

The Future of School Board Governance Relevancy and Revelation

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The Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy

Frank W. Lutz and Laurence Iannaccone

The Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy says simply that when the citizens of our democracy become dissatisfied enough with "things," they go to the polls and vote to change "things." Often the "things" they vote to change are the incumbent policy makers. On school boards, it is the incumbent school board members who are voted out. The newly elected board members often fire the old superintendent, and education policies change. The purpose of this chapter is to describe how this theory came to be while also saying something about policy, research, and theory in the politics of education.

In 1960, a new doctoral student at Washington University in St. Louis decided to run for a seat on a local school board in one of the more than two dozen St. Louis County school districts. He was about to begin a two-and-a-half-year doctoral residency with no idea of a topic or even a general idea of what his dissertation might be. Laurence Iannaccone, a new professor out of Teachers College, Columbia, became his advisor. Iannaccone suggested Lutz keep a careful journal of his experiences during the school board election and a diary of daily events should he be elected as a school board member. Lutz was also assigned a bibliography of readings of classical anthropological works in order to understand how ethnographic description was carried out. Thus began a long and rewarding personal and professional relationship between Iannaccone and Lutz, and the seeds of the Dissatisfaction Theory were sown (Lutz, 1962).

THE DISSATISFACTION THEORY OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

We often hear the question, "What's in a name?" In this case, considerable. That question in this chapter is broken into three parts. First, *why* dissatisfaction? Why not satisfaction? When we speak of voter attitudes about any issue, if there is voter dissatisfaction, there is also voter satisfaction. So why not call it the Satisfaction Theory? It is because in American democracy there is, more often than not, sufficient satisfaction among citizens that they are willing to permit the present policy makers to continue in office. Often the voters just don't care; things may as well stay as they are. Often voters do not bother to vote. In fact, it is usual for only about 50 percent of the eligible voters to vote in any national election and a much lower turnout in state or local elections. Local school district elections usually fall below 40 percent, even as low as 15 percent or less. Citizens seem satisfied enough and they don't know much about the issues, don't care much, and thus do not vote (Menand, 2007). It is when the voters become dissatisfied enough that something happens to get the voters' attention. When they bother to vote, it may be a single issue citizens are dissatisfied about. Not infrequently there are several issues that separate and different publics are dissatisfied about. When enough dissatisfaction occurs, voter turnout becomes unusually high. As they are dissatisfied with policy and cannot vote against the policy, they vote against the incumbent policy makers.

In most school districts, voters cannot vote against the superintendent, so they vote against the incumbent school board members who appointed that superintendent. When voters succeed in ousting enough board members, the new board appoints a new superintendent, and policy changes. Community influence on their schools is at the heart of the Dissatisfaction Theory. The two foci of the theory are incumbent school board members and superintendent turnover. Thus, it is called the *Dissatisfaction Theory*.

Second, *why* is it a theory? It is a theory because it fits the common criteria for a theory. It is grounded in a careful description of the reality of incumbent defeat and superintendent turnover, the Robertsdales ethnography (Lutz, 1962). That description has generated numerous hypotheses submitted to falsification testing. When they met an acceptable statistical confidence level, they were integrated into the theory and that theory became capable of predicting events. Thus, it is a theory.

Finally, *why* add the phrase "... of American Democracy?" We believe American democracy is unique. In many democracies citizens are required to vote. Failing that, in some democracies citizens may be fined or even put in jail. In America, citizens are given the right to vote but also the right not to vote. As often as not the American voter chooses not to vote. Such a condition favors the status quo and retention of incumbents. But incumbents

should beware. Citizens have a lifetime pass to the ballot box. They may use that pass whenever they wish, and when they are dissatisfied enough they vote and incumbents are at risk.

Of considerable importance is the fact that the American democracy was founded upon the notion and expectation that elected officials have a sacred trust to represent the people in *ethical* ways. In what we today refer to in many nations as democracy, corruption and graft are often rampant, expected, and accepted as a way of life. Such behavior destroys American democracy. When 60 percent or more of the American people disapprove of what the president and Congress are doing, the American democracy is in danger. That is the real danger America faces today. If the American voters become so jaded that they expect their elected politicians to be unethical, when they think that all politicians are "crooks," when they believe it makes no difference whom they elect because things still won't change—our American democracy will die.

The local school district and local school district governance are unique to America. Nowhere else in the world, except Canada, is education governed by locally elected school boards. As we have said before, local school boards are "the cradle of democracy" (Iannaccone and Lutz, 1995). Local school elections in America provide the closest example of democracy for the American people. They are, or could be, the classroom wherein citizens can learn and practice American democracy. Thus, we have the Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy.

BUILDING THEORY

Occasionally doctoral students, unfortunately with the approval of a dissertation advisor, choose ethnography or case study as their research tool simply because they are inept at statistical design. After all, anybody can observe and write a description of what they have seen, can't they? Often such research is haphazard and done at the convenience of the observer. Such descriptions are not research and they are not ethnography. Good ethnography or case study should be the start, not the end, of educational research and theory. In such a manner, research and theory are *grounded* in reality. The criticism of many education practitioners that research is not practical is, in part, the result of the lack of grounding of research in the real world of education. Good ethnography or case study grounds research in the reality of society and culture.

The Robertsdales ethnography is the heart of the Dissatisfaction Theory (Lutz, 1962). It was based on three years of the careful recording of every piece of data related to the election and board member experience of Pren-tice, who served on that board and became president. Notes were made

during or immediately after phone calls, whether in the afternoon or at twelve o'clock at night. Visits to local schools, administrators, and citizens were recorded when they happened. All agendas were saved along with printed financial data. Notes were made of conversations and expressions of sentiment during meetings. Descriptions were recorded of every meeting immediately after meetings, sometimes at one and two o'clock in the morning. The point here is not to instruct in ethnographic methodology. Rather it is to indicate that the Dissatisfaction Theory is grounded in the politics of school elections and of school board and administrative public and behind-the-scenes politics.

This book is about education political and policy research and their implication for education practitioners. It therefore seems reasonable to ask, "How does good research, in this case education political research, get accomplished?" In the 1930s and 1940s, the best we had to train and advise prospective and new superintendents was the sometimes insightful recollections of retired administrators and, occasionally, a school board member. This advice was grounded in *one* person's experience, usually remembered decades after the events and colored by years of personal hurts, professional glory, and often secondhand reporting.

Let me give you an example of one such report that we find funny and probably close to accurate. At an executive board meeting during the 1930s, a big-city superintendent was being given an unusually difficult time by a particular member of his school board. After some lengthy confrontation, the red-faced Irish superintendent rose and in a loud voice exclaimed, "For a thousand bucks I'd resign from this damn job!" That was a lot of money during the Great Depression. The board member who had been engaged in the conflict, who was quite wealthy, rose, removed a fine leather wallet from his inside coat pocket, and said as he peeled off 10 hundred-dollar bills and placed them on the table before the superintendent, "Go ahead, Mike, pick them up." The still red-faced superintendent slumped back in his big leather chair in the walnut-paneled boardroom, speechless.

That true story is grounded in the unchanged political reality of superintendents and board members even today. It is humorous and somewhat informative. It tells us that the superintendent's life is not always a bowl of cherries, and that boards do not always protect the superintendent, at least not in private. But it is hardly theory and does little to tell a superintendent how to handle other confrontations with school board members, even though Mike may have learned not to say something if he was not prepared to live it. (For your information, Mike survived that one.)

The point here is to suggest how education political research is accomplished and theory emerges. Political theory in education is badly needed today if public education is to survive. Universities are, or should be, places

of inquiry. Universities, as opposed to training schools, have the mission of contributing to knowledge and *educating* individuals. Some may disagree with that position, which is one of the major discussions in the history of the University, but that is not the topic here. We are expressing our bias as a point of reference for what is to come. Research only takes place when it is encouraged, motivated, and rewarded. Theory only emerges after some time of well-thought-out theorizing and creative hypothesis-generating, followed by well-designed testing and thoughtful integration into the theory.

The development of theory usually takes funding of some sort, although the Dissatisfaction Theory never received any outside funding. But research requires more. It requires a culture of inquiry. At a university, it requires a program of professorial recruitment that makes explicit the role of research expected in the faculty. It requires the recruitment of doctoral students to study *with* those professors and for both to engage in a line of research, not just a random set of opportunistic encounters with anticipated benefits.

FERTILE GROUND FOR CULTIVATING A THEORY

The Graduate Institute of Education (GIE) at Washington University in St. Louis was just such a place. Under the leadership of Robert J. Schaefer, the GIE grew and prospered during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Professors were recruited who had a deep interest in education, in research, and in students. Having had some experience at professorial recruitment, we are well aware of the possible pitfalls of those who look good and make it and those who just do not live up to their promise. Whether fortuitous or not, the selection of the individuals at the GIE was, at that time, everything one could expect and more. All professors did research and published and many won national awards. All were interested in students and were in their offices with open doors to talk to students; not just chairs and committee members, but the entire faculty was available.

Lutz's first university position after his dissertation was at New York University (NYU), where Daniel E. Griffiths was Associate Dean for Research and then Dean of the College of Education. Many recall that Griffiths has been called the father of the theory movement in educational administration. He was also the prime mover in the establishment of the University Council for Educational Administration and a driving force for research and publication in educational administration programs. Those years with Griffiths certainly reinforced the values established at the GIE. A set of fortunate experiences brought Iannaccone to NYU for two of those years. He and Lutz took the same subway and bus routes to and from work and spent one day a week working together. That resulted in two coauthored books and the beginning of the Dissatisfaction Theory.

There were six full-time doctoral students who interacted with each other every day. For Lutz, it was an unforgettable experience. Decades later, he was visiting with Schaefer, then a close personal friend. They were walking along a beach and Schaefer asked, "Whatever happened to the very conservative young man who came into my office one day a long time ago, and asked to be admitted to the GIE? He wanted to be a school principal, as I recall." Lutz responded, "You and the GIE happened." That is what a graduate education should be. It should be a life-changing experience. And that is how education research and theory get started.

As research study follows research study, as dissertation follows dissertation, as professors develop a line of research, and sometimes their students follow the same course, theory is generated. Some graduates go into practice, but others into a professorship. When one is very lucky, interests merge and students follow a professor's general line of research. In the case of the Dissatisfaction Theory, two individuals worked together for decades off and on, and with their students, to produce what has become known as the Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy. That has been a most rewarding experience for both of us. No less than eight of the other authors in this book represent five generations of graduate student progeny emerging from Iannaccone and Lutz's original student-teacher relationship. In addition, dozens of other students and students of students have done research contributing to the Dissatisfaction Theory.

The point of this rather lengthy description is that for the pursuit of research and theory in education and, particularly, for our purposes here, the politics of education, several things are required. A university must foster such a goal. It must recruit research-oriented professors who are themselves engaged in research and theory building. It must provide resources, including scholarships, in order to recruit good students who study with those professors. Professors must be on campus to mentor those students. Lines of research must be developed, not just random topics pursued. Professors need faculty colleagues that hold the same values and are interested in interaction with each other about each other's research. While there may be individual exceptions, the above is the best way to foster research and theory. Additionally, neither the politics of education, nor education in general, make progress and improve without good research and theory building.

DEVELOPING QUALITY RESEARCH

As noted above, the Robertsdale case is ethnography in the classic sense of the word. More accurately, it is an ethnography describing the culture of a public school board operating in the early 1960s. School board cultures have not changed all that much in the ensuing decades. They still make most of

their decisions in private and enact them in public. In other words, they tend to be elite councils (Richards and Kuper, 1971). The Robertsdale ethnography's original framework of analysis was a social systems framework using the concepts of activities, interaction, and sentiment as its tools of analysis (Homans, 1961). It was soon to be the subject of political analysis.

It is unnecessary to review the important and appropriate uses of good theory. Simply stated, theory provides practitioners with a means of acting with a specified confidence in a wide variety of situations under specified conditions. However, everything that is labeled a theory is not a theory. Additionally, "thinking like a researcher" can assist practitioners in making better decisions. Proposing a practical solution in hypothesis form can avoid the disaster of hiding one's policy into the dark abyss of disaster. If one asks the question "Will this work under these circumstances?" and then collects data related to that question, one may find a workable solution. However, we must remember that research should always pose the negative question describing how something does not work. Thus stated, one has some hope of disproving the negative statement and making corrections in the description of reality before it is too late to be of use to practitioners in the field. Conversely, to seek the preferred or selected policy answer is to assure a biased answer and to court a failed policy. Additionally, "all that glitters is not gold." That is, all that appears to be research is not research. Perhaps some recent trends in education research have pushed research beyond the line.

The notion that one's belief or value orientation, psychic state, or philosophical position creates reality is beyond that line. Political correctness can distort scientific fact and cloud reality. True, the purely positivist orientation of education research had marginalized minority views, conditions, and voices. But just because one believes it so, even when others agree, does not make it so. Falsification remains the heart of good research. Elsewhere Lutz has written, "The fact that each of the three blind men saw a different 'reality' when they 'saw' the elephant does not change the fact that there is a real elephant. Each, after observation, had an image of the animal in their minds that was 'true' for that observer. That did not change the truth about what is an elephant" (Lutz, Watt, and Combs, 2006, p. 295). It is a good thing that positivism is not dead in education research.

New paradigms of research methodology have opened new vistas and understandings about education. They are helpful. But they may not be what are properly called research and may, in some unfortunate fashion, impede that research. Some present practitioners of our trade have suggested that this is so but suggest that to say it could be political suicide in the profession. That is at the heart of the problem in the current social/political milieu. To "preach truth to the powerful" could be a professional disaster! But not saying what you believe may prohibit the honest pursuit of important questions and promote tolerance of wrong ideas.

The renowned anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has written that magic and science are not bad and good ways of understanding human cultures. Rather, they are alternative ways. He says, "It [magic] forms a well-articulated system, and is in this respect independent of that other system which constitutes science . . . It is therefore better, instead of contrasting magic and science, to compare them as two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 13). Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss, it may be better not to contrast the new paradigms with positivistic research but rather to compare them as two parallel systems of inquiry.

More recently in an article in *Scientific American*, Krauss and Dawkins, described by the editors as "two prominent defenders of science," discuss science and faith (Krauss and Dawkins, 2007, p. 88). Krauss takes the position that, while some extreme positions in faith damage science or make it difficult for science to inform humankind, both science and faith have a place in our culture. He says:

I do not think we will rid humanity of religious faith any more than we will rid humanity of romantic love or many of the irrational but fundamental aspects of human cognition. While orthogonal from the scientific rational components, they are no less real and perhaps no less worthy of some celebration when we consider our humanity. [Dawkins replies] As an aside, such pessimism about humanity is popular among rationalists to the point of outright masochism. It is almost as though you and others . . . relish the idea that humanity is perpetually doomed to unreason. But I think irrationality has nothing to do with romantic love or poetry or the emotions that lie so close to what makes life worth living. Those are not orthogonal to rationality. Perhaps they are triangular to it. In any case, I am all for them, as are you. (Krauss and Dawkins, 2007, p. 90)

In a same fashion, we are not opposed to the new paradigms. We think they make a contribution to our field. But we believe they are different from what we refer to as research. Further, we believe public education and knowledge about its politics and policies cannot move forward and improve without good research.

POLICY STUDY VS. POLITICAL RESEARCH

Our discussion of political research cannot end without some mention of our views about the difference between political research and policy study and the meaning for theory and practice. A decade or so ago, policy study in education began to dominate the stage in the politics of education. This paralleled major increases in federal funding and the accompanying regulations for local school districts and states. As big dollars became available,

so did the regulations and the questions about the success of the policy and the wisdom of continuing the policy. Usually school districts were not required to adopt the policy—but if they did not adopt, they received no funds. Few local districts or states could afford that luxury.

However, the question of the success of the policy was often left to an agency funded either directly or by contract from the agency that formulated or administered that policy. Examples are so numerous that our readers require no examples. Simply put, when policy study is funded by the agency either initiating or funding the policy, the effort is often to prove the success of the policy rather than to question it. To what extent would anyone trust a study of the effects of smoking done by the tobacco companies?

As discussed earlier, research should rest on the effort to falsify and test the null or negatively stated hypothesis. A declaration of support for a theory is made only after finding that our null hypothesis was wrong. Policy study too often thrives when it finds what the policy's initiators want to hear. The effort is often not to find what is wrong with the policy but to find that it is working. If you had just put millions of dollars into some public program, how likely would you be, as an elected official, to tell your constituency that those millions were money down the drain? This is not a matter of partisan politics; it is a matter of human nature.

Policy study can be and sometimes has been useful. But, generally, it must be independent in order to be useful and trustworthy. Like research, it should be independently funded. When all pharmaceutical research is done by the big, for-profit corporations, the health of the American people is at risk. When research about national education policy is funded by the agencies that set those policies, American public education is at risk. At the very least, let's be sure that policy study does not push political research off the stage of public education research.

DISSATISFACTION THEORY AND ITS APPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Before explaining how the Dissatisfaction Theory was developed, it is important to understand that the suggested competition between it and the two other theories about the governance of local education in America (Wirt and Kirst's input-output theory and Zeigler's continuous participation theory) in our view is misleading. The theories are not as competitive as they are complementary. Each explains a different aspect of the politics of public school governance. Each posits a somewhat different thesis about the nature of democracy and, therefore, comes to a different conclusion of whether or not local education, governed by elected local school boards, is democratic. That is where they may be seen as competitive. In our chapters

(Iannaccone and Lutz, 1995, pp. 39-43; Lutz and Iannaccone, 1993, pp. 78-81), we have explained the differences in some detail, so we do not go into the detail here.

Zeigler et al. (1974) sees democracy as a matter of competition for office and participation by the voters in the election process. Finding there is often little competition for membership on the board and usually very low voter participation, they concluded the governance process to be undemocratic. The Wirt and Kirst (1992) input-output model looks at the public demands and compares those to policies the board enacts. As these may be commensurate, they suggest that democracy has worked. They find, however, that the policies (outputs) are seldom what the public had demanded (inputs). Therefore, they declare the governance process of local schools is usually undemocratic.

The Dissatisfaction Theory uniquely looks at the process in a longitudinal (diachronic) fashion. It suggests that in all aspects of our democracy, the American voter is often uninterested, usually fairly satisfied, somewhat uninformed, and doesn't bother to vote. But we point out that when the American voters become dissatisfied enough, they go to the polls and vote out the incumbents and install new representatives who, they hope, enact more satisfying policies. This we claim is the essence of American democracy, and therefore not only is the politics of local school governance democratic, it is one of the few remaining grassroots example of that democracy.

Actually the three theories together describe the complete overview of politics in the American republic. Democracy works best when there is competition for office and the people vote in large numbers. It is to be hoped that through this process of electing representatives of the people, those elected officials enact the policies expected by the people who elected them. When that doesn't happen, the people may become sufficiently dissatisfied and motivated to go to the polls and vote out the incumbents who failed to provide the policy they wanted. They expect the newly elected officials to enact the policies they want, or the voters also turn them out. That is American democracy.

Returning to the development of the Dissatisfaction Theory, based on the Robertsdale ethnography we posited a set of revised statements that accounted for the data in the three-year study. These provided a springboard for a series of research studies in an attempt to falsify or, failing that, to verify the statements. In *Public Participation in Local School Districts* (Lutz and Iannaccone, 1978), many of these are systematically reported so are not reported here in detail.

The 15 years following the original ethnographic study were very productive for the Dissatisfaction Theory. In 1966, three dissertations were completed. All basically verified the proposition that incumbent school board member defeat followed socioeconomic changes and was significantly re-

lated to superintendent turnover (Freborn, 1966; Kirkendall, 1966; Walden, 1966). All were completed on the West Coast. Moen (1971) confirmed that the same phenomena were true in the partisan elections in Pennsylvania. Thus we felt fairly secure in asserting that school superintendents were in jeopardy when there were episodic shifts in socioeconomic indicators in their communities followed by the defeat of incumbent school board members.

As these studies also offered a set of precursors to incumbent defeat, we felt we had something important to say, not only to the school board member who wanted to stay in office but very importantly to superintendents who wanted to keep their jobs. However, in that same year, LeDoux (1971) completed a study in New Mexico that called these relationships into question. The findings reported by LeDoux and Burlingame (1973) had to be somehow integrated into the theory if the theory was to stand. Several years later, Lutz (1975) suggested that the relationship of superintendent turnover to incumbent defeat might not be as strong in school districts where socioeconomic indicators are turning down as they are in school districts where they are turning upward. This, he suggested, might be because politicians in such "down" communities might be pressured to respond more appropriately and quickly to the changing conditions in their communities than do politicians in "up" communities.

Garberina (1975), in a study in Massachusetts, posited a relationship between incumbent defeat and superintendent turnover using a set of socioeconomic indicators describing the "up" or "down" socioeconomic conditions in each school district. Using these predictors he again found a significant statistical relationship between incumbent defeat and superintendent turnover. Thus, the theory was becoming more sophisticated and predictive. Essentially, it was now clear that school boards and their superintendents are more likely to recognize and respond to downward socioeconomic trends than they are to upward trends. Where boards did not respond, it seemed superintendents were sometimes perceived as having attempted to be responsive. In such cases, these superintendents were more likely to survive after incumbent school board member defeat.

During this same 15-year period, two other studies stimulated by the Dissatisfaction Model and the Robertsdale ethnography were completed. Noting the election returns reported in the tax battle in Robertsdale, Spinner (1967) completed a study of school financial elections in New York State. In the Robertsdale case, an episode was observed where Prentice led the district in an effort to increase the tax levy in order to increase teacher salaries and significantly add to the high school curricular offerings. The tax proposal was first defeated by a fairly large margin; a second attempt also lost but by less of a margin. Finally it succeeded as the total vote continued to increase, and the yes votes finally exceeded the no votes, which had remained stable

through the three elections. The question explored in the Spinner research was whether this pattern was unique or could be typically expected if defeated tax issues were resubmitted.

Carter and Savard (1961) suggested that as voter turnout increased, fiscal school elections stood a greater chance of losing. The Robertsdale data suggested that while this was partially correct, it missed an important point: In elections where propositions to support needed educational efforts lost and were resubmitted to the electorate, the proposition was likely to pass as the turnout continued to increase. This, it was suggested, was because the electorate was originally poorly informed and had expected the issue to pass. Many "yes voters" had stayed at home. The yes voters' participation increased in subsequent elections until the issue finally passed. In future tax elections after the tax passed, the voter turnout returned to its original and stable pattern with lower voter turnout, and the issue usually passed.

Spinner tested this notion in New York State elections using percentage of turnout rather than actual no/yes response as a measure. What he found confirmed that the voter behavior in school tax elections described in the Robertsdale case was consistent with the voter behavior in the New York elections, thus increasing the scope of the Dissatisfaction Theory and expanding the meaning of the Carter research.

A second study conducted by Cistone (1970) recognized the relationship between what appeared to be a changing political culture in Robertsdale and turnover on the school board with incumbent defeat leading to superintendent turnover. He sought to explore the relationship between political values and political culture, and the type of governance in that political entity. Citizens in Pennsylvania's local municipalities had been given the opportunity to select whether they wanted the city manager or mayoral form of governance (similar to but not exactly like machine vs. reform, or public-regarding vs. private-regarding politics).

He explored the relationship between the choice of municipal governance and the degree of professional freedom that elected school boards gave their appointed school superintendent. He posited that communities choosing the city manager form would also select school boards that gave the appointed school superintendents a greater degree of professional freedom. In other words, the board members, like the general electorate, preferred professional control of the public's business. That hypothesis was confirmed at a statistically significant level. Thus, we could say that political cultures tended to dominate across different aspects of the political governance in the community. This congruence was the beginning point in the Robertsdale case. Only when socioeconomic and value changes had taken place, caused by changes in population size, had political change in the

Robertsdale school board occurred. Again the Dissatisfaction Model was enriched and supported.

One of the problems with the Dissatisfaction Theory, when it came to the practical politics of school board members and superintendents, was a matter of political timing. It was clear that when an incumbent school board member was defeated, the superintendent was in real trouble. Actually, it was already too late for that board member and very late for the superintendent to do much about it. *In Politics, Power, and Policy*, Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) have a chapter titled "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin"—roughly translated, "It is finished; you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting; your kingdom is divided." That was the problem. Although the chapter relates many events that led to the incumbent defeat and these events continued through the second defeat in Robertsdale, it suggests that once the first incumbent defeat had occurred, it was over for the incumbent superintendent and for school politics as it had occurred before.

The chapter notes the Walden study (1966), which demonstrated that one incumbent defeat was sufficient to predict the demise of the superintendent. "It was finished!" All that could be suggested was that school board members and superintendents, like all good politicians, should always keep their finger on the pulse of the public(s) and note changes in population, values, and voter sentiment and demands. Not bad advice in any case. Smart superintendents do not totally rely on the school board for their information about these matters, and school board members should not rely only on the superintendent for their information. That pattern is obviously circular, self-fulfilling, and self-defeating. Yet the problem remained: What is the best way to predict incumbent defeat of a school board member and the superintendent?

Thorsted (1974), working with Mitchell, developed the Thorsted index, using a ratio of indicators that seemed to predict political unrest and incumbent defeat. However, Hunt (1980), using socioeconomic data and an incumbent defeat index, failed to predict incumbent defeat in an Ohio school district. This was the first time since the LeDoux study that the relationship between incumbent defeat and superintendent turnover had been challenged. Wang and Lutz (1989) reanalyzed the Hunt data and using the same target election developed a formula that they called the "Dissat-factor." That formula is: Dissat-factor equals one minus the quotient of the number of seats available divided by the number of incumbents running plus the number of challengers. This enabled the production of a statistical model that would have predicted the target Ohio election results. Working with Texas school districts and using the Dissat-factor, Wang (1989) was able to predict incumbent defeat in a target election in Texas, again confirming the Dissatisfaction Model and strengthening the theory.

OTHER ISSUES TANGENT TO DISSATISFACTION THEORY

Superintendent Resiliency

Some other issues, not directly within the Dissatisfaction Theory, are of considerable interest, particularly to practitioners. As the theory is centrally concerned with superintendent turnover, some of our work has been interested in the issue of superintendent mobility. We begin here with Callahan's (1962) *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, which established the concept of "superintendent vulnerability." This concept holds that due to the conflict between a professional superintendent trying to make good educational decisions and a school board making conservative fiscal decisions, superintendents are in a state of constant vulnerability that sometimes costs them their jobs.

Wisener (1996, p. 57) states that in a personal communication Iannaccone told her that "Vulnerability is an underpinning thesis of his and Lutz's 'dissatisfaction theory' work" and Lutz said that the explanation of superintendent vulnerability is central to the Dissatisfaction Theory. Vulnerability, however, may have played an unintended role in the development of the myth of the superintendent's role. It may have led to an attitude of "pity the poor superintendent," which fosters a solid position where the superintendent may retreat when in trouble and an attitude that the board should be working to help the superintendent instead of the superintendent working to help the board.

In a sample of 260 Texas superintendents who had changed their positions within the four previous years, Parker reported that mobility among these superintendents did not appear to be the pressured kind, or at least not the emotionally difficult kind suggested by the notion of vulnerability. She reports that most superintendents moved up and to better salaries and larger school districts. Not one reported that his or her move was due to disagreement over business valuing issues. Most who reported major issues with the board were from smaller school districts, and the issues tended to be over who should or should not graduate, hiring or firing a particular individual, or other "board involvement in petty matters" (Parker, 1996, p. 77).

Taylor began with a sample of 700 randomly selected members of AASA. Of these, 544 responded and 302 of these reported that they had changed positions sometime in their career. Surveying those individuals, Taylor found that "superintendents who experienced mobility, whatever the reason for that move, did not suffer great losses, in fact, tended to improve positions. Mobility is not explained by vulnerability unique to the superintendent" (Taylor, 1996, p. 153).

But mobility is not the same as vulnerability. Merrell interviewed, by phone, 115 of the superintendents who had returned questionnaires in the

Taylor (1996) study. While agreeing with Parker and Taylor about the lack of loss in superintendent mobility, she reported some very interesting findings. She concluded, "Political pressures remain an area of 'vulnerability' for superintendents and their families and serve to reaffirm the relevancy of Raymond Callahan's 'vulnerability thesis' (Merrell, 1997, p. 118).

Both Merrell (1997) and Brinson (1998) report similar findings. Both found that in retrospect, spouses of retired superintendents, both male and female, reported satisfaction with having been in that role and that "it was all worth it." That finding is interesting, as the data are clear that perhaps the highest price paid in the pressure tank of the superintendency position is to be paid by the superintendent's spouse and children. So vulnerability remains a central issue in the Dissatisfaction Theory.

Sometimes superintendents keep their positions because board incumbents fail to fire them in the face of community opposition. Those incumbents then lose their seats on the board to challengers who after winning the next election usually fire the superintendent. Sometimes superintendents lose their jobs because boards are trying to satisfy an electorate who wants the superintendent fired. In either case, superintendents are clearly a central actor in the Dissatisfaction Theory.

School Voter Behavior

A second tangent issue to our theory is voter behavior in school financial elections. For various reasons the focus of our research has been school bond elections. In their article Lutz and Smith (1990), using a sample of 290 voters over the age of 50, describe older voter behavior in school bond elections. They report that older voters, unlike the well-believed myth, are not much different than their younger counterparts. They tend to think they should support public education and when they vote in bond elections they tend to vote yes.

Voters who were approaching retirement age showed a slightly lower degree of support until they reached retirement age, and from then on the majority of all voters over 65 reported voting for the bond issue. One hundred percent of all reporting who were over 75 reported voting yes. One might suggest, based on this study, that a minority of older voters, like all voters who are less informed, less directly involved, or less pleased about the issue, tend not to vote or vote no.

Rehl (1991) studied a random sample of 360 Catholics and 360 non-Catholics in north-central Texas. He found that Catholics reported a slightly higher voter turnout rate in both regular school elections and in bond referendums than did non-Catholic voters. They also tended to report slightly higher support for public school bond issues than non-Catholics. This

again destroys a popular myth about voter behavior. In general he found that Catholics reported approximately the same voting behavior in school elections as did non-Catholics.

Lutz and Foerch (1990) looked directly at the ability of the Dissatisfaction Model to predict bond elections. They found that when dissatisfaction was high, defeat of the bond issue was high. However, they also found that some dissatisfaction was necessary for the bond issue to pass. There was the possibility that dissatisfaction was related to some need addressed in the bond issue. Predictors of failure were school board incumbent defeat within the past nine years and also superintendent turnover in the past nine years. There was no relationship to the size of the bond issue proposed or the intended purpose. There was a small empirical, but not statistically significant, tendency for defeat to be linked to higher voter turnout. Perhaps this is because defeated issues are often not proposed again when voter turnout seems likely to increase again and issues seem to pass.

Lutz and McGehee (1994) took a bit more oblique tack. They looked at how voter psychological satisfaction might affect the election. Using the concepts of "hygiènes" and "motivators" (Herzberg, 1959), they found that "hygiènes"—for example, the tendency to hold that schools were safe and children were being educated—were sufficient to prevent voters from voting against the bond issue but not sufficient for them to bother to vote for it. They tended to stay at home. Voters who had "motivators"—for example, those working for the school district or having a child that played on the football team, in the band, or on the debate team—tended to vote for the bond issue. Voters lacking both hygiènes and motivators tended to vote against a bond issue.

As motivators are more difficult and expensive to produce, school boards can be advised to concentrate on the hygiènes, using their public relations programs and targeting the different publics in the district. Thus, long before Karl Rove, we were telling school boards and superintendents that to win school bond referendums they had to identify and pay attention to the individual and different publics in their school districts.

A POSTSCRIPT ON THE RESEARCH

An article by Alsbury (2003) describes a study employing both quantitative and qualitative data and analyses. While four previous studies reported by Weller et al. (1991) examined the relationship between incumbent defeat and superintendent turnover and failed to confirm the relationship, Alsbury replaced the routine method of using ex post facto data to classify the nature of incumbent defeat as either political or apolitical. Still, only one of four analyses done according to time periods demonstrated a significant re-

lationship between the variables. What was wrong? Using case study data collection methods and analysis procedures, Alsbury chose the school district within the sample that seemed to produce the most deviant case among districts in the nonsignificant group. When he examined those data, it became clear that the actual district politics mirrored the conditions that the Dissatisfaction Model described.

Eleven turnovers on the board that had been categorized as school board member defeats without superintendent turnover in the original study were actually eleven apolitical school board member retirements from the board. The single superintendent turnover during the case study period followed a three-year period when there was increased voter turnout, more challenges, and three political defeats on the board. That is exactly what the Dissatisfaction Theory would have predicted. It was the quantitative data categorization that had failed. Alsbury suggests that his study actually supports the theory, and suggests

the necessity of in-depth data analysis of all districts that do not seem to follow the Dissatisfaction theory model before making conclusions about the efficacy of the theory. . . . Future research of [the model] should include distinctions between political and apolitical school board and superintendent turnover. (Alsbury, 2003, p. 689)

At this point a lot has been said about the research that went into the development of the Dissatisfaction Theory. If one isn't convinced, there is a lot more information contained in works reported in the references and more could be found in an extensive literature search. Perhaps we can now turn to a few generalizations about the larger body politic and offer some suggestions as to how this theory might be used to assist practitioners and develop new research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

While we know of no research that directly demonstrates that the Dissatisfaction Theory accounts for phenomena in the general world of American politics, most of us can recall considerable political comment suggesting that to be the case. Probably without ever hearing of the Dissatisfaction Theory, political news commentators have discussed periods when major changes have occurred in our national political arena following periods of intense citizen dissatisfaction. Situations like Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America," when the Republican Party took control of the Congress and kept it for years, the Reagan era, and when Clinton after riding high fell to a historic low, allowing the current president to win the presidency and

Republicans to take control of both houses of Congress, all come immediately to mind.

More recently, political commentators have pointed to the low approval of President Bush, followed by the Democratic takeover of both houses of the Congress in 2006, as an example. Most political commentators suggest that after citizens judge events as sufficiently wrong, have expressed considerable dissatisfaction, and fail to get the change they demand, they go to the polls and vote the incumbents out of office. Then, perhaps, policy is changed. That is exactly what the Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy describes and predicts.

Founded in the crucible of the American democracy of the local school district, the model emerges as the best example of what democracy in America is all about. What follows are some suggestions that we offer to the practitioners who administer our schools and the school boards that govern them, with the hope that better governance might produce better education. It should be noted that the issue of school board influence on student success was recently confirmed by Alsbury (forthcoming), who found a relationship between incumbent defeat, superintendent turnover, and student academic achievement.

Some suggestions for school board members and superintendents based on the Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy include the following:

1. In spite of a "few bumps in the road," the Dissatisfaction Theory of American Democracy remains the best description of the politics of education in independent school districts in America. It proposes that when American voters become dissatisfied enough, they go to the polls and exercise their right to vote, and vote the incumbents who created the dissatisfying policies out of office. The model suggests that in this way the citizens of a school district can get what they want and therefore probably get what they deserve. After incumbent defeat, newly elected officials create more satisfying policies or risk defeat at the next election. This theory may also describe and predict general American politics.
2. Both superintendents and school board members should keep careful track of the population, socioeconomic, ethnic, and value changes occurring in their school districts. Simple labels may mask data and not be sufficient. Superintendent mobility is not always turnover caused by political pressures or dismissals. An incumbent's name no longer appearing on the roster in the public school report does not necessarily signify a political defeat of that board member.
3. Single-interest groups are groups that are interested in your schools, in one fashion or another. "Recognize the diverse and pluralistic val-

ues, aspirations, and wants represented within the community. [They are] . . . not to be shunned and beaten down but to be heard, understood, and helped [to feel somewhat important]" (Lutz and Merz, 1992, p. 53).

4. Some political pundits have suggested that local school boards have become irrelevant or actually harmful to needed reform and higher achievement in public education in the United States. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our model suggests that through the process described, citizens can change local education policy and obtain the level of education they choose and are willing to support.
5. Local school districts and local school boards are not only a historical tradition in our nation; they are the grassroots example of American democracy. The political process described in the Dissatisfaction Theory is the best approach to teach American governance, with school boards offering the most accessible classroom. It is immediately at hand, just at our fingertips. Public education is a matter of some interest to all citizens and of major importance to many. Give up local school governance *very* reluctantly! It is a grand example of exactly what our American republic is all about: the right to educate *all* of our children as "we the people" choose, and the right to govern ourselves in a free and equitable republic.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following is not offered based on research nor based directly on the Dissatisfaction Theory research as are the above suggestions, but rather on nine decades of working in the professorship; observing school practitioners and school boards; and teaching school administration, politics in education, and occasionally ethics. They are offered for your consideration based on just what school administrators often accuse professors of having too little of: practical experience.

1. Rules are made to be broken and sometimes should be broken if justice is to be served. The statement "You are right, but we cannot make any exceptions" always earns new political enemies. Still, indiscriminately breaking rules based on personal preference surely gets you into difficulty. So, don't make too many detailed rules. Rather, establish broad policy to cover the generalized case and allow qualified and knowledgeable administrators on the scene some situational latitude. These exceptions should always be officially reviewed and documented, rationally defensible, and used to determine if and how policy should be modified to improve the organization.

2. The claim to occupy the "moral high ground" can be dangerous. It suggests that you have the only morally correct decision and those who disagree are immoral. One cannot change such a decision without being seen as immoral, either then or now. Sometimes you may want to change a decision. You don't want to be seen as a "flip-flopper." Often the only decision that can be practically implemented is a choice between two or more poor but possible decisions. The good decision is no longer possible due to conditions beyond your control. An ethical decision is impossible. What is required is to have a working philosophy and make an ethically defensible decision within that philosophical framework.
3. Ethics is not a matter of following six or so simple two-line rules. Ethical behavior requires the development of a working philosophy used so that one can make decisions and then examine those decisions over time. One has to work at being ethical. It is not as simple as following a set of simple rules. Being ethical is always a work in progress and never a matter of self-affirmation.

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School Board Research: A Retrospective

Peter J. Cistone

It does not seem possible that more than three decades have passed since the National School Boards Association convened an invitational symposium in April 1975 on the theme "School Board Research: Main Lines of Inquiry." Fourteen scholars from across North America were invited to participate in the symposium and to each prepare a state-of-the-art paper on a specific facet of school board research.

The Papers were subsequently revised, in light of the discussions in the course of the symposium, and compiled in a book titled *Understanding School Boards: Problems and Prospects* (Cistone, 1975). The chapters reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized disciplined inquiry into various dimensions of the school board and suggested the most promising directions for future inquiry.

The present chapter is intended to offer a reflective statement on the main themes and issues that marked the 1975 symposium and to suggest some promising directions for future inquiry on the school board. It is not intended to be a historical review of the research literature on school boards, but rather to serve the purpose of furthering the discussion and debate on the scope, quality, and impact of that research.

CHANGING CONTEXTS AND SCHOOL BOARD RESEARCH

Historically, school board studies tended to reflect the dominant ideology of educational governance that emerged out of the reform era early in the