile, 2005). However, if the researcher intends to research something quantitative in nature and use quantitative methods, then, rather than a research question, a hypothesis can be posed, which is then tested.

The latter half of research design largely concerns *how* the researcher will go about addressing the research question or testing the hypothesis. In the social sciences, the research approach is either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative approaches are used to research perceptions, experiences, feelings, or other subjective factors. Quantitative approaches are used to examine the relationship between variables numerically to predict future outcomes. A mixed-method approach refers to a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative study that uses statistical descriptors, like this thesis does, is *not* mixed-methods; some form of statistical analysis needs to be performed for it to count as quantitative and, if in combination with qualitative methods, a mixed-methods analysis. Generally, the social sciences looks more favourably on mixed-methods because it is positioned as being “more” – more points of data, more things analyzed, more forms of analysis, etc. (Creswell, 2014). However, as discussed below, this thesis takes a strictly qualitative approach as it is “more” appropriate to my research questions.

### 3.2 RESEARCH TOPIC

The previous chapter presented a literature review that covered the following topics: the importance of local schools, the relationship between planning and schools, the history of school closures in Ontario and the changing consultation processes, models of public engagement, and theories of public engagement.

The practice of planning has generally shifted from top-down, expert-based approaches to bottom-up, public participatory approaches. While this shift has taken place in planning, the consultation process during school closure reviews has failed to keep up. The research topic for this thesis is to examine the consultation theories and models from the field of planning to evaluate which might be appropriate for all stakeholders during school closure reviews.

### 3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As noted in the Introduction, the overarching research question of this thesis stems from the review of literature on school closure reviews in Ontario and beyond. The general

question guiding the research is, why is there a continued history of contention and conflict with school review consultations? Despite there being a number of updates in how the reviews and associated consultations are to be carried out, the consultations are mired in conflict. What causes this? To address these broader questions, the following research questions guide the thesis:

- During the consultation period of a school closure review, what are the main issues for concerned stakeholders?
- What are the main points of dissatisfaction with the consultation process?
- Are there models of public consultation and engagement from community planning that can address these concerns?
- What analysis can be provided by engaging the underlying theories of public consultation?
- What other benefits to the community result from meaningful public engagement during a school closure review, even if it is determined a school should close?

The thesis proposes research questions rather than a hypothesis to test. This is for the following reasons. A hypothesis is something that can be definitively tested (Center for Quality Research, 2015) and seeking to find out how stakeholders experience the consultation process during accommodation reviews is not something that can be definitively tested. Were the thesis to be researching something more quantifiable, such as the length of consultation processes, then it could pose a hypothesis such as “the longer the consultation process, the less likely a school will close” and then gather and analyse quantitative data to test the validity of that hypothesis. As well, one could alter the research questions so answers are either “yes” or “no,” or provide a set of predetermined answers, but this would be too narrow and not leave room for respondents to provide their own thoughts in their own words. Further research might hypothesize that a specific consultation model satisfies the concerns of stakeholders, and then one could implement and test that hypothesis. But, since the research questions posed seek to ascertain the perceived experiences of stakeholders, they are more appropriate for qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.4 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

In the social sciences, there are generally four research philosophy paradigms, outlined in the following table.

**Table 1 – Research Philosophy Paradigms**

Positivism/Postpositivism	Constructivism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determination</li> <li>• Reductionism</li> <li>• Empirical observation + measurement</li> <li>• Theory verification</li> <li>• <b>Ontology:</b> one reality; knowable</li> <li>• <b>Epistemology:</b> objectivity; dispassionate</li> <li>• <b>Research Approach:</b> Quantitative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Multiple participant meaning</li> <li>• Social and historical construction</li> <li>• Theory generation</li> <li>• <b>Ontology:</b> reality socially constructed</li> <li>• <b>Epistemology:</b> interactive</li> <li>• <b>Research Approach:</b> Qualitative</li> </ul>
Transformative	Pragmatism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political</li> <li>• Power and justice oriented</li> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Change-oriented</li> <li>• <b>Ontology:</b> multiple, unequal realities</li> <li>• <b>Epistemology:</b> cultural lenses; power</li> <li>• <b>Research Approach:</b> Qualitative/Critical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consequences of actions</li> <li>• Problem-centered</li> <li>• Pluralistic</li> <li>• Real-world practice oriented</li> <li>• <b>Ontology:</b> action, effectiveness</li> <li>• <b>Epistemology:</b> interaction w communities</li> <li>• <b>Research Approach:</b> Mixed Methods</li> </ul>

Adapted from: (Seasons, 2017b)

Each of these paradigms is predicated on theories or assumptions of knowledge (epistemology) and of reality or being (ontology). For example, positivism or postpositivism assumes a single, knowable reality which can be deciphered by objective and dispassionate research. More starkly, it assumes there is a knowable reality prior to interpretation and the “world turns towards us a legible face which we only have to decipher” (Foucault, 2002).

This thesis, on the other hand, assumes that reality (or at least the level of reality we have access to) is a product of *ways of knowing* informed by various social and power relations. More specifically, this thesis subscribes to the “ontological idealist” perspective which means that the human mind and consciousness take precedence over the material objects of the world (Löfgren, 2013c). In more concrete terms, the perceived experience during the consultation process is what should be used to measure that process’s success or failure.

Epistemology is often divided into empiricism and rationalism (Löfgren, 2013b). Empiricism in this context means that knowledge about the world is based on what our senses perceive. Rationalism, however, is the philosophical position that emphasizes reason as the means to gain true knowledge about the world. This thesis follows Kant (2003 [1781]), who demonstrates that knowledge cannot be gained exclusively by either sense perception or reason alone, but rather through a combination of the two as intuited by our critical faculties of reason.

#### 3.4.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY USED

Based on these ontological and epistemological positions, this thesis falls into the “constructivism” paradigm. This paradigm holds the epistemological position based on social interaction. Put another way, this paradigm assumes that reality is the result of social relations, and this pairs well with both the rationalist and empiricist perspectives outlined above. While this thesis follows constructivism by taking an ontological position that reality is socially constructed, it will nonetheless brush up against some aspects of the “pragmatism” paradigm. That is, the thesis will be looking at the interaction within communities. It will also stay grounded in a problem-centred and practice oriented approach by giving priority to communities’ experiences in consultation processes.

Since the thesis is primarily concerned with how people perceive the consultation process, it will be employing qualitative methods and approaches. Thus, while touching on some aspects of “pragmatism” the thesis is primarily in the paradigm of “constructivism.”

### 3.5 RESEARCH APPROACHES

There are three research approaches appropriate to social sciences: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods (a combination of quantitative and qualitative). Put very simply, quantitative analysis is used to explain what is happening, qualitative analysis tells us why something is happening, while a mixed-methods approach is more a complete analysis and seeks to explain both what and why something is happening (Seasons, 2017b).

Quantitative approaches are appropriate when a researcher is looking at something that can be numerically measured and intends to find a causal link between two or more variables. As mentioned above, quantitative approaches are predicated on a testable hypothesis: the researcher proposes a hypothesis then uses quantitative data to test the validity of the hypothesis (Center for Quality Research, 2015). This can also be explained as being “deductive reasoning”: a process by which a logical conclusion is reached based on a series of premises (Goel, Gold, Kapur, & Houle, 1997). The clichéd example of deductive reasoning is as follows: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. Another way to capture the quantitative approach is through the mathematical formulation “if  $x$ , then  $y$ .” This only works in the hard or natural sciences. In the social sciences there are many probabilities that cannot be accounted for (namely the instability of human behaviour) so the formula is modified to “if  $x$  then probably  $y$ .”

One of the strengths of quantitative research is that it produces very specific and fairly clear-cut research that is uncomplicated by complex theories or ambiguities. It is also falsifiable, meaning that the research is done in an open way so that other researchers can reproduce the experiments and data in the exact same way to test if it is true or false (Popper, 2002).

Quantitative research, however, also has some significant drawbacks. While it is well-suited to the natural or hard sciences, it is not always best for studying human behaviour. For centuries, philosophy sought to explain the world and our life within it in

terms of reason and metaphysics. Only relatively recently did it seem appropriate to bring the methods for studying the physical world into studies of the human world (Bourdeau, 2014). While the social sciences might benefit from calling itself a 'science' and seek to present research findings as though they are hard truths, human life is hardly as rational and logical as quantitative analysis would like us to believe. Thus, quantitative analysis has to organize behaviours and outcomes into quantifiable schematics, tables, and typologies that often betray the truth of its contents.

Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, seeks to relax the grip of mathematical certainty and accept the vagaries of human life. Rather than posing a hypothesis to be tested with hard data, qualitative approaches can work with research questions that are more open-ended. Like quantitative approaches, qualitative analyses also seek patterns and regularities, but unlike its quantitative counterpart, qualitative research does not result in law-like generalizations. While qualitative research might provide some recommendations, it seeks to dig deep into the issue or topic at hand, to go beyond mere description of what is happening and provide a deeper analysis of the underlying causes and personal meanings. And, since the conclusions of a qualitative analysis are probable rather than final and conclusive, it is known as inductive reasoning. That is, the premises are the source of the truth of the conclusion (Holland, 1989) – if  $x$  then  $x!$

### 3.5.1 RESEARCH APPROACHES USED

Qualitative approaches are much more suited to the study of human behaviours and interactions. Of course, this is not to suggest there is no place for quantitative analysis, but qualitative research is able to provide a much richer and more nuanced analysis and is able to maintain a fidelity toward the unpredictability and uncertainties that make human social life what it is. So, while less clear-cut and certain, this thesis maintains that qualitative research better captures the essence and truth of human social life. More pointedly, qualitative research methods are most appropriate for understanding and analyzing the consultation processes and methods for school closure reviews.



Mixed-methods, as noted above, is a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses. In some cases, mixed-methods can provide the best of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It is important to note that a qualitative analysis that uses numerical descriptive numbers is still just a qualitative analysis; for a qualitative analysis to cross over into mixed-methods territory, it must deploy some sort of statistical analysis of the numerical data (Seasons, 2017b). Mixed method approaches are often broken down into three different types based on the chronology of research (Creswell, 2014). If both qualitative and quantitative analyses are occurring simultaneously, then it is known as a convergent parallel mixed methods. If the quantitative research is done first, then qualitative methods are employed to dig deeper in the data, then this is known as explanatory sequential mixed methods. Lastly, if qualitative lead the research and then this analysis is followed up by quantitative methods, then it is known as exploratory sequential mixed methods.

This thesis uses qualitative approaches. It will be asking questions about how people experience the consultation process. It will be using this approach because it permits the interview questions to be more open-ended, allowing the respondents to guide the research, rather than seeking to fit people into this or that typology. That is, the thesis is asking “how” and “why” questions about their experiences with the consultation process rather than “yes” or “no” type questions. While the research will be looking for patterns and themes in the responses and using statistical descriptors (such as the community’s population size), the interview questions will not be formulated in a way that permits any statistical analyses.

Another researcher looking into the same topic could distribute a survey to those involved in school closure decisions and ask “check-box” questions (e.g. Do you feel the consultation process was long enough? On a scale of 1 to 10 how strongly do you feel your concerns were addressed? etc.). The answers could then be statistically analyzed. However, this thesis is more interested in the *how* and *why* these residents may or may not feel the consultation process was effective or genuine.

## 3.6 RESEARCH METHODS

According to Curry (2015b), there are four major qualitative study designs. In-depth interviews are used to explore individual experiences in great detail. Focus groups develop unique insights into shared norms and experiences. Observation allows the researcher to learn about behaviours and interactions in a natural setting. And document review identifies patterns of communication and characteristics of organizations and processes. Curry (2015b) adds the “structured survey” approach, but notes this is a check-box format that does not encourage responses as rich as would be generated through in-depth interviews. Also to this list of qualitative study designs, we can add case studies (Robson, 1993; Yin, 2014). Case studies are not normally considered a research method, but they can be thought of as part of research design to focus the research done by other methods as they provide a spatial or other context to frame the research.

### 3.6.1 RESEARCH METHODS USED

This thesis relies almost exclusively on in-depth interviews, with some minor document analysis – all focused on two case studies. Details of these methods are explained below. But briefly, the case studies are two communities that experienced a school closure review. In-depth interviews are used to gain insight into the experiences and recommendations of those who participated in these school closure reviews, and document analysis refers to a Judicial Review decision on the question of procedural fairness during a school closure review.

Though the thesis does not use any quantitative methods, a variety of theories and qualitative methods might qualify it for what is known as “triangulation.” Patton (1999) outlines numerous types of triangulation, though this thesis uses two. One is “methods triangulation,” (Patton, 1999) which means using more than one method (in this case, in-depth interviews and document analysis) to gain a fuller picture of the processes and issues to understand people’s experience of the consultation process.

“Theory/perspective triangulation” (Patton, 1999) is also used, as the thesis tests the

theories outlined in the previous chapter (Habermassian and Foucauldian). These different methods or triangulation give a deeper, fuller analysis.

This thesis maintains that the fundamental theories are essential to ensure deep, worthwhile, and productive in-depth interviews. Put another way, it is essential to have a deep understanding of the theories of public consultation, the role of local schools to their host communities, and the processes and issues of each closure review so that any empirical observations and interview discussions can be richly interpreted and more deeply analyzed.

### 3.6.2 CASE STUDIES AS A RESEARCH STRATEGY

Case studies are not a method *per se*, but they are a way to focus research. According to Robson (1993), case studies are a “strategy” for doing research that uses a variety of empirical observations (i.e. research methods) to understand something in its real-world context. The thesis uses case studies to focus research on two rural communities that underwent school closure reviews. It will go beyond a descriptive case study and instead use case studies to present accounts of how people experienced the consultation process (Gibbs, 2012). Since the thesis looks at different rural communities to research how residents experienced the consultation process during a school closure review, Gibbs (2012) would call this a “set of individual case studies” which are then analyzed by comparing and contrasting. The two case studies are of school closure reviews that happened at roughly the same time and underwent very similar consultation processes (albeit with different outcomes); these are sometimes referred to as “parallel” studies (G. Thomas, 2003; Yin, 2014).

The two case studies are single closure reviews in the communities of Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) and Zorra, Ontario – namely, the review of Parliament Oak Public School in NOTL and A.J. Baker in Zorra. Section 3.8.1 below offers a justification for choosing these communities and provides a descriptive overview of each community.

### 3.6.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Document analysis is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents” (Bowen, 2009). While O’Leary (2014) provides some rather obvious steps in document analysis, such as preparing a list of documents to be analyzed, she does raise an interesting point: consider what forms of documents are to be analyzed and judiciously pare down the scope to something manageable. This thesis was to have examined news media reports that provide an account or perspective on the closure review processes for Parliament Oak in NOTL and A.J. Baker in Zorra. However, there is only a handful of such reports available for Zorra and there are none for NOTL. Niagara’s local papers were recently shut down or had ownership and website changes so that any web presence is now gone. What little news media coverage remains is presented in the Case Studies section (section 3.8) below.

Instead, a very brief document analysis is provided of a Judicial Review on the decision to close Parliament Oak in NOTL. This Judicial Review was heard on the argument of procedural fairness – that the consultation process was unfair. This is serendipitous as it provides an expert legal opinion on the requirements of a fair consultation process during a school closure review.

It follows, then, that a type of discourse analysis will be part of this document analysis. This discourse analysis is much different than Foucault’s notion of discourse as power-knowledge, as discussed in the previous chapter. Discourse analysis is a complex and wide-ranging field that has, ironically, developed its own discourse (van Dijk, n.d.). The analysis of the reports on these school closure reviews will be taking “discourse” to mean “the way in which language is used socially to convey broad historical meanings” (Henry & Tator, 2002). The analysis will look at terms in their social and institutional context, who is using the terms, and for what implicit and explicit purposes (Henry & Tator, 2002). This means that, while the analysis will not be digging into semiotics or a deep analysis of metaphor and metonymy, it will be aware of how terms like “public,” “consultation,” “consensus,” and other terms that may arise that relate to public consultation are taken up and articulated in different ways for particular purposes. A

deep understanding of the theories of public consultation, engagement, and consensus will be invaluable in the discourse analysis as this will assist in developing a deeper understanding of the terms and concepts used.

#### 3.6.4 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The central research method in this study is in-depth interviews. These are conducted rather than surveys because surveys do not provide the rich, detailed responses that interviews do (Curry, 2015b; Jansen, 2010). A set of broad, somewhat open-ended questions are posed to those involved in the closure reviews of Parliament Oak and A.J. Baker. The interview questions are supplied in Appendix 1. However, during interviews, further questions were asked and different directions taken based on responses from interview participants or the specific areas of interest or expertise of the interview participants. The goal of this type of open-ended interview is to elicit deeper contributions and allow interview participants an opportunity to control the direction of their interview. Interview participants were encouraged to offer insight into something not covered by the pre-set questions. As well, the broad nature of the questions helps to ensure areas not anticipated are given the opportunity for discussion and analysis. For example, the financial implications of closing Parliament Oak were not considered until the issue arose during interviews.

In-depth interviews provide accounts of individual experiences and perspectives. They are like “guided conversations”: rich answers are the goal, but there is also the need to ensure the interview stays on topic (Curry, 2015b). In selecting interview participants, this study turns to what Curry (2015b) calls “key informants” meaning those who have a knowledge of, or experience with, the issue at hand and are willing to speak about it. Interview questions need to be open and non-directional so they are more exploratory and do not overly guide the interview subject. There is a clear set of questions for each interview, but the interviews will deviate when an idea or issue is raised by the participant that warrants exploration. It is also acceptable to reword or drop or add questions as the interview progresses (Curry, 2015b).

Curry (2015b) suggests opening the interview with a broad comfortable question, like “describe your situation here.” This allows the interviewer to get a sense of the participant and makes the interviewee comfortable and open to responding fully. Good questions are those that encourage descriptions of processes that open up discussions about a broad range of factors. A “tell me about it” type of question is good to use to ensure answers are not guided. Another good tip is to ask about how things have changed as they will highlight and focus on things they have noticed. These can be followed up with what changes they might like to see.

It is very important to carefully craft questions so they are not leading. The interview guide will need to be thoroughly known with the questions memorized (Curry, 2015b). During the interview one must not move to the next question or topic too quickly so as to allow the interviewee to fully answer the questions and not be interrupted.

After the interviews are completed, a content analysis is performed to identify key words or themes (Schulz, 2012). As with the document analysis method, a discourse analysis is needed to look at how things are expressed and if there are certain words that are used to describe something. Following this, a relational analysis is performed to identify relationships between different concepts or themes.

An inductive approach would have the interviews as open as possible, find what the participants say, and then develop some theory or express commonalities or connections based on their responses. While Schulz (2012) describes a very detailed process of sorting and coding his interview material, it can be generally summed up as finding commonalities in the interviews, labelling those as subthemes, and seeking to find commonalities across those subthemes to identify main themes and then begin theory generation or analysis.

A deductive approach, on the other hand, begins with a theory or theories followed by interviews to test the theories to see if the interviewees confirm the theory (Schulz, 2012). If a theory is not already on hand, some interviews can be done, and then a theory can be developed using the inductive approach. That theory can then be tested

in further interviews with the deductive approach. As with the inductive approach outlined above, the interviews are analyzed to find subthemes and themes while looking at the relationships between these themes. More generally, new themes and ideas need to be allowed to emerge while also being systematic.

This thesis asks questions from both the inductive and deductive structures. That is, interview questions are open and broad so the interview participants articulate whatever they think and in their own terms. At the same time, some questions are posed from a deductive interview structure: the questions ask if they think a certain theory, explanation, or principle expressed in the consultation or review guidelines matches their experience.

Another important task comes after the interviews themselves. What seems to be the most popular method for analysing the information is to categorize and then code the information (Taylor-Powell, E. and Renner, 2003). This can mean finding themes in each interview, placing each interview into a column with the themes listed within each column, then finding commonalities across columns to find common topics. This is a good way to visually organize the interview data and clearly identify themes and topics. Another way to think about this is to develop a “code structure” (Curry, 2015a). This refers to the process of developing a practical way of organizing the data into topics and themes by summarizing points and identifying commonalities across the data. Importantly, this is an “iterative” process, which means that code and theme development requires returning to transcripts throughout the process to add, subtract, and revise the code structure as we work through the data (Curry, 2015a).

But, how to know what to code? To start, a line-by-line analysis of each interview will help the researcher find the following: something repeated in different interviews, something unanticipated, anything the interviewee explicitly states as being important, something that aligns with research or theories presented in the literature review, or any other reason the researcher deems important (Löfgren, 2013a). While this is somewhat

abstract and ideal, these various themes begin to emerge during the process of interviewing and become quite clear to the researcher.

### 3.7 RESEARCH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

#### 3.7.1 RESEARCH ETHICS

In qualitative studies like this MA thesis, and one that will involve human participants, it is imperative to strictly adhere to research ethics. While there are many aspects to research ethics in general, there are two areas that are most relevant to this thesis project: research integrity and the safety and welfare of the human participants involved.

Research integrity refers to the general principles that must be followed while conducting academic research: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (University of Waterloo, n.d.-a). While there are many aspects to the above principles, those that most closely relate to this work involve either falsification or manipulation of recordings or data, as well as plagiarism. As for the latter, I have never committed, nor do I intend to commit, plagiarism. One area that is a bit murky is “self-plagiarism” which refers to submitting all or part of one’s own work more than once for credit or publication (Rosenzweig & Schnitzer, 2013). There are aspects of this thesis that first developed in other writings previously submitted for credit. However, those previous assignments were done with the express purpose of becoming part of this thesis, and those writings have been altered to fit within this thesis.

As for providing false or manipulated recordings or data, this thesis has followed very clear guidelines (Panel on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2016) to ensure the integrity of the data. One aspect of those guidelines is to not alter or fabricate any recordings or data. While this might seem very clear-cut, there are times when manipulating a recording or data seems inconsequential or perhaps even unintentional. The best way to avoid unintentional manipulation of data is to keep a very detailed record of the interviews. This provides a clear account of what was said and is accurately reflected in the thesis. As for what appears to be inconsequential manipulation of data, the rule to follow, of course, is to not manipulate at all. Say, for



example, an interview respondent said something that was very close to, again for example, a certain theory. The thesis would discuss the similarities but go to lengths to note the differences.

Regarding the safety and welfare of the human participants involved, this thesis follows all of the guidelines posted on The University of Waterloo's Research with Human Participants webpage (University of Waterloo, n.d.-b). There is far too much in those guides to comprehensively cover here, however, of all the elements this thesis must adhere to, a few are particularly relevant. University of Waterloo has a clear, step-by-step "Ethics Process" that begins with outlining the need for "Mandatory Research Ethics Training," a long list of frequently asked questions, and a guideline for the ethics application process (University of Waterloo, n.d.-b). For this thesis, the online "Course on Research Ethics" was successfully completed, and the researcher applied for ethics clearance. The application included draft recruitment materials, information and consent forms, interview guides, feedback letters, conflict of interest statements, as well as approved research proposals (University of Waterloo, 2015). On December 8, 2017, the project received ethics clearance from a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee.

### 3.8 CASE STUDIES

This thesis uses two cases to evaluate the public consultation process during school closure reviews. As noted above in section 3.6.2, case studies are not a research *method* but are rather a research approach or strategy (Robson, 1993). Rather than descriptive case studies, this thesis will use case studies to provide an account of how people experienced an issue or event – in this case the consultation process during school closure reviews (Gibbs, 2012). A case is a particular instance that can be used to generalize (Stake, 2000). While cases can be sections of a population, a specific area, or a certain event or phenomena, it is important to remember the aspect of time (Gerring, 2011). Thus, the case studies used in this thesis are bounded by space (specific areas) and are also bounded by time (specific range of time).

### 3.8.1 JUSTIFICATION OF CASE STUDIES USED IN THESIS

The two case studies used in this thesis are bounded by space and time. One case study is school closure review that occurred from June 2013 to April 2014 of Parliament Oak Public School in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The other case study is the closure review of A.J. Baker Public School that occurred from May 2013 to October 2014 in Zorra, Ontario. It is important to delineate these case studies from other issues, including other school closure reviews in these areas, as well as previous reviews of these schools.

These two case studies have been chosen for reasons that they are both similar and different in various ways and are thus more likely to lead to appropriate generalizations about the consultation process province-wide. Both cases concern school closure reviews that occurred under the same set of Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines (PARG). The PARG that guided these reviews addressed deeper concerns (such as community and economic impacts) than the subsequent PARG, and are more similar to the most recent PARG. These two case studies are also similar since in both instances the school under review was the only elementary school in their communities.

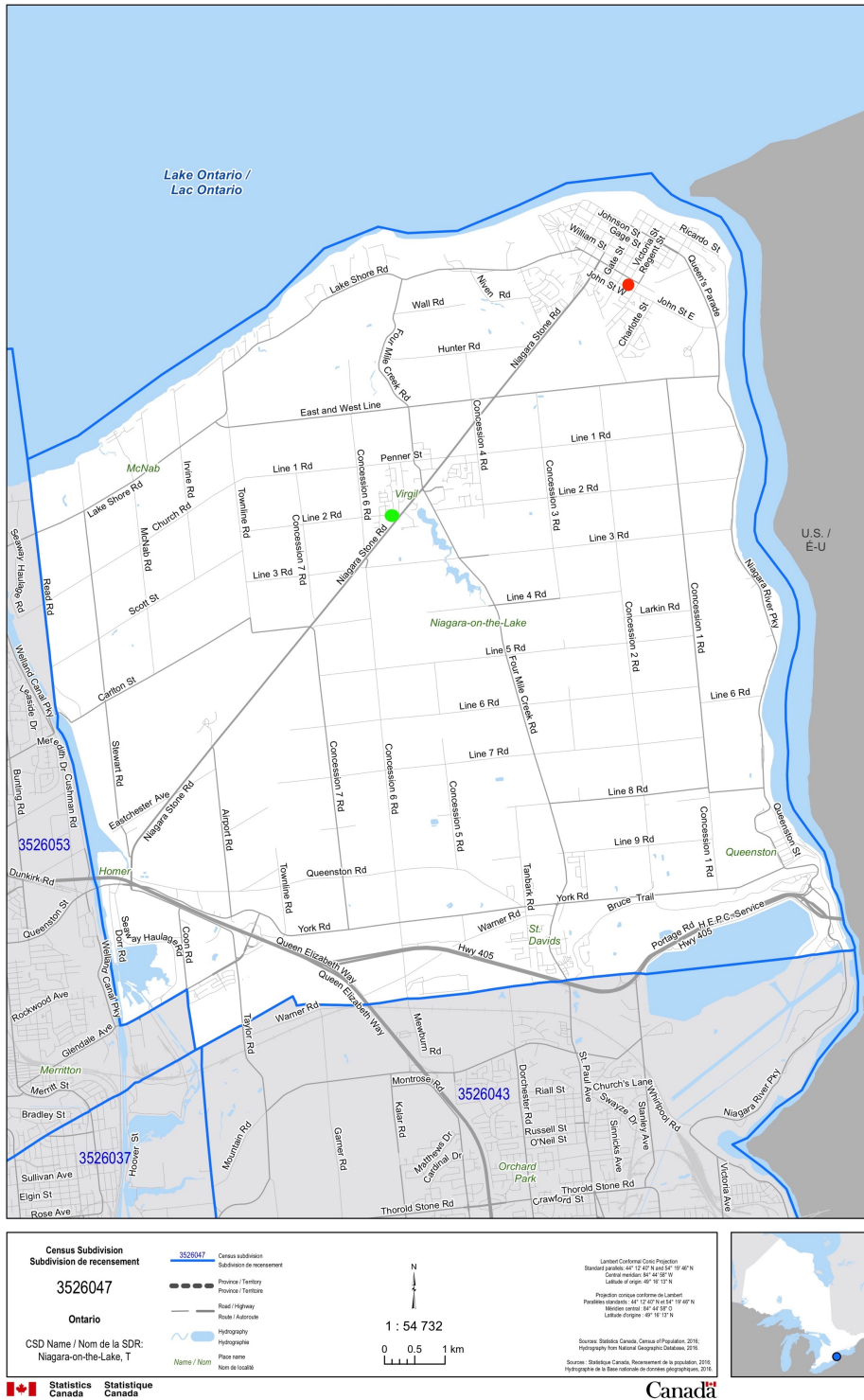
However, the differences between the two cases are striking and provide further justification for their use. The main difference between the two is that the review of Parliament Oak led to its closure, whereas the review of A.J. Baker resulted in the school remaining open. Since one was “successful” and the other not, comparisons may be drawn and conclusions can be postulated about the effect of the consultation process on the final decision. The closure of Parliament Oak was contested in Ontario’s Divisional court, and although it did not overturn the closure, the case decision directly addresses the appropriateness of the consultation process since this was the basis of the appeal. The decision to keep A.J. Baker open can shed light on what aspects of the consultation process may or may not have led to this decision. The thesis provides arguments and suggestions for what strategies and processes during the consultation process that may have led to the decision to keep the school open.

When choosing a case study or case studies, Gerring (2006) finds there are nine types of case studies: typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, crucial, pathway, most-similar, and most-different. Based on the general descriptions of the two cases, the review of Parliament Oak can be considered “typical” in that the review followed the rules of the existing PARG and resulted in a closure. A.J. Baker, since it remained open after the review, can be understood as “deviant” since it is rare that a school remains open once a closure review has begun (People for Education, 2017). These two cases allow for what Gerring (2006) calls “cross-case technique,” which is a means for comparing two or more case studies. In this case, it compares an “onlier” with an “outlier” (Gerring, 2006, p. 89). The reviews of Parliament Oak and A.J. Baker took place at roughly the same time: October 2013 to April 2014 for Parliament Oak, and May 2013 to October 2014 for A.J. Baker.

### 3.8.2 CASE STUDY: CLOSURE REVIEW OF PARLIAMENT OAK PUBLIC SCHOOL, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) is located in South Eastern Ontario, close to the American border. While primarily agricultural, it is known for grape and wine production and is a popular tourist destination.

Figure 1 – The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake



Map image from Census Canada. The red dot indicates the location of Parliament Oak Public School in Old Town and the green dot indicates the location of Crossroads Public School in Virgil.

From 2006 to 2016, the Census Subdivision of NOTL saw its overall population increase by 26.5%, with much of this attributed to a significant increase in people aged 55 and older. The largest increase comes from those aged 65 to 69 (79%), followed by those aged 85 and older (73%). This clearly demonstrates it is attractive to those retiring. Narrowing down to the Census Tract 0110.00, which is solely the Town of NOTL and shown in Table 1 below, the overall population change from 2006 to 2016 increased by only 3%. There was a significant decrease of 31% of those aged 0 to 19 years, while those aged 65 to 69 increased by 80%. The median age is also quite high at 59, well above the Provincial median age of 41, which is also the National median age.

**Table 2 – Census Data of The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake**

Town of NOTL (Census Tract 0110.00)				
	2006	2011	2016	% change
Total population	3905	3870	4030	3.20
0 to 4 years	70	50	60	-14.29
5 to 9 years	110	85	70	-36.36
10 to 14 years	125	105	80	-36.00
15 to 19 years	160	125	95	-40.63
20 to 24 years	150	140	140	-6.67
25 to 29 years	75	100	115	53.33
30 to 34 years	80	80	95	18.75
35 to 39 years	115	80	75	-34.78
40 to 44 years	185	120	100	-45.95
45 to 49 years	215	200	130	-39.53
50 to 54 years	330	260	270	-18.18
55 to 59 years	500	370	370	-26.00
60 to 64 years	415	575	500	20.48
65 to 69 years	350	465	630	80.00
70 to 74 years	325	350	470	44.62
75 to 79 years	270	285	330	22.22
80 to 84 years	215	235	235	9.30
85 years and over	200	240	285	42.50
Median age of the population	58.6	62.1	59.3	1.19

Data from Census Canada

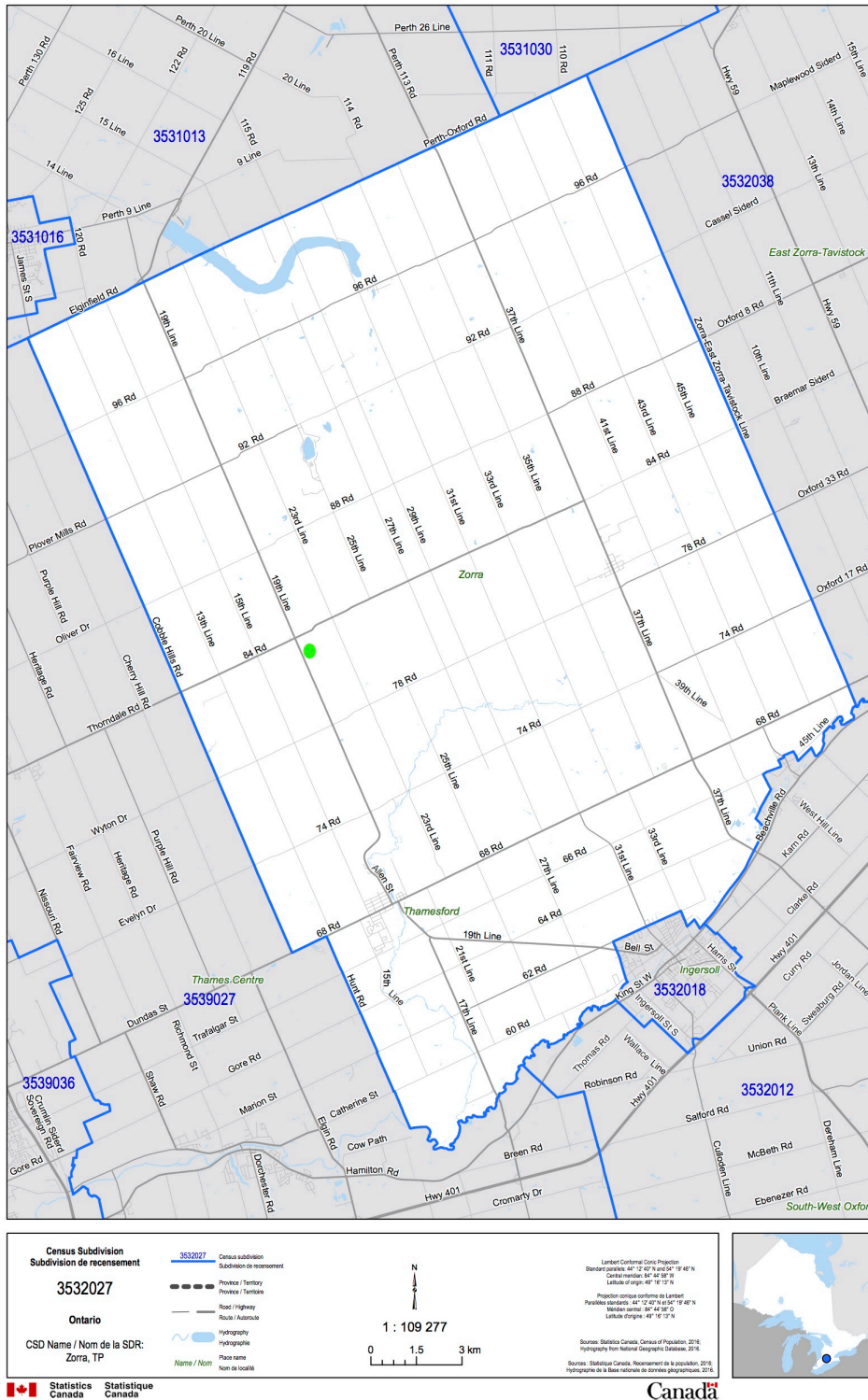
Built in the 1940s, Parliament Oak Public School was located in the centre of the historical Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake at 325 King Street (Zettel, 2018b). The District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) voted in June 2013 to put the school up for closure review (Cheevers, 2013). The Pupil Accommodation Review that followed this decision began in October 2013 (District School Board of Niagara, 2013). In April 2014, the DSBN decided to close Parliament Oak (Niagara Advance, 2014). The school closed on June 30, 2015, and the students were “merged” with Crossroads Public School in Virgil, which is roughly 6.5 kilometers away (Cheevers, 2014). After the closure of Parliament Oak, a group of residents began a private “community” school they called Royal Oak and hoped to eventually house the school in the old Parliament Oak building (Cheevers, 2015). They were unsuccessful and other residents sought to turn the building into a community hub. Even though the Town of NOTL submitted an over-asking-price offer to purchase the site (Niagara-on-the-Lake, 2017), in January 2018, the DSBN sold the building and property of Parliament Oak for \$4.9 million (Zettel, 2018a).

This case study is bounded by the Accommodation Review of Parliament Oak Public School in NOTL that took place between June 2013 and April 2014.

### 3.8.3 CASE STUDY: CLOSURE REVIEW OF A.J. BAKER, ZORRA TOWNSHIP

Zorra Township is located in Southwestern Ontario, roughly between Woodstock and Stratford. It is primarily an agricultural community, with Thamesford being the main settlement area.

Figure 2 – Zorra Township



Map image from Census Canada. The green dot indicates the location of A.J. Baker Public School in Kintore.

From 2006 to 2016 the overall population remained the same with only a 0.18% increase. However, as Table 2 below shows, there were significant declines in those aged 10 to 19 and substantial growth of those aged 50 to 79. Nonetheless, the median age of the population is 40.7, just 0.3 lower than the Provincial and National average of 41.

**Table 3 – Census Data of Zorra Township**

Zorra Township				
	2006	2011	2016	% change
Total population	8125	8060	8140	0.18
0 to 4 years	430	500	480	10.42
5 to 9 years	515	445	535	3.74
10 to 14 years	635	545	475	-33.68
15 to 19 years	630	610	510	-23.53
20 to 24 years	485	490	495	2.02
25 to 29 years	370	380	415	10.84
30 to 34 years	480	405	420	-14.29
35 to 39 years	505	485	520	2.88
40 to 44 years	690	520	475	-45.26
45 to 49 years	695	690	540	-28.70
50 to 54 years	615	680	685	10.22
55 to 59 years	590	575	665	11.28
60 to 64 years	425	565	565	24.78
65 to 69 years	345	425	510	32.35
70 to 74 years	250	300	350	28.57
75 to 79 years	220	200	245	10.20
80 to 84 years	150	140	135	-11.11
85 years and over	95	115	115	17.39
Median age of the population	40	41.5	40.7	1.72

Data from Census Canada

A.J. Baker Public School is located in Kintore, a hamlet within Zorra Township. On January 22, 2013, the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) voted to subject A.J. Baker to closure review (Thames Valley District School Board, 2016). The ARC had its first meeting on May 8, 2013, and submitted its report recommending A.J. Baker not



be closed in April 2014; TVDSB made its final decision to not close A.J. Baker on October 14, 2014 (Hart, 2014).

This case study is bounded by the Accommodation Review of A.J. Baker Public School in Zorra that took place between May 2013 and October 2014.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis researches the existing and possible public consultation strategies and models during school closure reviews. As the literature review has shown, this is an area with little prior research. While most literature on school closures notes the flawed consultation models in use, little has been done to investigate why these models are flawed or what models would be more appropriate. To address this, this thesis presented the two main theoretical foundations for consultation (Habermassian with its emphasis on consensus, and Foucauldian with its emphasis on inherent conflict and power relations), and it outlined a number of consultation models from the field of planning.

To gain an understanding of participants' experience with the consultation process during these closure reviews, research for this thesis included interviews with those involved in the consultation process of a school closure review in their community. As detailed in the Methods chapter, this thesis is using two case studies: the review and closure of Parliament Oak Public from 2013-2014, and the review for closure of A.J. Baker in Zorra Township from 2013-2014. Interviews were conducted with people involved in those two closure reviews. Before outlining the details and results of those interviews, this chapter first provides an overview of the consultation requirements as outlined in the 2009 Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG). Though a new PARG was released in 2015, and another in 2018, the 2009 PARG was the one in force when both Parliament Oak and A.J. Baker were reviewed. Furthermore, as will be explained below, the content of the 2009 PARG is closer to the 2018 PARG than to the 2015 PARG. This chapter will then provide a document and discourse analysis of the closure reviews as reported by local news media. The details and results of the interviews will then be discussed, and the chapter will finish with a discussion of the court appeal brought on after the closure decision in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL).

## 4.2 CONSULTATION GUIDELINES

As briefly outlined in the Literature Review, section 3.8, in 2009 the Province of Ontario introduced a Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009), which updated the 2006 PARG (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The purpose of these PARGs is to provide a set of guidelines for local school boards when considering closing a school. The PARG has been updated in 2015 and again in 2018. However, since both case studies concern closure reviews that took place between 2013 and 2014, specific attention will be paid to the then-in-force 2009 PARG.

While the Province provides these “guidelines,” it is ultimately up to each board to develop its own review policies based on these guidelines. The stated purpose of the 2009 PARG is to ensure that when a decision is made about the future of a school, “that decision is made with the full involvement of an informed local community” and that the decision is made based on “criteria regarding the quality of the learning experience for students” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1). To fulfil this purpose, the PARG outlines the process of review through the creation of an Accommodation Review Committee (ARC), which is to assume an “advisory role and will provide recommendations that will inform the final decision made by the Board of Trustees” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 2). The members of the ARC are appointed by the Board of Trustees and are to consist of community members such as parents, educators, board officials, and community members – trustees do not have to serve on ARCs.

Prior to the official beginning of a review and the creation of an ARC, boards must complete a School Information Profile (SIP) which includes data on four areas of value: to the student, to the school board, to the community, and to the local economy. These are listed in order of importance, and the PARG explicitly states the main priority is the value to the student, which includes things like learning environment, student outcomes, course and program offerings, the general condition of the school, accessibility, and safety. The value to the school board somewhat overlaps with the value to the student,

but importantly addresses fiscal factors, such as the cost to operate, maintain, and upgrade the school's facilities.

While the value to the community and local economy are the least important from the PARG's perspective, they are of utmost importance of those involved and interviewed for this thesis. The PARG lists the factors for value to the community as how the school facility is used by the broader community (such as for its green space or for recreation), if there are after-school programs that serve the community, if there are existing partnerships with other government initiatives, and the somewhat vague "value of the school if it is the only school in the community" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). In terms of the value to the local economy, the PARG repeats the vague line about the school's value if it is the only school, and points to factors such as the school as an employer, if it provides co-op opportunities, or trains people for employment with local businesses. It also includes the school's role in attracting and retaining families in the community.

In the sections below, where interview participants' concerns are discussed, it will be shown that their concerns are not part of the explicit factors the SIP addresses.

Regarding the consultation process, the PARG's approach is somewhat based on the "citizen jury" model (Shiple & Utz, 2012). Rather than focusing on a consultation with the public at large, the ARC is established with the intention of representing the community's views. That said, the PARG states that all information (i.e. the SIP, Terms of Reference, etc.) made available to the ARC is available to the public. The PARG also makes the ARC responsible for inviting a wide range of groups such as parents, students, school staff, and other interested parties in the local community. However, these broader consultations are to be limited to the SIP and the Terms of Reference provided by the board.

The public meetings hosted by the ARC are to be well publicized, held at an appropriate location, and structured to encourage an open exchange of ideas. However, the content of these public meetings are to be limited to the SIP, the Terms of Reference, and the

Accommodation Report the ARC drafts. The PARG states there are to be a minimum of four of these public meetings and minutes are to be kept and made public. Of note, ARC members and “board administration” are to respond to “questions they consider relevant” either at the meetings or in writing appended to the meeting’s minutes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 5).

The PARG has some stipulations about the timing of these public meetings. The first of the minimum four meetings cannot be any sooner than 30 days after the decision to review the school. The total public consultation period must be at least 90 days, and there must be at least 60 days between the presentation of the ARC report and the meeting where the Board of Trustees makes its final decision.

Once the minimum four public meetings are complete, the ARC is to prepare and present a report to the Director of Education and the Board of Trustees. The PARG makes no mention of how or even if the ARC report or the comments from the public meeting is to be taken into account when making the final closure decision.

With these ground rules now laid out, we will now see how participants involved experienced the consultation process.

### 4.3 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Interviews were conducted with nine participants, four from Zorra Township and five from the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). Below are brief sections outlining how interview participants are identified anonymously throughout the thesis, and the reason for their selection for inclusion in the thesis.

#### 4.3.1 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS’ ANONYMIZED IDENTITIES AND SHORT FORM CODES

All participants’ identities are anonymized and each either suggested or agreed to their respective anonymous identifier. Pronouns are avoided as to not reveal the participants’ genders. Below are listed the anonymized identifiers for each interview participant as well as their assigned short-form code that will be used throughout for simplicity and clarity (e.g. “Zorra Councillor 1” will be referred to as “ZC1”).

The participants from Zorra are identified as:

- Zorra Councillor 1 (ZC1);
- Zorra Councillor 2 (ZC2);
- Zorra ARC Member (ZA); and
- TVDSB Trustee (TT).

The participants from NOTL are identified as:

- NOTL Community Organizer (NCO);
- NOTL ARC Member who is a Registered Professional Planner (NAR);
- NOTL Councillor (NC);
- NOTL ARC Member 1 (NA1); and
- NOTL ARC Member 2 (NA2).

#### 4.3.2 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS' ROLE, SELECTION, AND EXPECTED RESPONSES

This section might run the risk of de-anonymizing the interview participants, but all are on record stating they are not concerned if a motivated person deciphered their true identities. All are proud of the work they did. Nonetheless, the Waterloo Research Ethics Committee insists on anonymizing interview participants and so they shall remain anonymous.

From Zorra, the four participants were selected based on their involvement in the school review consultation process. One of the Councillors took a leadership role in the consultation process and became a Councillor shortly after the decision to keep A.J. Baker open. The other Councillor was not formally involved in the consultation process as an ARC member but lent support as a Councillor. The participant identified as "ARC Member" also played a leadership role during the closure process and is very knowledgeable of the process and the impacts of school closures more broadly. The "Trustee" was not a Trustee at the time of A.J. Baker's review, but had been involved in closure reviews before and since the review of A.J. Baker.

I was aware that all but the Trustee were firmly of the mind that A.J. Baker should not close and thus expected discussions to concern why A.J. Baker should not have been reviewed for closure and views of the decision to keep it open to be deemed as a

victory. I had hoped involving a Trustee would provide either the perspective that not closing A.J. Baker was a mistake, or at least offer a perspective to counter the other interviewees. I was surprised that this was not the case and that even the Trustee noted the consultation and review process more generally was problematic. As one interviewee noted, only one or two community members supported closing the school and one took the position under the false impression that closing A.J. Baker would result in more funds for other schools.

The NOTL interview participants were selected for similar reasons. However, instead of two Councillors only one was interviewed. This person was a Councillor during the review of Parliament Oak and is an advocate for retaining local schools in rural Ontario. The “Community Organizer” was not a member of the ARC, but is heavily involved in local school advocacy and was instrumental in launching the Judicial Review of the closure and setting up the private community school (Royal Oak) after Parliament Oak was closed. Two of the three “ARC members” did not appear to play as much of a leadership role as those interviewed in Zorra, but were deeply involved in and knowledgeable of the process. The third “ARC member” is also a Registered Professional Planner with many years’ experience and was thus able to provide a distinct perspective.

I expected each of these participants to feel the consultation and review process more broadly was unfair and unjust. However, I was surprised at their high level of frustration and the degree to which they felt the process was disingenuous and even rigged. It was one of their responses – “it’s farcical!” – that provided the title of this thesis. As noted below in the Shortcomings section in the following chapter, Trustees from the Niagara District School Board were contacted but none responded to interview requests. It was hoped a Trustee might provide a counter-perspective, but perhaps they would hold a critical perspective as the Trustee from Zorra did.

The questions posed to the interview participants are based on the interview question rubric (Appendix 1), which is organized based on the participant’s role in or relationship

to the ARC. As discussed in the Methods chapter, these questions were open-ended and participants were encouraged to raise other issues or topics they felt were relevant.

#### 4.4 INTERVIEW THEMES SUMMARY

Out of these nine interviews, there emerged a number of themes and subthemes. Subsections of this chapter are organized by these themes. For each theme, participants' own words are presented, followed by a brief summary. Each theme is then analyzed based on material from the Literature Review. The interview themes are:

1. Time
  - a. Community should be informed of school review earlier
  - b. Length of consultation period
2. Consultation process did not feel genuine
3. Flawed decision-making process
  - a. Trustees are weak
  - b. School boards are too large
  - c. Trustees were not at consultations
4. Dispute over facts and data
  - a. Incorrect facts
  - b. Manipulated data
5. Money
  - a. School funding
  - b. School site's property value
6. Trustees hostile towards parents and the community
7. Positive outcomes
8. Recommendations
  - a. Involve community official and/or planners
  - b. Establish community hub
  - c. General recommendations

It should be acknowledged that these themes emerged partly because of the questions that were posed, but they are mainly the result of the participants' responses to questions.



## 4.5 TIME

One of the main concerns of interview participants concerned issues around time: a) the feeling that the community should have been informed earlier that their school was being subject to closure review, and b) the length of time of the consultation process.

### 4.5.1 COMMUNITY SHOULD BE INFORMED EARLIER

Interview participants from both communities felt that their respective community should have been informed of the review earlier. The following subsection discusses the length of the consultation process, whereas this section presents the concern that the school board's decision to close the school had already been made when the community was informed of the review.

As put by ZC2:

The decision made by senior administration to target a school for closure is made *years* before a recommendation goes to the board to consider that school for closure.

And ZC1 felt the same:

Recommendations were already made to close the school. That [School Information] Profile is what determines the recommendation [and so] the Profile information needs to be circulated to the public much more in advance than the actual review.

Hinting at a specific recommendation that will be discussed further below, NCO stated that

the decision was already made, and so the question is, how do you start the process earlier, before the decision is made, so you can get input, so you can get some alternative solutions?

And lastly NC expresses a similar position:

[The consultation process] should be meaningful and should start with regular meetings between staff at the community and staff at the board level ... There's a saying, 'staff to staff, politician to politician.' But there is no

requirement for anything like that to take place. The Ministry has said it *should* but so far they have not made it a requirement.

#### 4.5.2 LENGTH OF CONSULTATION PROCESS

Aside from the feeling that the consultation process began too late, interview participants had opinions on the length of the process. As noted in the Methods chapter, community members in NOTL were informed that Parliament Oak was under review in June 2013 and the closure decision was made roughly ten months later in April 2014. In Zorra, the review of A.J. Baker was revealed to the public in Jan 2013 and the decision to keep the school open was made roughly 21 months later in October 2014.

It is quite possible that A.J. Baker was kept open partly because of the longer consultation process. As ZC2 explained:

The trustees [took our perspective and opinions into account]. I want to be specific: the trustees did – that's it. The only reason they did was because of the length of time under that process that we had to talk with them. About 20 months in total from the night trustees voted to start the Pupil Accommodation Review to the night they voted to keep it open. And it was that timeframe that allowed us to talk to trustees, understand what they did and did not know about our community, educate them about it in terms of facts, and for them to get an appreciation of the situation. ... That time was key and trustees told us this. They told us one-on-one: 'We learned things about this community.' And they learned those things because there was time for them to get to know.

In fact, in Zorra, the community had been working outside the framework of the ARC and created their own committee to meet and strategize. As ZC1 argued:

Because there had been so much ground work done by the committee, by the Save AJ Baker Committee, not the ARC Committee – but they were good too – but the Save AJ Baker Committee, the whole Board was listening.

ZC2 explains why it was important to have sufficient time with trustees:

[ARC members] get to formally present to trustees only at the end. That's why the length of the process is so critical. We established relationships

with trustees so you get to incrementally inform them. There were three hours of delegations at the final night. That's just way too much information for any human being to take on in a meaningful way.

ZC2 reiterated this point:

Six months [the official time allowed for the current Pupil Accomodation Review] is not enough time for there to be meaningful dialogue and exchange of information. ... It's not enough time for trustees to really understand the situation they're looking at. Thirty days from when trustees vote to begin review to the first meeting is nowhere near enough time for anyone to become familiar enough with that process to effectively engage in that process.

The consultation process was shorter in NOTL, but ZA explains why it was not so much the length that mattered:

[The review] was a year ... but it only involved four ARC meetings so whether it was a year or six months or whatever, it wasn't many meetings. At meeting one you might ask for some statistics on whatever, and by meeting four you *might* get them, or just get an answer 'no, we couldn't find that for you.' ... Had we not been working our heads off in between each ARC meeting, there's no way on earth we would've won that.

NA1 was somewhat ambivalent about the length of time:

The process is very long. The length is good because not everyone has time [but] we need the lengthy process to make sure everyone can give their input. It should be longer. [There should be] more meetings with *all* the players.

But as NC notes about the later revisions to PARG: "They've actually shortened the consultation process and eliminated the opportunity for real dialogue."

#### 4.5.3 TIME – SUMMARY

All interview participants who spoke to the issue felt that their community should have been informed earlier that their school was subject to closure review. Participants felt that the review process actually started much earlier, that a closure decision had already been made, and the community was brought in far too late. Zorra likely

remained open partly because of the rather lengthy process and the fact that community members organized and strategized before the ARC was created and during the entire process. During the review process, those involved became aware that the official length and number of meetings was not nearly sufficient to provide trustees with the information necessary to make an informed decision. Community members in NOTL were somewhat ambivalent about the actual length of the consultation process but felt the structure of the meetings needed significant improvements.

#### 4.5.4 TIME – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

The concern that consultations did not begin early enough in the process, or that the consultation process itself was too short, presents two difficulties. One difficulty, as noted in the Literature Review chapter, is that people writing on consultation only touch on the idea that those consulted ought to be brought into the process at an appropriate, early time (Arnstein, 1969; Burby, 2003; Gray, 1989). Since it appears to be an obvious point, little discussion or analysis is available. The common phrase in planning consultation “consult early and consult often” is sound, obvious wisdom. However, some of what appears in the non-academic sources that discuss the issue (Association for Project Management, n.d.; Javaheri & Boyco, 2016) align with what the interview participants felt: that they were informed of the closure review somewhat after-the-fact and that the review process was already years old, and they were brought in at the final stages. A second issue is that there is no set time-frame for when “early” is, just that consultations start at the beginning or early stages of processes (Javaheri & Boyco, 2016). When “early” or “appropriate” would be is dependent on the specific issue or problem. However, we can surmise that, for school closure reviews, it would be before the School Information Profile is drafted. This will be discussed more fully in section 5.1.3 in the following Recommendations chapter.

That engaging early and often will build relationships is evident from the interviews with participants in Zorra. Both ZC1 and ZC2 argued it was the result of a long and sustained consultation process that allowed the community to provide the appropriate and necessary statistical and demographic evidence to make an informed decision. If school

boards are genuinely consulting with the community about the future of a school, they would do well to aim for “partnership” on Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation. That those involved in the review process in Zorra found benefit in a longer consultation process so as to get to know and educate school board trustees at a more reasonable pace speaks to the benefits of developing a longer-term relationship with the community (Sandercock, 2004; Shipley & Utz, 2012). This improves the quality of the relationship through improved communication and trust among the partners.

#### 4.6 CONSULTATION PROCESS DID NOT FEEL GENUINE

Nearly every interview participant expressed the opinion that the consultation process was not genuine. That is, they felt their concerns, though they were asked to provide them, did not have any bearing on the final decision. This is the largest issue that arose in all the interviews, and interview participants had much to say about the quality of the consultation. Even those in Zorra where the school was not closed felt the consultation process was not genuine.

NA1 put it most succinctly: “It’s farcical!” And, when asked if their concerns were understood or recognized as valid:

Absolutely not. The framework of the process is more important than the context. You go through the exercise, but the information you’re sharing never gets shared with the people who are actually making the vote or decision.

NA1 went on to explain:

You sort of had a feeling the whole time that it was more important that they followed every rule about how an ARC was to happen vs getting really good information from the public and considering that information. It was more about ... checking off all the boxes. The framework of the process always seemed more important than the context. It just never felt genuine. As you went through the process, it became more and more obvious that the trustees weren’t interested in the logic, or the fact that almost every community member and the town all said that Parliament Oak should stay open. Do I have faith in the trustees listening? No.

From NOTL, NA1:

I think everyone in the community felt that the minute that ARC was opened, Parliament Oak was doomed. It was fairly well-known in the community that the plan was to close Parliament Oak. There was nothing anyone was going to be able to do to keep the school open because the school board had made the decision and that they only go through the ARC because they have to, not because they want to, or want our input, or genuinely care what the community has to say.

From Zorra, ZC1 had a similar sentiment

It comes down the fact that the staff is there to defend their position as opposed to a full consultation. A superficial to lack of willingness to consider options.

This perspective is repeated by ZC2:

School boards view those PARs, PARGs, ARCs – all those things are necessary hurdles to get through to close a school. They do not view those things as inputs to make a decision. Those are hurdles to overcome to do what you set out to do years ago anyway.

Some interview participants stated the consultation was a waste of time. NA1:

When they only have to consider it, but not actually ... when the public input doesn't really matter, it's just a waste of everyone's time.

NA2: "Go through this waste-of-time experience."

NAR argues that:

The decision to close had already been made before I was even appointed to the ARC, notwithstanding the fact I asked them not to waste my time if the decision had already been made – don't even bother, get somebody else.

Very troubling and quite concerning is what NA1 witnessed:

At every meeting I attended, the superintendent would sit at the side of the room and be on their phones. It was downright rude and disrespectful. It

backs up my feeling that this is a predetermined result. They know what's going to happen, they're just there to show their face. It's not in good-faith, the whole process. I don't think the whole process is in good faith at all, they're just doing it because the government says they have to go through the process and hear the public.

In Zorra, ZC2 explains the value of the school to the community:

At the beginning of the process, at least to senior administration who made the recommendation [to review the school for closure] it did not matter *at all*.

Though the value of the school was to be included in the SIP, ZC2 stated:

It was not addressed anywhere in the binder that we got. [Trustees took] 'community' to mean 'school community' and by the end of the process, parents and students would identify with their new 'school community' and this would be a non-issue.

IN NOTL, NC argued:

There is a disconnect between the boards and municipalities. For school boards the only people who count are parents who have children in the system. They [boards] feel they have no reason to consult with anyone else. The wider community is not part of the process.

NC took a very clear and stark position:

ARCs didn't matter because the decision was going to be made at the director of education and supervisory staff level.

However, TT, perhaps because of being a trustee, took a more nuanced position:

Those who are engaged in the consultation fully comprehend their leadership role. We immerse people in an extremely complex process ... and we ask for their thoughts, views, ideas, and opinions on something that is much greater than 'should your school remain open or be closed?' What we're asking of folks and the complexity of knowledge they need to have to ensure that the information they provide to us is actually the information that is required to make a decision. *And* it takes an investment on the part of the

trustee to make sure they are as engaged, as fully informed as they need to be.

Many felt the consultation process was so disingenuous they were left with strong feelings of bitterness and resentment. NA1:

At the time I felt they [trustees] were listening... but honestly, no. At the time I hoped, you always hope and feel the time you put in is worthwhile. But they clearly weren't interested in our ideas.

NA2 expresses a similar sentiment:

This was my first foray into understanding how elected officials affect decisions ... how they affect me and my child. And I would say 'disillusionment' is how I felt about the whole process. I feel more disconnected from my community.

NA2 frustration with the process is very apparent:

The Chair of the committee is being paid by the board, their role is to close the school. That's the first step in the ridiculousness of it. It's not democratic, there no real mediation here, there's no two-way communication. You present, but there's never response opportunities.

In Zorra, ZA makes the point that it was not an appropriate way to decide if a school should close or remain open. After talking about all the work that went into saving the school, ZA states:

It really appalls me that a community has to do that. A school should stay open on its own merit ... not just what kind of song and dance you can put on for them. It's a strange situation. You're talking to the school board, and you're like, 'this is your school, we don't own it, and we have to convince *you* to keep it open.' ... You basically have to put on a song and dance and it has to be good enough, and if it's not good enough then your school won't stay open. It's kind of a strange procedure, for sure.

ZA later returned to this point:



I still feel it's [the consultation process] ridiculous. You're a like the jesters in the court. Like you have to impress them and blow them away and then maybe they'll choose to keep you open and maybe they won't.

While ZA notes that the community was heard by the school board, it was not in the way a consultation is meant to unfold:

We were heard, but only because we made it so public and so awkward for them to say anything different. We used their own rationale ... and showed how it didn't make any sense, had no backing to it. Used their own words against them, that helped I think. We made it awkward for them to say no.

IN NOTL, NCO explained the community's frustration:

The trustees didn't care to listen, and it is unfortunate, because I believe they are elected to listen to their community members ... but they just took what the staff said at face value and voted accordingly.

NCO explains the frustration this way:

I literally got involved because I thought it's a no-brainer. Once we show them the data, of course they will see it is financially a bad decision to close the school. ... It was only through the process that we realized they weren't listening and were trying to achieve their seat reduction targets, and they actually didn't care that it cost them more.

NCO continues:

It was so clear the moment we started, there was no way they were changing their minds. There's no information we could've shared with them that would've changed staff's mind. They were given the job of shutting the school and they were gonna do it. It just felt like the whole process they weren't listening. I would've rather they said at the beginning, 'We're just shutting the school, tough, deal with it' rather than making us feel like they're pretending to listen and us investing so much time and energy only to find out at the end they clearly weren't listening and it was all meaningless. It was such a fake process that I think is so frustrating for community members.

NAR made a similar point about just wanting to be heard. In context of previous work in another jurisdiction and never having a development decision appealed, NAR explained that

People just want to know that they've been heard. Even if the decision goes against your opinion, most reasonable people – not everybody – but most reasonable people will accept it – 'I was heard, I heard evidence, I see why we made the decision, OK, that's good enough for me.'

#### 4.6.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS DID NOT FEEL GENUINE – SUMMARY

Not one person interviewed felt the consultation was anywhere near genuine. Most felt their participation in the consultations had little to no effect in the final decision. Even in Zorra, where the community did change the school board's position, participants noted it was the result not of meaningful consultation, but of putting the school board in an untenable public position so they had little choice but to keep their school open. While it is very concerning to hear school board staff were on their phones and not listening during the meetings, perhaps more troubling is the cynicism and distrust such a disingenuous process breeds. It is alarming to hear how little trust some interview participants now have in their elected officials.

Some interview participants noted that the consultation was set up so that community members had to 'wow' and impress trustees, and this should not be the way in which these decisions are made. This speaks to the decision-making process itself.

#### 4.6.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS DID NOT FEEL GENUINE – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

Somewhat like the issue with the literature on the topic of beginning the consultation process at an appropriate, early stage, the literature on consultations only broaches the topic of genuineness. Most of the authors covered in the Literature Review chapter assume those consulting are doing so as honestly as possible. However, some literature on the closure review process itself notes the ways in which the process is manipulated to support a closure decision (Bondi, 1987; Doern & Prince, 1989). And it needs to be emphasized that this manipulation during school closure reviews was

identified as long as 30 years ago (Bondi, 1987). Fredua-Kwarteng (2005), in her analysis of Ontario school closure reviews finds it was often a one-way communication process and, as the interview participants felt, was only to give the appearance of public involvement in a consultation process.

As noted in the Literature Review, the Habermasian-influenced form of consultation as a collaborative activity was found to be too idealistic, and some researchers sought to examine how consultation sometimes really happens rather than how it ought to happen (Flyvbjerg, 1996; Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2005; Yiftachel, 1998). These authors help us to understand the so-called “dark side” of planning: the realm of mis-information, rhetoric, falsehood, and appeals to emotion. However, the interview participants report being simply ignored and treated with disrespect and even contempt. As with the issue of involving participants at an early, appropriate stage, that those holding the consultation should pay attention and treat participants with respect is perhaps so obvious that it is difficult to find research that makes these suggestions.

This is where theory can help. Just as Kant (1970) suggested, in section 2.8.1, if the existing theories in the literature are not helping to explain the situation, the problem is not with the situation, but with the theory, and what we need is more and better theory.

If we understand the disingenuity of the consultation through the lens of power relations, some of the theories Foucault discussed, which can be found in the Literature Review, are pertinent here. Power for Foucault is not an object external to social relations, but is constitutive of social relations (Foucault, 1990). Thus, a Foucauldian analysis of the consultation would not suggest that the school board had more power than members of the community. Instead, the power relations were uneven and, borrowing from Arendt (1970), existing social structures and relations of ruling granted institutional support to the *authority* of the school board. While Arendt suggests laughter is the means to undermine authority, Foucault’s insistence that all involved in the social relation are caught up in power relations reminds us that community members themselves play a role by “recognizing” the trustees’ and school board’s authority.

Harvey's (1997) discussion of the relationship between process and form provides a way to think through ZA's suggestion that perhaps a school closure review should be based on facts and evidence, not a public consultation process. While it would perhaps be difficult to accept that the community should not be involved in a school closure review, Harvey's argument outlined in section 2.8.2 helps to think through ZA's suggestion. Harvey argues that certain decisions are inherently non-democratic, not because of how they are arrived at, but because they institute a social form that requires social supports that are reliant on expert knowledge, not democratic decision-making. It appears this is how ZA sees the existence of the local school. It was established at some point based on expert knowledge, and its day-to-day functioning was based on expert knowledge, so it ought to remain open or be closed based on expert knowledge.

However, another perfectly valid opinion would be that the decision of a school closure review should not, as ZA states, be based on impressing the decision makers with a "song and dance," nor should it be based on the cold facts of enrolment projections. Instead, the decision could be *partly* based on community value. That ZA feels there are only the two extreme options of either "song and dance" or enrolment projections speaks to the widespread problem of consultations for school reviews.

#### 4.7 FLAWED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Many interview participants made comments about flaws in the decision-making process. It needs to be emphasized that the decision-making process for reviewing a school for closure is really its own topic, in which consultation is just a part. However, this was an important issue to participants and many discussed it in the context of the consultation process. The interview participants' comments on the flaws of the decision-making process as regards the consultation process revolved around three subthemes: a) trustees are weak and beholden to school board administration, b) school boards are too large geographically, and c) trustees were not present at consultations.

#### 4.7.1 TRUSTEES ARE WEAK

A few interview participants felt that trustees do not have much authority or autonomy in their decisions and thus consultation processes with trustees are not effective. Many branded trustees as “weak.” As NAT put it: “There’s no reason to trust trustees because they’re weak, very weak.”

This feeling is echoed in Zorra from ZA:

Admin feeds them [trustees] the information they want to feed them and then the trustees make decisions, votes ... but they know they don’t have the entire picture, the time to read it all. Admin takes advantage of them [trustees] and just feed them parts of the story so we [administration] get what we want.

However, as ZC1 shows, this apparent weakness was not always on display:

The [Save] AJ Baker Committee did such a good job of making the trustees personal, you know? Each side got to know the other probably better than in any other ARC review. They convinced trustees that they *could* have an open mind, that they *could* support this vision – gave them permission to support a position that wasn’t a staff recommendation.

And, speaking as a trustee, TT suggests the lack of unanimous votes points to trustees’ autonomy:

Is there ever a predetermined conclusion? No. If you look at the split vote, or certainly not a unanimous vote ... it’s not a predetermined conclusion.

From NOTL, NC makes an interesting point about the power relations at work with small town elected officials:

In the rest of Ontario [outside GTA] trustees and municipal politicians are part-timers. They are people who want to try and help their communities and so they pay attention to ‘the report of the week.’ Hence, the ability for a director of education who is a professional to run the show. Directors aren’t even employees of the board, they’re employees of the Ministry.

#### 4.7.2 SCHOOL BOARDS ARE TOO LARGE

Another aspect of the decision-making process interview participants had strong opinions about was the size of school boards. This is a concern particular to rural communities and small towns because of the large geographic areas school board's cover.

In NOTL, NC states that

Rural communities [and] small communities lumped in with large urban centres, don't truly have a vote for their trustee. We don't have a trustee from NOTL.

NA1 reiterates this point:

The way that trustees are voted in here, NOTL is counted as part of St. Catharines, so we don't get our own representative ... so we end up without representation.

And finally, NA2: "Trustees didn't really care. They have their own regions they're supporting."

A similar, though less stark, perspective is present in Zorra as well. As ZC2 states:

TVDSB is far too large for the trustees to even begin to be able to have genuinely local knowledge and understanding of situations.

#### 4.7.3 TRUSTEES NOT PRESENT AT CONSULTATIONS

A final subtheme of the perceived flawed decision-making process concerns something much more related to the consultation process: that trustees are not present at them. As ZC2 observed:

A lot of the time, senior administration pressures trustees not to attend. There was only one trustee at ARC meetings and their role is not to help or advocate in anyway. Their role, at best, is to help the ARC members navigate the process they were in. There, not as an elected representative, but as a 'board functionary.'

The problem of trustees not present at consultations is made clear by NA1:

Some of the trustees didn't show up at any meetings, then would show up on voting night and vote to close the school.

When asked about the lack of trustees at the consultations, TT appeared aware of the problem but stated:

Timelines are very short. It makes it incredibly complex for all the trustees and hence there should be ... it is the trustee's responsibilities to be at the public meetings to be able to connect to the broader community, to be able to hear, listen, and engage in the public consultations that are happening locally that may not be part of their constituency area.

#### 4.7.4 FLAWED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS – SUMMARY

While the decision-making process is a topic unto itself, these three specific flaws relate to the consultation process. If trustees do not have, or are not perceived as having, the authority or courage to make decisions they believe in, then there is little reason for members of the community to participate in the consultation process. With large school boards, members of small communities discover that trustees who are unaware of the specifics of their communities are making decisions about their communities. This issue re-appears in section 4.8 below. Finally, the lack of attendance – let alone participation – of trustees at consultation meetings is a problem with a clear solution.

#### 4.7.5 FLAWED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

It appears representation is a common thread running through these three problems with the decision-making process: trustees do not have authority to properly represent their constituents; school boards are too large to provide adequate representation; and trustees are not present at meetings to listen to their constituents. This issue is better addressed in research on representative democracy and beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Foucault's and Arendt's theories of power and authority can help to understand the power dynamics at work. Power relations are inherent to social relations (Foucault, 1990), and through institutional supports, certain people are granted authority (Arendt, 1970).

In the case of school boards, authority is supposed to be granted by the community to the trustees through democratic elections, but it is apparent trustees often acquiesce to school board directors and staff. As interview participants noted, trustee representation is uneven with a large majority of trustees elected by people outside of the community. If we accept the interview participants' accusations, it is not difficult to agree that trustees are, in fact, properly responding to those who granted them authority: the constituents outside the community that elected them. If a school in the large district needs to close, then trustees are following the theory of Arendt (Arendt, 1970) insofar as they are acknowledging that their authority comes from those who elect them and work to keep open the schools where the majority of their electors live.

#### 4.8 DISPUTED FACTS AND DATA

Many interview participants expressed frustration about the facts and data in question during the consultation process. These frustrations revolved around two subthemes: a) the facts being used to guide a closure decision were incorrect, and b) the school board was purposefully manipulating facts and data.

##### 4.8.1 INCORRECT FACTS AND DATA

Many interview participants argued that essential information and data about the school under review and the host community was incorrect. As ZC1 explains:

The local council meets once a year with the school board and at that meeting [the one prior to the review] the Information Profile on A.J. Baker was incorrect, it had not been updated in quite some time. ... If the councillors had not been at that meeting, that [incorrect] information would have been what was used [to determine enrolment trends].

In NOTL, there was a similar feeling. NCO was emphatic:

We believed very strongly that the enrollment projection numbers they had were *very* flawed.

In Zorra, as ZC1 explains, it was essential for community members to keep strictly to the facts at hand so that during the presentations to the board "they were very fact



based, not ‘poor me’ or emotional stuff.” And many trustees were surprised by the facts at hand. As ZA stated:

We’re presenting this information [EQA results and enrollment numbers] and the trustees were ‘wowed’ by this information and thanked us for sharing this information, and the whole time I was thinking, ‘where do you think we got that information? Where do you think we got our enrollment numbers and EQA results?’ ... You’re presenting them with their own facts.

Nonetheless, some felt that the school board was not as committed to facts. As NA2 put it:

There was no balance of information. So the value of ... say, the census data – that’s a pretty important thing when you’re talking about school closures. But the DSBN says there’s going to be this many kids. But one is a real number. One is a *fact!*

Furthermore, there was strong sense that it was near impossible to have trustees make a decision based on correct facts. NA2:

Trustees hadn’t read any of the materials [the ARC had prepared] only the school board report. There was no way offer the correct information.

Another interview participant in NOTL was also led to believe the school board was not interested in correct information. According to NCO:

I had trustees tell me point-blank, ‘We’ve been working with the staff at the DSBN for ten years and I’m looking at your numbers and the school board’s numbers and they show different things and I trust school board staff so I’m going to side with them.’ That’s what they *all* said. They are rubber-stampers to the finite.

#### 4.8.2 MANIPULATED FACTS AND DATA

Even more troubling than the dispute over the veracity of information and data is that many interview participants felt the school board was purposefully manipulating information and facts to support their desire to close the school.

In Zorra, echoing the sentiment that information and data ought to be shared earlier, ZA argued that there:

should be a lot more information right at the beginning of the process. It took so long to get. It's ridiculous because they have it all there. To me it's quite obvious they're just trying to keep it from you.

Nonetheless, some interview participants were generous or diplomatic in how they saw the information coming from the school board. For example, ZC1 stated:

I had concerns about the information being presented from the staff at the Board. Things would be presented in one way that would make you think you were going down a path in fact that was not what was going on...

The apparent manipulation of facts and data was a particular problem in NOTL. Often the explanation for adhering to misrepresented facts was rather troubling. NA2 explains one such situation:

One of the first meetings I attended, they had a map up and the map had our school district region for Parliament Oak right next to the Crossroads region. The map had them looking as similar size. I asked, 'Why would you do this? It makes it look like Parliament Oak district [is the same as Crossroads]', which is really very small ... They could've just moved the district [the catchment area] and then you could've had more kids come to Parliament Oak and not have overcrowding at the other school. But the superintendent made a comment, 'Well, you need to make maps fit onto the foam core board.' And that was the most ridiculous comment ... an insult to my intelligence. But a trustee only sees this map.

NA2 provided another example:

In a report, instead of showing census data, they showed one bar graph, and it showed the number of ten-year-old girls in relation to 60-year-old women. It was constantly that kind of ridiculousness. It was that kind of ridiculousness, pettiness ... it was that that created the hostility.

Another interview participant, NCO, also from NOTL, provided another example of how the school board sought to manipulate facts to support a closure decision:

One of the final arguments that the trustees hung their hat on was that they claimed there was something like half a million dollars worth of costs to get the school up to accessibility standards. ... We asked, 'Why? What's going to cost a half million dollars?' ... And they said they would need to put an elevator in and to do that we need to move the boiler room and all these other costs. But we researched it and everything said they were not required to add an elevator and have accessibility to the basement. [But] staff stood up and said, 'we believe in accessibility and for anyone who might come to repair the boiler, it should be accessible.' But how many schools have their mechanical equipment on the roof? And have elevators to the roof? Zero! But we didn't have the opportunity to retort that. We didn't have a chance to defend these last-minute arguments.

Many had a clear idea of precisely *how* the school board manipulated data. NA2 sets up how the process worked:

The director of education is doing the best for his business organization. He wants to access the money which is to build new schools. He can show overcrowding in some areas and build schools in others and as long as he makes schools 'appear' they have low enrolment – it's so easy to do, it's so easy to get families to leave schools. We were the last school in the Niagara region to have all-day junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten. ... They brought in temporary [French immersion] which created crazy splits with only 20 kids in a class.

NCO further explained this 'long game' of the school board:

For the five years leading up to their decision to close the school they introduced full-day kindergarten at all the other surrounding public schools so that meant that some people chose not to enrol their kids at the local school because they couldn't afford \$8,000 in child care when you have two parents working, and would instead drive their kids to the other schools. So that caused a bit of a decline. As well as they introduced French Immersion, which is very popular, and then they pulled it out and put it in Niagara Falls, so a bunch of kids who liked that program left the school to follow French immersion. But then they [trustees and staff] used those years as where the projection was going and it showed a decline and projected that, like, out ten years. It was just a load of crap.

NA2 also explained some strategies to make Parliament Oak appear it was decrepit and closure was an obvious choice:

At the entrance of the school, they put a giant dumpster, and we would have to walk past a dumpster to enter the school ... At the time that the ARC was going on, they never cut the grass at the school. It just starts to look ridiculous. As soon as the school closed, suddenly they're on a regular lawn maintenance schedule where it gets cut once a week.

NCO provides a theory as to why the school board would manipulate the facts to support a closure decision:

How the board comes up with their numbers for future enrollment is basically two things: what's been the trend for the last five years and projecting it forward, plus they look what the birth-rate has been in the last couple years. But I think they purposefully drove down the enrollment at Parliament Oak because they're incented to remove seats [reduce capacity] at the provincial level. It's politically easy to shut schools in NOTL because NOTL and St. Catharines both vote for four trustees together ... so our votes are meaningless. So when trustees are thinking of where to shut a school, they'd rather shut a school in NOTL because our votes don't impact their re-election.

It is hard to disagree with NCO: "These processes cause such bad blood between school board and the communities." And NA2 provides a clear solution to these problems about incorrect or manipulated information and data: "The people who prepare the report should not be Board employees."

#### 4.8.3 DISPUTED FACTS AND DATA – SUMMARY

Based on the interview participants' account, there is clearly a problem with the information and data that school boards are provided. This is a serious problem since it appears it is this data upon which trustees make a closure decision. The consultation process is an excellent means by which some of this disputed information and data could be corrected or resolved. Indeed, it appears that in the case of Zorra, it was the trustees' acceptance of the community's facts and information that helped save the school. Much more troubling is the purposeful manipulation of facts and perception of

the school and its enrolment. That NOTL was subject to the political games with all-day kindergarten and French immersion is deeply unfair and makes a mockery of the entire process. Placing a dumpster at the entrance and not doing basic maintenance of the schoolgrounds during the consultation only leads to cynicism and deep distrust of elected school trustees.

#### 4.8.4 DISPUTED FACTS AND DATA – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

As with other themes that arose in the interviews, that school boards either made their final decision with incorrect information, or purposefully manipulated facts and data is so contrary to the principles of public participation that it barely registers in the literature. Arnstein's (1969) ladder metaphor has "manipulation" on the lowest rung and is presented as a sort of obscene outlier in the consultation processes. In other literature, the discussion of facts and data being manipulated is about members of the public, not governmental representatives (Hodge & Gordon, 2014; Shipley & Utz, 2012).

Although the Literature Review found Habermas' theories of communication to be too idealistic, his theory of reaching a common understanding helps to analyze the dispute or manipulation of facts and data. Habermas' "validity basis of speech" outlines the four validity claims that must be followed for genuine communication and understanding (Habermas, 1979, p. 2). Included in this is that the speaker must intend on speaking a true proposition, and without doing so the two parties may never come to a common understanding. This would apply to the closure review in Zorra when the early School Information Profile was incorrect and local council was able to provide the school board with correct data. Had the school board insisted on using incorrect data, such as was the case in NOTL, it would have been near impossible to have genuine communication or come to a common understanding.

Similarly, the "communicative turn" in planning, as discussed by Healey (1992), is primarily concerned with meaningful communication between planners and the public, which is not possible if those engaging the public are either relying on misinformation or, worse, purposefully manipulating information. A criticism of Habermas' theory and the

communicative or collaborative approaches to planning is that participants are often obstinate, manipulate facts, and appeal to emotion and rhetoric. While this certainly presents a problem, the consultation process is likely doomed from the start if it is those doing the consulting who are engaging in such “strategic action” (Habermas, 1979).

## 4.9 MONEY

Much like the decision-making process, issues surrounding money are really their own topics, but interview participants often had comments relating to the consultation process. The issue of money fell into two subthemes: a) how schools are funded and the effect this has on the consultation process, and b) the property value of the school under review and how this affected the closure decision, regardless of the input from consultations.

### 4.9.1 SCHOOL FUNDING

School funding is, again, a topic unto itself, but interview participants provided comments and insight about it as regards the consultation process.

In Zorra, it was noted that the consultation process felt disingenuous because of the way school boards receive funding from the province. ZC2, speaking mockingly as an administrator, explains:

The CPPG is a hurdle to get over so you can get on with the business of closing schools because that’s where the real money is. If I fill a school ... and at a full cost recovery model, that’s nothing near the money I can get if I close that school ... I can get \$20 million to build a brand new school.

Interview participants in NOTL had a similar perspective. As NA1 put it:

The funding model is really flawed because all they fund are new builds. Boards look for ways to justify new builds. ... And the new builds are all out on the highway. None of the small communities here have a school. It’s like the Walmart of school planning.

Another interview participant in NOTL suggested the same:

School boards' hands are tied ... they have a job to do ... how to get as much bucks from the government.

Lastly, NC explains another problem with the funding model:

There's very little oversight between the Ministry of Education and the local school boards. MoE funds what local school boards ask for, they've written to say they do not have the power to override decision made by the local school board.

#### 4.9.2 SCHOOL SITE'S PROPERTY VALUE

Another issue that arose specifically in NOTL was how the property value of the school site influenced the decision to close the school.

According to NAR:

It's the economics behind it all that's driving the bus. It has nothing to do with anything else. When a school board is looking at closing schools they're doing it because the economics of keeping it open are no longer viable. And they have no motivation to hold onto that school site because by liquidating the asset, they are generating cash. ... So, what we need to be doing is changing how money is funneled to a school board. They should not be winning dollars by selling off an asset. It should be a municipal decision [to sell a site].

As a planner, NAR went on to say:

It's got nothing to do with building sustainable, walkable communities; it's got everything to do with money. The goal was not about keeping the school open but their goal was to liquidate cash [through sale of the school site].

However, in Zorra, as ZC2 put it: "With AJ Baker the value of the school property was not a factor."

#### 4.9.3 MONEY – SUMMARY

While funding models are ultimately another topic of discussion and research, because of money's centrality to school-closure decisions, it inevitably plays a role in the consultation process. Many participants noted that school boards are 'rewarded' with money to build new schools if they close existing schools. If school boards are

concerned about funding (and they all are), then this model disincentivizes school boards to keep schools open and reduces the impact consultations have on closure decisions. The issue about the property value of the school is specific to NOTL and other communities where the school is located in the built-up area of a city or town. In Zorra, A.J. Baker is on a highway and the community faces little development pressures, so the value of the school site did not appear to be an issue.

#### 4.9.4 MONEY – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

While none of the literature in the Literature Review discussed money or funding issues affecting the final decision, the way in which this issue arose in the interviews does speak to the possible outcomes of a consultation and the degree to which the public's input is incorporated into a final decision.

Any consultation process should begin with a clear set of parameters of what is up for discussion and what cannot be changed regardless of public input (Bedford et al., 2002; Clary & Snyder, 2002). If participants know that certain things are already decided, then there is less of a chance of participants becoming cynical of the process (Patten, 2000). As will be addressed more fully in the following chapter, if it truly was the case that no matter what members on the ARC said, the school was slated to close, then there should not have been a consultation process. Or, at the very least, it should have been made clear that the school would close regardless of the community's input and they were free to participate or not in the "consultation" process. As with other studies in public participation (G. Brown & Chin, 2013), community members in NOTL had little sway in the final decision of the school closure. Perhaps if the consultations were better designed (Halvorsen, 2003) or were longer and more sustained (Kathlene & Martin, 1991), the community's input would have had more impact on the final decision. As noted above, it is possible that the relatively longer consultation in Zorra contributed to the decision to not close the school. However, this is likely because the community of Zorra provided input that directly addressed the demographic profile of the community and school.



#### 4.10 TRUSTEES HOSTILE TOWARDS PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

One of the more concerning issues that arose during interviews were the feelings of hostility community members felt from their elected trustees. This was particularly a problem in NOTL.

One interview participant from NOTL, NA1, introduced the term 'entitled' regarding how the school board felt about the community:

Most of the trustees have a preconceived idea. They've said that NOTL is considered to be difficult to deal with and entitled. That's how they see us. They don't consider rational arguments to rational arguments, just that we're entitled.

NA2 also used the term 'entitled' when discussing the selling of the school to a developer, not the municipality. NA2 heard "trustees who said, 'oh we had to do that because NOTL was so difficult to work with. They're so entitled.'"

After the closure of Parliament Oak, the community sought to turn the site into a community hub. But, as NCO explained:

This school board seems so spiteful and the fact they wouldn't participate in the community hub program, I think was just a punishment. They feel like the community school we created is a competitor to them and is 'stealing their kids' and the trustees told us as much. ... We're afraid they're going to shut another school as punishment.

##### 4.10.1 TRUSTEES HOSTILE TOWARDS PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY – SUMMARY

Perhaps due to the format of consultations, or because of issues that could not be resolved during a consultation process (such as the lack of trustee representation, distorted information and facts, funding, and the school site's property value), some interview participants perceived a hostility or disdain from school board trustees. A number of interview participants from NOTL corroborated that the school board stipulated they would not sell the school site to the Municipality. This either reflects a true hostility towards the community from the school board or, at best, it reinforces the perception of hostility.

#### 4.10.2 TRUSTEES HOSTILE TOWARDS PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

As with other issues discussed above, that those running the consultation should not be hostile towards participants is so obvious it should not even need to be mentioned.

#### 4.11 POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Perhaps oddly, there were a few positive outcomes of the otherwise stressful and contentious consultation process. Interview participants were specifically asked about the strengthening or weakening of community bonds.

In Zorra, two interview participants noted that it brought together the community. As ZC1 saw it:

Because of the review, it has created a very strong community. ... It allowed the three schools in Zorra Township to work together and not be pitted against each other.

ZC1 also explained that the school board sought to drive a wedge in the community by suggesting if A.J. Baker closed, other schools might get more students

or a new gym – this was the blackmail. [The division] dissipated, it was gone, that wasn't there ... that was a huge piece to being able to present strongly to the Board and be more united.

Along with bringing the community together, ZC1 also explained how other programs became more widely shared:

A broader awareness of the people beyond your own community ... The amalgamation did not go well here ... so trying to bring a large geographical region into a community is not easy and I do think the ARC review did help to get over a little bit of a hump on that because there's now more sharing on things ... the Farm Safety Education thing ... had been in only one of the schools, and last year it came to another school, and the next year it will be at another school ... a sharing of popular events or educations. I don't know if that would have happened without the ARC review.

Also from Zorra, ZC2 pointed out how the broader community relationship is better:

There's always been a rivalry between Kintore and Thamesford and it's a bit healthier now. At the end [of the review process] they [Thamesford] were very supportive of keeping AJ Baker open. There came to be a better understanding and mutual respect between the communities.

ZC2 provides a bit of a theory as to why, and explains a concrete benefit:

[The review] brought the Kintore community together ... nothing brings you together like an exterior threat. We now have the Zorra Local School Committee and its mandate is to inform council about our schools in a municipal context.

However, the trustee interviewed, TT, argues the community needs to be strong before the review:

Need to have the community bonds prior to the review to build the capacity. By the time the trustees are making the decision to study an area, it's too late. You need to be proactive.

Despite the bitter dispute, losing their school, and feeling punished by the school board, interview participants from NOTL nonetheless felt their community was strengthened by the process. As NA1 observed:

[I was] really blown away by the quality and commitment of people who came together and came out and spend time and committed to try and keep the school open. People who didn't know each other ... a really amazing group of people came together. ... Lots of positives came out that in terms of community, but it didn't save the school.

However, school reviews are not at all entirely positive processes. NA1 explains:

In the case of the high school [previous ARC], there was some negativity and discord ... some infighting of the community. By the time they got to Parliament Oak, the last elementary school, the people who chose to get involved were newcomers. Everyone else had scattered and run.

A concrete positive outcome from the review in NOTL was the opening of the privately run Royal Oak community school. While the school fills a gap in the community, it does have a downside. NA2:

Royal Oak is a great thing. Didn't want to be a private school but how else are they going to fund it? It is a beautiful thing, but it did fracture the community even more. Now you have children [going to different schools].

#### 4.11.1 POSITIVE OUTCOMES – SUMMARY

While a school review is upsetting and stressful for a community that wishes to keep its school, it can have the consequence of bringing a community closer. This should not in any way be taken to suggest that school review is good for a community – just that it is an unintended consequence. The trustee's sentiment is worth repeating: there need to be strong community bonds in place *prior* to the review to organize and present a united voice to the school board.

#### 4.11.2 POSITIVE OUTCOMES – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

“Collaborative planning” as defined and theorized by Patsy Healy concerns the processes by which segments of the public participate in policy development (Healey, 1997). To be clear, this form of planning is about the collaborate effort to affect the final decision, and this was clearly the case in Zorra. A collaborative planning analysis of the process in Zorra would focus on the specific means of communication between the community and the school board.

This would follow Habermas' theory of “universal pragmatics” which is the universal conditions for communication and understanding (Habermas, 1979). Since Habermas' argument is that all social actions are about seeking a common understanding, the Zorra case seems to fit insofar as the final decision was the result of a shared understanding of the situation (i.e. the school is important and proper enrolment projections conclude the school should remain open). However, these theories of consultation do not account for the fact that the trustees were initially of the opinion that the school should close and used the “blackmail” of more students or a new gym, and that the community had to “make it awkward” for trustees to vote for closure. The trustees were not open to understanding or seeking a collaborative decision, but were rather forced into one.

In NOTL, however, the collaborative planning and universal pragmatics theories fail quite early in the analysis. While the interview participants did experience community solidarity and strength, it was in spite of hostility from the school board, as well as the board's manipulation of facts and their candid unwillingness to be open to opinions different than their own.

#### 4.12 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

The last theme concerns the specific recommendations interview participants suggested either during or at the end of individual interviews. Many of these recommendations were similar insofar as they suggested a) involving municipal officials and/or community planners in the consultation process, and b) establishing a community hub at the site of the school under review. There were also a number of recommendations that do not fall within those or any other subtheme.

##### 4.12.1 INVOLVE COMMUNITY OFFICIALS AND/OR PLANNERS

Some participants in Zorra felt that it was important to have municipal representatives involved in the consultation process and they should remain involved in other school reviews. As ZC1 states:

[It is] good to have municipal representation on these committees [ARCs] ... have a broad representation of the community ... including the business community. Any time there's going to be a review it needs to be broad-based.

ZC2 feels it is a mistake to no longer include municipal officials and explains why:

During our process we had the opportunity for a municipal representative to sit on the ARC. The new process does not have that, which I think is a flaw. Schools are assets to our municipalities to attract and retain people to our communities.

Participants from both Zorra and NOTL both felt that planners should be involved either for the consultation or for the closure review more broadly. ZC2 contrasts the degree to which planners consult with the public and what school boards do:

Planners at the municipal level go to a lot of trouble to have meaningful consultation about what they're going to do, why they're going to do it. And school boards are the exact opposite.

ZC2 took the argument even further, suggesting

Municipal planners should be the ones making decisions about school locations because they can do that best, they have the local understanding. They use true engagement.

A similar argument was put forward in NOTL by NCO:

School boards make decisions that have huge [land use] planning impacts on communities but they aren't held to any sort of planning guidelines. In the case of Old Town, which has a population of about 8,000, no developer, builder or planner would ever support the building of a community that size without land earmarked for an elementary school [but with the sale of the school] you have a community with no land for a future elementary school. You need to have some check and balance when you're giving the school board such power that they actually take planning considerations into consideration.

As a trustee, TT makes a point that speaks not just to the involvement of planners but of engaging the community much earlier:

We [as trustees] really fall down in that relationship that we should have between municipalities and trustees. As urban planners are looking at where subdivisions should be, when there is that conversation [about the location of schools], that conversation is way too late. Need to look at this in terms of where we'll be at 10 to 15 [or] even more years.

#### 4.12.2 ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY HUB

Participants in both Zorra and NOTL felt that using the school site as a 'community hub' would be either a way to keep a school open, or would be the appropriate use of the site if the school did close. However, as ZC1 explains:

All of the language [in the Provincial documents] about Community Hubs is great, but there isn't actually any support for it.

NC in NOTL explains the issue in terms of the process and how funding works:

The way the process is set up right now, it's skewed so there can't be a partnership. If a municipality wants to establish a community hub ... that conversation cannot begin until school has closed and the children have been moved. Then the municipality is faced with having to buy the school ... for the highest return possible for the board. The rules are stacked against hubs. The conversation should be started before the school is closed, before the kids are moved.

#### 4.12.3 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants were asked to provide recommendations for improving the consultation process, and some of their recommendations do just that. Other recommendations are about the process, or the decision-making process, more generally.

The participants' recommendations that directly concern the consultation process are clear and perhaps unsurprising. From NOTL, NCO argues for the

Need to make it a real consultation process as opposed to a disingenuous 'we'll pretend we're listening and go ahead with the decision we already made' [process].

The trustee, TT, puts it clearly and succinctly:

Consultations need to be an ongoing dialogue, which continuously happens long before there is a recommendation by senior administration to study an area.

Other recommendations were partly about the consultation process, but were more about the make-up of the ARC and its chair. NA1 states:

It shouldn't be run entirely by the school board given that the school board has an agenda. They determined they want to close these schools, and they have to get public input.

NA1 then provides a related and more specific recommendation:

Not have a board member, the superintendent, be the chair of the ARC. They don't have anyone running that show who isn't completely biased. It would be great to have someone with an outside interest come in who has

a background in education, in town planning... someone to chair the ARC who doesn't have a bias.

NA2 makes a similar recommendation:

I don't think the chair of the ARC should be a DSBN employee. That was a red flag. They control the subject, all the discussion.

NCO felt the entire structure needs to be re-examined and replaced: "The ARC process is so flawed; it can't solve any problems."

Though less definitive, NA2 also sees serious issues with the ARC process:

I don't agree with the process that is used to select schools that should be ARC'd. ... We don't have democratic representation because of the district. Trustees say, 'Let's close schools not in our district.'

NA1 provides a related though more positive suggestion:

[I] would like to see the government take a more active role. All the government does is say 'we won't interfere in the school board.'

Thinking beyond the confines of ARCs and SIPs and PARGs, some participants provided some creative possible solutions. NA1:

I would like to see people outside of the school board given voting rights on the decision. More third party input, more objective input. The provincial government should step in [for] maybe a second to care how the money they're spending is affecting communities.

NCO provides a very clear and workable suggestion for future reviews:

What we need is for the process having a range of solutions they have to work through first, and they have to prove that those can't work first. ... Need to make the decision later [in the process] and involve the community before any decision is made. They [the board] should have to prove an alternative solution is not a viable option before they can take it off the table.



ZC1 provides a suggestion, not so much for the formal framework, but a strategy used by Zorra and might help other communities whose school is under review:

“Collaboration between the schools” in the community.

NCO provides two related suggestions that go well beyond reformatting the ARC process:

The province should think about [having] a small-school school board, or a separate strategy for small schools, or rural schools, or small communities. If the [existing] school boards can't run them [small schools] then take them off their hands and let an independent group run them. Or let the municipalities run them. I think the municipalities in these small communities would be very happy running their own schools, which is what we used to. That would be a tremendous win.

#### 4.12.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS – SUMMARY

Recommendations from interview participants were rather varied. There were only two recommendations that directly address the issue of consultation and neither were particularly surprising (they should be genuine, begin early, and be ongoing). Other recommendations were mostly practical suggestions for improving the review process as a whole, either with or without the existing ARC framework. Many brought up the idea of community hubs as a way to either keep a school open or as an appropriate use of a closed-school site. Some felt that involving local community planners would either result in a more genuine consultation process or keep the review more fact-based.

#### 4.12.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS – RELATIONSHIP TO THE LITERATURE

Since the following chapter contains a set of recommendations for improving the consultation process, many of the interview participants' suggestions will be addressed there. However, the recommendation to involve community officials or planners in the consultation process does relate to some arguments found in the Literature Review. On the one hand, Burby (2003) cautioned that including experts or other planners in planning consultations will likely result in discussions laden with jargon and taken-for-granted assumptions. Nonetheless, including *some* planners in the school closure

review process would not likely lead to such a conclusion. Instead as Burby himself notes, including local planners and other municipal officials might be more in line with tapping into “local knowledge” that would lead to better final decisions (Burby, 2003). Similarly, Berman (1997) argues that including more participants, particularly those with expertise in the area, leads to lower cynicism in the process. Including planners alongside members of the community might help to inform members of the community what is at stake, what is possible, or other aspects not considered. It would fall within Toews’ (2013) suggestion of creating “tiers” of stakeholders who would be notified and consulted with differently.

#### 4.13 JUDICIAL REVIEW DECISION

Most of the interview participants’ complaints about the consultation process were about processes and behaviours that were so contrary to the spirit of consultation that they barely registered in the literature. Community members in NOTL that formed Citizens for Accountable and Responsible Education Niagara Inc. (CARE) found the consultation so flawed that they brought the decision to close the school to the Ontario Divisional Court for Judicial Review (*Citizens for Accountable and Responsible Education Niagara Inc. v. District School Board of Niagara*, 2015). CARE argued that the decision to close the school was marred by procedural unfairness. They were not arguing that the decision itself was flawed, just that the procedure was unfair for two main reasons: 1) a breach of duty of fairness and 2) a reasonable apprehension of bias. Their arguments are as follows:

1. Breach of Duty of Fairness
  - a. Inadequate document disclosure
  - b. Failure to include all of the final submissions in the ARC report
  - c. The Senior Staff Report was released 24 hours after the ARC Report without adequately considering the ARC report
  - d. There were errors in the Senior Staff Report not adequately considered by the Trustees
  - e. The public submissions to the Trustees were inadequate as they were limited to five minutes and Trustees could not ask questions

- f. There were private meetings between the Senior Staff and the Trustees that diminished the delegates' submissions
2. The Reasonable Apprehension of Bias
  - a. The Trustees were not independent and were beholden to the Senior Staff of the School board
  - b. Comments made by four Trustees demonstrated they had a closed mind

This Judicial Review was heard by three Judges. CARE lost on all counts.

This Judicial Review decision is presented here not to suggest the consultation process was adequate, but to demonstrate that the clearly flawed consultation did not violate the rules of procedural fairness. The Judges determined that the minimal amount of time to make a submission to trustees (five minutes for each delegate, with no questions) was sufficient, and that the final staff report was submitted the day after the ARC report was a sufficient amount of time for staff to consider the ARC report. They also determined that, even though a trustee said they are like “rubber stamps” that approve staff recommendations, trustees are sufficiently independent.

Nearly all of the goals of collaborative planning and the assumptions of a proper consultation process in the field of planning are not supported by law. Even though there is a Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline, it is just that – a *guideline* that has no legislative authority. Similarly, the *Planning Act* requires a single public meeting before adopting an Official Plan, which does not even come close to the amount of consultation the Literature Review suggests.

As it clearly states in the decision, the mandate of a Judicial Review of a school board's decision is extremely narrow and circumscribed. It is not the place of courts to second-guess the policy and financial considerations or determine the wisdom of the decision – this is entirely the responsibility of the elected trustees. This returns the analysis to Arendt's theory of authority (Arendt, 1970), as discussed in section 2.8.4.1, in examining the flaws in the decision making process. The courts often maintain that decisions made by legislatures and elected officials are not for the courts to second guess – those decisions are made on the authority granted through the democratic process.

#### 4.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the interview data conducted for this thesis. This interview data was organized into themes that arose during the interviews. A summary and analysis of each theme was discussed and, where possible, connected to literature outlined in the Literature Review chapter. The overall finding is that many of the experiences of the interview participants cannot be accounted for in the standard consultation literature. Much of that literature is predicated on the notion that those doing the consulting are doing so honestly and truly want the public's input. Thus, the following chapter will provide analysis of these deep flaws in the consultation process on a more general level, as it engages with the theories of Foucault that were discussed in the Literature Review chapter.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a set of recommendations drawn from the interviews in relation to the more standard planning literature presented in the Literature Review chapter. It then provides a deeper analysis of the flawed consultation process to address the overarching research question of this thesis: Why is there a continued history of contention and conflict with school review consultations? Despite a series of updates in school review policies, the consultation process is still mired with problems – why is that? To attend to this broad question, the thesis has addressed the following research questions:

- During the consultation period of a school closure review, what are the main issues for concerned stakeholders?
- What are the main points of dissatisfaction with the consultation process?
- Are there models of public consultation and engagement from community planning that can address these concerns?
- What analysis can be provided by engaging the underlying theories of public consultation?
- What other benefits to the community result from meaningful public engagement during a school closure review, even if it is determined a school should close?

Even without going through each of the above bulleted questions one by one, we have heard the stakeholders' main concerns and points of dissatisfaction. We have seen that the standard consultation models and theories are useful though of limited help. And we have heard from the interview participants on the unintended positive outcomes of a school closure review. This chapter will, in part, more fully address the overarching question about why the consultation process has a continued history of conflict, and this will be addressed through an analysis of the underlying theories of the public.

### 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON INTERVIEWS AND PLANNING LITERATURE

The following recommendations are drawn from the interview participants' own recommendations and the planning materials in the Literature Review.

#### 5.1.1 INVOLVE PLANNERS AND/OR COMMUNITY OFFICIALS

More than one interview participant recommended involving community officials or planners in the consultation process. This came from a notion that planners are much better at consultation than school boards and have some expert knowledge on community planning. While partially true, some participants who made this recommendation expressed a somewhat idealistic view of planners. There are certainly consultation practices and methods from planning that would improve the consultation process during a school closure review, but “a planner” may not be the best resource. There are consultants, mediators, and others whose area of expertise is specifically consultation, and these would be a better resource.

To address the issues concerning the community’s need for a school and where it should be located, municipal planners already provide such analysis and recommendations in official plans and secondary plans. And school boards have Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) on staff. Their advice and direction is provided; it appears, however, it is not being heeded. Thus, this thesis recommends involving people who are experts in consultation and mediation (whether or not they are RPPs) and incorporating the advice of municipal planners and school board planners into the final closure decision.

#### 5.1.2 BE CLEAR ABOUT OPTIONS

Many interview participants argued for establishing a community hub at the site of the school. This was thought to be a possible alternative to closure of the school or a way to ensure the site continues to serve the community. Much of the “community hub” discussion is not related to the consultation process, but it does speak to the issue of needing to be clear about what is up for discussion and what is not a possibility. Below, in section 5.2.1, is a longer discussion of the role governmentality plays in defining what is and what is not open for debate during school review consultations. As a general recommendation, before the consultation process begins, those being asked to provide input should be clearly informed of what options are available and what aspects of the proposal are debateable and which are not.

### 5.1.3 BEGIN CONSULTATIONS EARLIER

There is a widespread perception among the interview participants that the consultation process began after the school board decided the school would close. This is perhaps the most fundamental problem since it led to numerous other problems, including the disingenuousness of the consultations. On the other hand, the school board's more sustained engagement with the community in Zorra provided the community time to explain the local context to trustees and ensure the facts were correct. Ministry and school board staff are continuously monitoring enrolment numbers and investigating demographic trends. It is when they identify a school with low enrolments or projections that they begin to develop a School Information Profile (SIP). It is precisely at this stage that the community should be informed. In planning, when a municipality receives a development application, a sign is placed on the property to inform the community that the application has been received and, in some cases, includes information about the application. This is a practice that school boards might take direction from.

Not only should a community be notified before an SIP is drafted, they should be involved in its drafting. This would help ensure the demographic and other local information used to draft the SIP is correct.

### 5.1.4 INVOLVE DISINTERESTED PARTIES

The data in the SIP, after being drafted with the community, should be verified by a disinterested third party. This will help ensure its accuracy. Further, as interview participants NA1 and NA2 (section 4.12.3) suggested, the consultations should not be entirely run by the school board and the chair of the ARC should not be a school board employee but, again, a disinterested party. This would mean hiring an expert in mediation from outside the community.

### 5.1.5 RESPECT THE COMMUNITY

As discovered throughout this thesis, there are aspects of the consultation processes in the case studies that are so obviously flawed they seem to elude the need for research. Trustees not attending meetings or not paying attention during meetings, purposefully

manipulating data, withholding information, etc. – most of these issues come down to respecting the community. It seems absurd to have to make this recommendation, but trustees and school board staff should respect their community and its members. While this thesis was critical of Habermas and the “communicative turn” in planning, this type of research and analysis might assist in making it clear to those consulting the benefit of respecting and genuinely communicating with those being consulted. While it is unlikely a school closure consultation will reach the level of an “ideal speech situation,” following the validity claims outlined in section 2.8.3.1 is a worthy goal. Those consulting should be seeking to arrive at a common understanding by speaking truly and understandably.

As discussed in section 2.8.3.1 above, Habermas’ theory of communication, in which participants are seeking to engage in genuine communication and reach a common understanding, outlines a set of validity claims that need to be met. Speakers must intend on speaking truthfully. If speakers are not intending to speak truthfully or come to a common understanding, then Habermas’ theory is of limited help. Though to a lesser extent than Habermas’ theory of communication, models based on collaborative planning and the “communicative turn” (Healey, 1997) require a high level of honesty from all participants and a strong willingness to come to a common understanding or compromise. If, such as was the case in NOTL, participants on either side are unwilling to change their minds, then collaborative planning models do not appear appropriate. This limitation of Habermassian theories is why many planning scholars began critiquing collaborative planning and turned to Foucault (Flyvbjerg, 1996; Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2005).

#### 5.1.6 INCORPORATE PUBLIC INPUT INTO FINAL REPORT

One way to help ensure the public’s input is taken into consideration would be to clearly outline the public’s concerns and recommendations in final reports and to state how these were incorporated or addressed in the final decision. Final reports that go to trustees before they vote could include a section specifically devoted to public input. This section would clearly explain which public input was incorporated into the decision,



or an account of the public's input could be given, as well as an explanation as to why it was not or could not be incorporated.

The 2015 PARG, as discussed in section 2.4.3, comes close to implementing this recommendation. However, it only requires that the feedback received be documented and included in the final report and says nothing about incorporating or addressing the feedback in the final decision. This problem persists in the 2018 PARG: feedback is to be included in the final report, but there is no direction regarding what to do with this feedback.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEORY

Nearly all of the literature on public consultations appears to begin from the assumption that those initiating the consultation process are doing so genuinely. In the Literature Review, this thesis presented articles that primarily seek to show how to improve the consultation process. Yet, when analyzing the interview data, it is very clear that many of the often-cited articles are only of limited help to explain the data. This is why the foundational theories of Habermas and Foucault (and very likely others who are not addressed in this thesis) are of such importance. They allow us to step back and analyze the issue on a broader level. Like Kant (1970) suggests, more theory is needed when a theory or theories do not work in practice. Theories of consultation in the Literature Review largely do not apply to the situations in NOTL and Zorra, and so this thesis has followed one avenue of theory scholarship present in the planning literature: the shift from a reliance on Habermasian “collaborative planning” to analyses that employ Foucault to understand the contours of conflict in the consultation process. This thesis has extended this tradition in planning by presenting and arguing for the applicability of other aspects of Foucault's work, namely governmentality and biopolitics. These theories provide a worthwhile and compelling explanation of the underlying research question guiding the thesis: why is there this continued conflict in school review consultations? As I hope to demonstrate below, this conflict continues because these reviews are practices of governmentality with biopolitics as its technique. This

severely constrains the possibility for the community's inputs to affect the final decision. However, by using the theories of governmentality and biopolitics to delineate what is not up for debate, it exposes a "remainder" that should be considered during a closure review, namely the *meaning* of a school to a community.

The following sections provide a discussion of how governmentality and biopolitics can be used to explain why there is continued conflict in school closure review consultations, as well as recommendations that can be drawn from this analysis.

#### 5.2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A GOVERNMENTALITY AND BIOPOLITICS ANALYSIS

As presented in the Literature Review (sections 2.8.5.2 and 2.5.8.6) governmentality is a term Foucault develops from a historical analysis of the role of economy and governance: it is a theory of how the concept of "population" was invented and reshaped the notion of the "public" to that of "population" (Foucault, 2009).

Governmentality is, in part, a practice or rationality of governance that targets and seeks to align the intersection of the interests of individuals and the interests of government. When looking at the practice of consultation through the theory of governmentality, the question arises, "is the purpose of consultation to align the interests of the individuals and the interests of government?" In a "good" consultation, this alignment of interests should be directed towards realigning the interests of government to match the interests of the people. During the school closure reviews covered in this thesis, the consultation process appears to have sought to realign the interests of community to match the interests of the governing school board. Thus, if both parties involved in a consultation are engaging in a practice of aligning the interests of the community with the interests of a governing body, both parties are performing a type of governmentality.

However, simply aligning interests is not all that governmentality is about.

Governmentality as a rationality of governance is concerned with "right disposition of things" and the object of governance shifts from maintaining a territory to ensuring the welfare of the people – and through the strategies of governmentality (namely statistical analysis), the people or public is recast as "population" (Foucault, 2009). The technique

of this aspect of governmentality is what Foucault calls “biopolitics” (Foucault, 1990, 2003). “Biopolitics” is the name for two powers over life: one that centres on the individual body to optimize its capabilities and increase its usefulness and a second that focuses on the biological processes of the human species with the aim of increasing its health and longevity. More simply, governmentality outlines the historical shift in which government developed its own rationality based on statistical series and rates to make demographic projections of its new object “population.” Biopolitics refers specifically to techniques that increase the health and longevity of individuals and populations.

#### 5.2.1.1 SCHOOL REVIEW CONSULTATIONS AS GOVERNMENTALITY

School boards claim to know a school and its value largely through statistical analysis and speculation of student and population rates, along with the projected costs of keeping the school open in comparison to a new build. As should now be clear, when school boards use this type of knowledge to determine a school is subject to closure, that decision can be understood as one based on governmentality. The “School Information Profile” (SIP) can be seen as a governmentality power-knowledge. This is the rationality that school boards come to the consultations with, which is why so many found the consultations “disingenuous” – “farcical,” even. The SIP masquerades as a “snapshot” of a school’s “reality” by providing broad overviews in the form of contextualizing maps, asset valuations, and precise numerical facts on the number of students in each grade. Using such statistics to speculate on future trends is a good example of Wendy Brown’s specific, governmentality-inspired notion of “neoliberalism” in which non-wealth generation spheres are governed through metrics, techniques, and rationalities that were once solely used in the private market (W. Brown, 2015; Shenk & Brown, 2015).

Since school boards value a school largely (almost exclusively) on statistical analysis and enrolment and population projections, it is disingenuous for school boards to “consult” the community about a school’s closure review. It is not a community decision but a calculation.

As noted above in section 5.1.2, consultation processes should begin with clear parameters of what can be changed during discussions. During the consultations, school boards need to explicitly state what is open to debate and what is not. Asking for the public's input on something that cannot be changed is worse than pointless – it antagonizes the public and contributes to the ongoing conflict that arises in school review consultations. Interview participant NCO said the community would have preferred just being told the school was going to be closed, and they would have to deal with it rather than go through the “waste of time” exercise. While it is hard to imagine a community being satisfied with being told, “we're closing your school, but don't worry – you won't have to go through a consultation process,” it would be more honest, as the school board would not subject the community to a disingenuous consultation process.

If a school closure decision is based on the logics of governmentality and biopolitics, then conducting a public consultation process will only continue to lead to conflict. As interview participant ZA suggested, a school should stay open based on “its own merit.” That is, if it meets a set of established criteria, then it should stay open regardless of the “song and dance” the community puts on for the board.

#### 5.2.1.2 COMMUNITY RESPONSE AS A GOVERNMENTALITY RESPONSE

As learned through the interviews, many community members argued the closure decision should be based on correct statistical data of the population. Insisting that a governmental decision be made based on statistical analysis of rates (birth rates, death rates, etc.) then this demand from the community can be thought of as demanding governmentality. And, if the argument is made in the name of increasing the health of the individuals (that it positively affects the physical, mental or emotional health of the students) and increasing the longevity and viability of the population/community, then this is a demand for a governing decision be made based on the logic of biopolitics.

If both the school board and the community debate the possibility of closing a school based on current and projected enrolments, broader population trends, and various other projected values relating to students, teachers, and the community as a whole,

both parties are engaged in governmentality. If both these parties involved are seeking to increase the abilities of the individual while also increasing the health and longevity of the population, both parties are engaged in biopolitics.

This is not to suggest that desiring a governmental decision be made based on the logic of governmentality or biopolitics is necessarily wrong or misguided. What could be wrong with wishing to increase the optimization of individuals (students) or ensuring the health, viability, or longevity of the population/community? These appear to be worthy goals. And it is likely these are the goals of all involved in the closure review process – the disagreement stems from how to achieve this. For example, trustees may firmly believe that a new, larger school is good for the students and community, whereas the host community might feel the health of the students and community is best served by an existing, smaller school.

In the case study in Zorra, the community partly responded with a similar rationality as the school board, “playing their game” by speaking to the values and metrics the school board has determined were important. Thus, the governmentality analysis helps to define what school boards value and what they do not. This in turn can help communities identify that rationality and respond to closure reviews with the same rationality of value frameworks, population projections, and so on.

#### 5.2.1.3 MEANING OF A SCHOOL TO A COMMUNITY BEYOND THE LOGIC OF GOVERNMENTALITY

While community members and others involved in policy reforms for school closure reviews often outline various corrections to SIPs and school board’s population projections, it is worth stepping back and recognizing that, fundamentally, the dispute is about having a place that educates young people in the neighbourhood in which they live.

During school review consultations, there are clearly things that are not up for debate, such as (correct) enrolment and demographic data. However, as discussed in section 2.1, local schools have meaning to their host communities that cannot be reduced to

numbers, and it is these sorts of meanings the community should be consulted about. These meanings elude calculation but need to be addressed, no matter how difficult. There should be discussion of the *meaning* (rather than the “value”) of the school to the community, even what a “community” is, and role the local school plays in the community’s cohesion. Steps should be taken to limit the governmentality impulse and avoid quantifying these meanings. Again, there are demographic and statistical data to be considered, but care should be taken to not reduce everything to quantifiable data.

The interviews and literature on school closures make it clear that there are concerns about things that are beyond what can be quantified and statistically analyzed. As noted in the Literature Review (section 2.8.8), planning and consultation might provide the possibility of getting to that other sphere of politics – one that is not concerned with questions of the health or longevity of the individual or population. This is the sphere that sees the “individual” as human, as a person, and sees the “population” as a community. This is where the basic question of politics – i.e. how do we want to live and organize ourselves – is not reduced to statistical analysis. In the context of local schools, the discussion would concern the meaning the community places on a school, irrespective of enrolment numbers and population projections. It would be those concerns that elude demographers and economists. Community members and researchers should not apologize, or worse antagonized, lied to, and ignored for insisting there are “factors” that cannot be quantified or put into a comparative table but are significantly important and should be considered when deciding on a school closure.

Governmentality is a specific way of knowing that produces its own objects of knowledge: those of series or rates, such as demographics and demographic projections. This is not how communities know their schools. They have a *meaning*, not simply a value. The logics of governmentality and biopolitics only get at some of why a school is important. Beyond these various metrics, there is a *meaning* of the school to the community, and this is where school boards should focus consultation.

To summarize, a SIP is one specific way of knowing a school. We can identify the rationality of the SIP as one of governmentality. As a power-knowledge, it “presents” the school as a statistical equation, and the consultation process pretends that equation is up for discussion. The community can respond by disputing the facts, arguing over correct demographics, and questioning the school board’s methods of predicting population projections, but there is a “surplus” (Žižek, 1989), some enjoyment of life beyond that particular understanding of a school. Besides the basics that governmentality offers (what can be counted), there is more, such as the meaning to a community to have a place for children to learn in their neighbourhoods, or the role a school plays in making a place a place. Royal Oak community school is one such response to this community need. The unanticipated benefits or positive outcomes (section 4.11) point to this form of community cohesion that ought to be “taken into account” during the review and subsequent consultations.

However, to implement anything that seriously addresses those meanings and have them influence the final decision, it is likely a set of criteria would be required. Is it the only school in a community? How far away is the nearest school? How many other community centres are available? etc. And we find ourselves slipping back into the rationality of governmentality. Those questions are very likely completely reasonable ways to formalize the process of evaluating the viability of schools, but there should only be a very specific type of consultation on these matters: Are the facts correct? The larger unanswered question is how to make a school closure decision that is not solely based on the rationality of governmentality. How to improve the consultation process without simply improving the functioning of governmentality? Rather than help the very thing that has caused such distress, the crux of the issue is beyond the grasp of governmentality.

### 5.3 SHORTCOMINGS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The loss of the media coverage due to sale, closure, and restructuring of local news media limited the description of the case studies. That these articles vanished (and

were not archived) during the writing of this thesis interfered with the overview of the school closure consultation process and an opportunity was lost to analyze the discourses used to describe the closure reviews. These articles would have given a fuller picture of how the community was responding to the closure review. As it is, the description of the closure review in this thesis relies too heavily on the interview participants.

Similarly, this thesis would have benefited from interviewing NOTL trustees. Some NOTL trustees were contacted, but either did not respond or were unwilling to participate. They were the object of much scorn from the interview participants and one can only speculate what their side of the story would be.

While quite a few consultation models were discussed, there are literally hundreds and there might be some that are more applicable to the situations in the case studies. It became apparent during the research that the consultation processes during these school closure reviews were so flawed that detailed models and strategies were well beyond what is initially needed. It is hoped that taking a broader perspective through the theories made up for this lack.

As regards the structure of this thesis, it might have been improved if the detailed accounts of Habermas' and Foucault's theories were situated in the Methods chapter. Foucault's famous discussion of power as a relation is found in his *History of Sexuality*, in a chapter simply titled "Method." Analyzing the history of sexuality through the lens of power certainly is a "method" of analysis. Similarly, analyzing the consultation process through the lens of specific theories suggests these theories are a "method" of analysis. Analyzing "data" through theory is a method of understanding, though perhaps not a method of research in the social sciences.

There is still considerable opportunity to look at the community response to a school closure review. Initially, this thesis had intended to look at the "community bonds" that were strengthened or weakened during the consultation and review process, but it proved to be a larger topic with some unexpected turns. The Literature Review would



have needed an entire section devoted to research and theory on “community bonds” and interviews would have needed to focus on this issue to elicit relevant responses. Instead, the thesis took some of the responses about “positive outcomes” (section 4.11) and left them largely unanalyzed.

More case studies would provide a richer analysis. Researching more instances where schools were subject to closure and underwent the consultation process would have provided a deeper discussion and would have led to more commonalities and connections.

This thesis would have benefited from more theory. It relied very heavily on Habermas and Foucault. This was explained and hopefully justified, but future research might turn to other theories and theorists who could provide a deeper analysis. For example, Jacques Rancière marks a distinction between politics proper and what he calls the “police order,” a distinction that would help to more fully think through the role a school plays to a community through a disagreement about “logics of being together” (Rancière, 1999). Furthermore, his work on the dissolution of democracy would provide a rich analysis of contemporary consultations (Rancière, 2014). The field of planning would benefit from research that takes consultation and related theory, not as a means, but as an object of analysis.

There are also many other aspects of Foucault’s work that would be of interest to planners. The panopticon presents a rather seductive figuration, but often missed is that the chapter in which it appears (Foucault, 1995) opens with an account of two historical towns. One town was consumed by leprosy and, in response, those with the disease were banished. A few decades later, another town was consumed by the plague. Instead of banishing those diseased, governmental authorities partitioned the city into segments and keep detailed records of who was sick, where they lived, what they were permitted to do, etc. It can be read as an early – perhaps first – account of something like zoning. Another possible avenue of research for planning scholars might begin with Foucault’s (2009) explanation of why towns began to be organized on a gridiron (for

circulation and security). It is hoped that by returning to some primary texts of Foucault's, some misinterpretations of his work were addressed, but it is also hoped that other planning scholars will return to Foucault's work and further develop this field of scholarship.

## 5.1 CONCLUSION

It is my hope to have shown that the overarching research question (why is there this continuation of conflict during the consultation process during school closure reviews?) can be answered in a word: governmentality. School boards largely based their closure decisions on sets of serial data about the population and students, but then claim to be consulting when there is little to nothing left to debate. As interview participants noted in section 4.5.1, the consultation did not feel genuine because they recognized that the decision had already been made. The decision, I argue, had been made through the rationality of demographic data and projections about the community and students compiled in a School Information Profile: the decision was made through the framework of governmentality. I also hope I have shown how communities that find themselves in such a "farcical" situation would do well to mimic the approach Zorra took. As ZA says in section 4.6.1, "we used their own rationale." That is, they accepted the governmentality framework and sought to make their case based on demographic statistics and projections. However, it should be cautioned that this approach was also attempted in NOTL without success. Finally, I hope to have shown that there are meanings a community attaches to their local school that are beyond the calculations of governmentality and, no matter how difficult, it should be on these meanings that school boards genuinely consult communities and ensure that they influence the final closure decision.

While it might not have required so many pages to simply say, "Do not consult on what is not up for debate," I hope that demonstrating how the strong theoretical frameworks of governmentality and biopolitics can be used to clearly identify what should and should not be subject to consultation debate, how a community might respond in such a

situation, and most importantly, what is beyond these calculative logics and ought to influence final decisions.

The recommendation here is not that school boards should not employ the logic of governmentality or even biopolitics, but rather that they should only consult on the correctness of the data these logics draw. It is also strongly recommended that school boards focus their consultations on the meanings a local school has for the community, no matter how difficult that may be.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

General	What was your role in the <i>public consultation</i> aspect of the pupil accommodation review?		
Role	School Trustee	Community Member	Municipal Official
Outcome	What concerns did you hear from community members and municipal officials?	What were your concerns and do you feel they were heard?	What were your concerns, or concerns you were representing, and do you feel they were heard?
	Were you able to take into account the concerns you heard when making the closure decision?	Do you feel the board understood your concerns?	Do you feel the board understood your concerns or the concerns of your constituents?
	Do you feel the final decision reflected the wishes of those involved in the consultation process?	Do you feel the board took your concerns into account when making their final decision?	Do you feel the board took your concerns or the concerns of your constituents when making their final decision?
Process	Do you feel the consultation process was appropriate? Was it long enough? Did it ask the right questions? Involve the right people?		
	Did you gather or meet with members of the community outside the formal review process? What things did you discuss?		
	During the consultation process, did you feel the community understood your role and abilities as trustee?	During formal or informal meetings, do you feel you developed or strengthened bonds with your community members? Alternatively, did you find community bonds were weakened?	
Recommendations	Based on your experience in your role, how would you change the consultation process?		