An institutional analysis of school closures in Saskatoon and Windsor

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Abstract. During the 1978–88 period the public and the Catholic separate boards closed seventeen schools in Saskatoon and twenty-two in Windsor. The repertories of involvements and interactions between the community representatives and the school board officials during the reviews of the closure of these schools are theorized. The empirical analysis utilizes archival data for two episodes of school closures in each city, after which the school boards might have amended their procedures for the closures. The findings illustrate the real and instantiated powers, and the agency skills of the involved community representatives versus those of the school board officials.

Introduction
Public and private organizations have been restructuring the geography of services since the mid-1970s, primarily to become more efficient (Pinch, 1989; Urry, 1987). School closures are an example of the rationalization of public services in response to declining student enrollments and the retrenchment in the funding for education (Honey and Sorensen, 1984; Phipps and Anglin, 1993). Enrollments have declined especially within the suburbs developed during the late 1950s and early 1960s, which were overstocked with schools. Although families have stayed and aged in these suburbs, younger families have moved elsewhere. Many other students have transferred to specialized district-wide educational programs. In addition, the growing segments of aging and childless people are less inclined to pay for public education. In short, more and more ratepayers endorse school closures to save money as long as their neighborhoods are not vulnerable.

School boards close their underutilized schools, and sometimes bus students from unserved neighborhoods to the fewer larger schools in order to reduce their total operating costs for facilities and their salaries for employees. Some may close schools in order to open new schools or programs in growth areas, and so they do not economize for the entire district. Between 1978 and 1988 in Saskatoon and Windsor, the school boards closed seventeen and twenty-two neighborhood schools, respectively (see figure 1 and tables 1 and 2). The Saskatoon public board saved at least Can$2 million in annual operating costs and projected major maintenance, and earned a similar amount from the sales of six closed schools. Even so, its decisions to close schools across the city did not maximize the savings (Phipps and Anglin, 1993). It postponed the closures, and subsidized the remaining students (and their families) attending the underenrolled schools for an annual amount equivalent to 40% of the actual savings on average.

Similarly to the restructuring in other public services (Stubbs and Barnett, 1992), the Saskatoon public board’s decisions seemed to be inefficient owing to the social and political costs imposed by the participation of the affected community representatives during the closure reviews of schools (Phipps and Anglin, 1993). Nonetheless, it never reprieved a reviewed school, even though other school boards have sometimes reprieved schools from closure in the face of acrimonious opposition from parents, guardians, and students. Thus, it somehow repressed these social and political interactions between community representatives and educators so that their
Figure 1. Closed schools in Windsor.
### Table 1. Dates for closed schools in Saskatoon, 1978–88 (sources: Board of Education Minutes of Meetings and Saskatoon Star-Phoenix).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Closure first mentioned</th>
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*a Catholic separate school.

*b Dates refer to discontinuation of neighborhood English-stream programs; since 1982, they have been designated for French-immersion programs.

### Table 2. Dates for closed schools in Windsor, 1978–88 (sources: Board of Education Minutes of Meetings, and the Windsor Star).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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consequences after the decisions to close schools were relatively benign. That is, the closures did not have political impacts that were translated into the voting-out of pro-closure trustees during later elections, or the forced resignations and firings of administrators (Cuban, 1979). The closures did not have neighborhood impacts that caused mobility or land-use shifts (Andrews, 1983; Dean, 1983). Also, the closures did not necessarily promote long-term activism among community representatives. Instead, those experiencing a closure rejoined the majority endorsing closures elsewhere even before their children left school. In other words, there was a paradoxical outcome: the intense neighborhood social conflicts before school closures were followed by benign consequences for future decisions. This paradox is further explored for Saskatoon and a second comparable study area, Windsor. The finding is that school boards may induce this outcome by amending their procedures for closing schools in order to enable their own actions and to constrain those of the other actors.

The repertoires of involvements and interactions between representatives of a community and a school board during a closure review are theorized in the next section. This theory (flowcharted in figures 2 and 3 below) is based on Reintges's (1990) model. She hypothesized that people mobilize, either individually or as a group, to become involved in urban change if it impinges on the social bases or the knowledge interests of their lives (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Lowe, 1986). These individuals or groups translate themselves into a social force against change if their actions are more enabled than constrained by not only their agency skills of varying effectiveness, but also their empowering structures of competing strength (Dear and Moos, 1986; Giddens, 1984; Moos and Dear, 1986). Their social interactions in exploiting their relative competency and empowerment produce for them intended and unintended consequences that subsequently may reinforce or subvert their skills and powers (Chouinard, 1989). Ultimately, if a community movement against state intervention—or vice versa—shifts the balance of power between the participants, or if it improves the agency skills of the participants ready for future actions, then it will have structural consequences (Castells, 1983).

After theorizing about the social bases, structural powers, agency skills, and consequences for community representatives and school boards involved in school closures, I pose four research questions for Saskatoon and Windsor. (1) Why did community representatives become involved in the reviews of schools? (2) What were their powers? (3) What were their actions during the closure reviews compared with those of a school board? And (4) what were the consequences of their interactions? The archival data for this empirical analysis are from two comparable episodes of closure reviews in Saskatoon and Windsor. The participants during these episodes had latent capacities for transforming their future actions and powers by means of amendments to the school boards' procedures for closing schools. In the conclusion, the comparative findings from these two communities reiterate the generality of the social and political processes influencing the geographical restructuring of this and possibly other services (for example, see Fitzgerald, 1991; Hudson and Sadler, 1986).

Theory of involvements in school closures
Social bases for community involvement
As illustrated in figure 2, the closure of a single neighborhood school impinges upon one or more of four social bases of the people in a community. First, the closure of a school is the loss of an impure public good. For the nearby residents, it eliminates the positive externalities from the facility, and any surrounding park, which were translated into transportation-cost savings and property-value increments (Andersson, 1988; Pacione, 1989). Even for seniors, it may symbolize a waste of
Figure 2. Communities' involvements and interactions in school closings.
their past property taxes no longer to be regained through sale revenues. And of course for the teachers and staff a school closure reduces their employment opportunity (Bondi, 1987). Second, a school closure may contribute to a broader commodification of the community and family life (Berger, 1983; Cox, 1988). The closure displaces students who then travel to a larger school that is sometimes far from their traditional neighborhood (Phipps and Holden, 1985). This depersonalizes their social relationships and interactions, especially if they are bused to school. It also distances the involvements of parents and clergy in the students' socialization and education.

Third, the removal of a school may compromise the identity of a neighborhood if residents reorient themselves to services and neighborhoods elsewhere after the closure of their focal point. Families with school-age children may either move from, or not move into, the neighborhood of a closed school. This geographical reorientation and redistribution of families on the basis of age and income may cause a consumption cleavage between the residents living in neighborhoods with schools and those with none (Lowe, 1986). Ratepayers may effectively be coerced to switch their local support to a private or denominational school system (Wood and Boyd, 1981).

Last, complementing these three individually competitive or community-defined bases for action, residents may mobilize for reasons of collective consumption. They may perceive that administrators target the declining schools in working-class neighborhoods where representatives are less organized and resistant (Adler and Bondi, 1988). In addition, women may be conscious of school closures impinging upon their presumed responsibilities for their children (Fincher and McQuillen, 1989). Alternatively, across both class and gender, residents may reciprocate for the previous actions of neighbors, colleagues, and school board officials (Cox and McCarthy, 1980; Reynolds, 1990). People mobilizing for these collective-consumption and community-defined reasons are usually the force behind a Castellian urban social movement. As hypothesized in the next section, they may refer to broader political and communication powers in support of their actions, in contrast with a minority of parents in a single community who become involved against another neighborhood for individually competitive reasons.

School board and community powers
Even the state may be considered as being composed of autonomous and knowledgeable actors who do not solely respond to the dictates of the society in which they live (Chouinard, 1989; Clark and Dear, 1984; Hay, 1988). In general, actors may turn both to 'real' and to 'instantiated' structures to empower their behavior (Craib, 1992). Real structures are expressions of those social relationships between groups that were historically 'necessary' for their coexistence and have become institutionalized and resistant to change through time (Gregson, 1987; Layder, 1985; Storper, 1985). These real structures effectively constrain present-day interactions. As hypothesized in figure 3, a school board derives its primary source of 'real' power from the legal or legislative bases for public administration, namely an education act of a provincial legislature in Canada (Blomley, 1988; Martin and Macdernott, 1982). In the technical appendix I discuss how these acts empower the administrators and the trustees. Besides being the elected and the appointed spokespersons for the district, these educational professionals communicate in technical and administrative terminology, sometimes confusingly for ratepayers. They may euphemistically refer to closures as a 'consolidation' or a 'revitalization' of neighborhood schools. Furthermore, they are the custodians of the provincial and municipal tax revenues for education in the district, and they authorize the
Figure 3. School board's involvements and interactions in school closings.
allocations of people and resources to neighborhood schools. In addition, the trustees may refer to a political structure to say that the ratepayers have elected them for educationally—and fiscally—responsible decisionmaking on behalf of the entire district, regardless of whether they are elected at large in the district or from neighborhood wards. Incidentally, a neighborhood-ward electoral system more commonly results in either divisive or paralyzed decisionmaking by trustees when neighborhood schools are closed (Bondi, 1988; Boyd and Wheaton, 1983).

Instantiated structures are those virtual rules and resources of society, constituted through previous human interactions. Actors instantiate these during their current actions in a locality, and thereby reproduce them for future action by themselves or other actors (Giddens, 1984). Instantiated structures may emerge when one group's present actions conform with and reinforce another's. However, analogously to neologism in language, dominant groups may redefine or transform these rules and resources as everyday interactions identify new circumstances or violations (Craib, 1992). The major structures that people may instantiate for their actions during a closure review are those embodied in the procedures designed by a school board for closing its schools (Burnett, 1988; Reynolds, 1984; Reynolds and Shelley, 1985). For example, one of the earliest procedures used by school boards for reviewing schools recommended the use of joint educator—parent committees. But these did not have the benefits for decisionmaking originally predicted in the mid-1970s (Berger, 1983; Bishop, 1979; Eisenberger and Keough, 1974; Zerchuky, 1983a; 1983b). The participants were educated and mobilized against a school board, which resulted in an inefficient committee process for administrators reviewing more than a single school during an academic year. Also, the trustees were compromised if they publicly voted against the recommendations of the committee. Accordingly, this early procedure was commonly amended to a newer one where representatives submitted briefs (or expert consultants wrote reports), and one or more public meetings gave the opportunity for scrutiny of the administrators' assumptions, data, and recommendations. The trustees and the administrators alone engaged in the final debate about closure, and the complaints from the community representatives about their involvement were postponed until after the decision to close.

Apart from these structural powers embodied in the procedures, actors outside the school board have few, if any, real powers for influencing the reviews and closures of schools (MacKay, 1984; Reynolds, 1990). In general, community representatives have only communication and economic and political powers derived from the educational 'social contract' (MacKay, 1984; Martin and Macdonell, 1982). They might refuse either to volunteer for work at a school or to register their children. They might transfer their children and their property taxes to another district or a private institution. Or they might vote out the trustees or take them to court (Adler and Bondi, 1988; Bondi, 1988). In reality, a closure is normally misinterpreted as affecting only those families with school-age children attending the school, and thus politically they will be relatively weak. In any case, other families might not know the critical information if the primary methods of information are newsletters sent home from school (Burnett, 1988). Others might be resigned to the eventual closure, and not become involved, and possibly move out of the neighborhood (Cox and McCarthy, 1980; Oropesa, 1989). In sum, a school board's dominance over the other actors in education seems to be structurally empowered before their encounters during closure reviews. In particular, unless the community representatives mobilize for a widespread conflict, or engage in radical activism, they will have only relatively weak communication and political powers during a closure. Further compounding these weaknesses, the school board officials will probably have superior agency skills in addition to their powers.
School board and community agency skills
Most community representatives are not experienced in closure reviews, unless their children are affected by more than a single closure. They may compensate for this inexperience through alliances with intellectuals or other communities (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Reintges, 1990; Zerchykov, 1983b). In fact, community groups possessing 'middle-class' levels of organizational skills, knowledge, and personal contacts are more convincing in persuading school boards to reprice their schools (Bondi, 1988). Nevertheless, they may have little time during the review to get organized in collecting their own data to challenge the board. If their leader is the president of the home-and-school association, he or she might have been prepared for noncontroversial duties, such as the liaison with the school's staff and the organization of fund-raising events for the school.

In contrast, the board administrators have professional training and status in educational administration. They assemble the data about the district's schools and have the expertise for manipulating those data. Both they and the trustees have their own or their colleagues' previous experiences in routinizing closures. Their compatible working relationship expedites closures and diminishes community opposition (Berger, 1983). In short, a school board will have more effective agency skills and powers for designing procedures for closing schools in order to constrain the powers, and thus the actions, of the community representatives. Even though these procedures might be 'unfair' to a vulnerable community, they nevertheless will emerge as an instantiated structure if the actions of the inexperienced community representatives conform with those prescribed by the school board.

Introduction to the empirical analyses
The particular powers and skills within these theoretical repertories referred to by the community representatives and the school boards in Saskatoon and Windsor, are empirically examined in the remainder of this study. The archival data for the 1978-88 period are from school board minutes of meetings, community briefs, and articles in the local newspapers, supplemented with notes from other meetings and conversations. The empirical analysis is focused on two episodes of closures during or after which the public boards either did or did not amend their procedures for closure reviews. The public boards in Saskatoon and Windsor amended their procedures for the first time during their earliest episodes of closures. They replaced the procedure for the reviewing of schools via an educator-parent committee, with one-off public meetings during which community representatives submitted briefs. As discussed below, these amendments constrained the communication powers of the community representatives, and afterwards a reviewed school was never even temporarily reprieved. The second episode preceded the Windsor public board's decision to amend its enrollment thresholds for reviewing schools, and the Saskatoon public board's corresponding decision not to amend. The school boards' enrollment thresholds are uniformly below the rational economic one computed for Saskatoon in an earlier paper (Phipps and Anglin, 1993). As discussed below, these second amendments were adaptations to shifts in their schools' enrollments to minimize the numbers of community representatives involved in the closure reviews.

Social bases for involvement in Saskatoon and Windsor
The primary actors in the closure reviews in Saskatoon and Windsor were the representatives of the school boards and the communities, as shown in figures 2 and 3. This is in contrast with Cedar Rapids, in Iowa, and Manchester, in the United Kingdom, for example, where representatives of either the school teachers or the principals, the municipal government, (the equivalent of) the provincial government,
and the clergy were also involved (Bondi, 1987; Reynolds, 1984). However, especially in Saskatoon, the displaced teachers were relatively assured of a transfer to another school, owing to the absolute growth in the total elementary-school and secondary-school enrollment. Officials from the provincial governments did not intervene in the closures of old schools, even though they were sometimes requested to do so by communities (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1979c; 1984a). Municipal planners commented only on the developments in the older urban neighborhoods that might invalidate the projections of low future enrollments (Study Committee, 1981; Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1984b; 1984c; 1986a).

Most interesting of all is that the residents of most of the neighborhoods in each city were insulated from the closures occurring one at a time elsewhere during single academic years (tables 1 and 2). The students in the growing suburban neighborhoods in Saskatoon were not bused to schools, as both the public and the Catholic separate boards constructed one new high school and up to ten new elementary schools in those neighborhoods during the same era (see Morton, 1985). In contrast, neither school board in Windsor constructed a new school after 1978 and, for example, the Windsor public board bused 1600 students in its mainstream-English programs during 1988–89. Even so, the discrete timings and locations of the closures helped to attenuate the impacts of a closure on everybody except the communities of the reviewed schools. The first research question therefore is focused on the reasons of the community representatives for their involvements, and it is answered with the analyses of the content of their briefs submitted to the school boards at public meetings, and the school boards' written and reported responses to these.

Community briefs

The community briefs consistently identified the communities' uncompensated loss of a neighborhood public good after the closure, versus the board's minimal annual cost savings (AHSA, 1975; Helbing, 1985; Katzman, 1983). Moreover, after the closure, the youngest children would have to cross busy streets to their next-nearest school, and they would require assimilation, and noon-hour supervision at their recipient school; the displaced students in Windsor would be bused to school; and families with young children would either switch to another school or move away, or not move into the neighborhood (Allan, 1983; Cook, 1982; ESC, 1984; MPCA, 1985; THSA, 1986). In addition, the briefs to the Windsor Catholic separate school board emphasized the possible lapse in religion (St. Charles School, 1980; Windsor Star 1979a). In response, the school boards solely recognized the democratic rights of parents to speak on behalf of school-aged children, and thus they disavowed any responsibility other than administering education in a city. For example, the Saskatoon public board "does not, and should not, have the mandate to determine land use in the city" (SPBE, 1984a, page 8).

The community representatives also capitalized on their personal knowledge about their neighborhoods in questioning whether a school board’s economic and student-enrollment data justified the closures (for example, see AHSA, 1975; Cheung, 1983; CPNA, 1984). In response, the school boards criticized the selfish bias of the community representatives towards their own neighborhoods. For example, in Saskatoon the trustees reiterated two of the director’s earliest generalizations to dismiss these suspicions about the capabilities of the administrators for reliable analyses, and their predetermined decisions: "Groups [threatened with closing schools] 'grasp at straws', they point to a new family which has moved into a block, they do surveys to determine how many children may be born in the neighborhood in the future" (Fast, 1975, page 9). Moreover, there is "support for the concept of
closing schools in areas other than those [in which a person's own community would be] affected" (Fast, 1975, page 4).

Last, the briefs implicitly questioned the professional expertise of an educator who has the assumption that the quality of education was necessarily worse in smaller schools (Innerd, 1983). In response, both public boards rejected the designation of 'magnet schools' specializing in subareas of the curriculum in order to stabilize falls in enrollment “because this approach is contrary to the [Saskatoon public] board's philosophy of providing 'excellence of opportunity' across the whole system" (SPBE, 1984a, page 5; *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* 1979a). The administrators cited the educational and administrative efficiency of mainstream elementary schools having between 400 and 700 students, whereas the closed schools usually had below 150 students (SPBE, 1984b).

**Discussion**

Most community representatives stated that they became involved in the closure reviews in Saskatoon and Windsor in order to save their neighborhood school. With the exception of the concerns about religious practice, they were motivated for the individually competitive and possibly the community-defined reasons hypothesized in figure 2. In any case, the temporal and geographical separations between the individual closures inhibited the emergence of a social movement of people involved for collective-consumption reasons. Also, because of these separations, each group of community representatives was not likely to learn from other groups about a school board's rehearsed reactions. In fact, only five out of 118 community representatives in Windsor submitted more than a single brief. In comparison, the school boards' responses oriented the reviews around educational issues and away from broader social responsibilities. This enabled the actions of the trustees and the administrators who had the accumulated knowledge about the administration of education and the data for the district, and who could thus invalidate the educational and analytical criticisms repeated in one community brief after another. They exercised their agency skills and powers in their actions to the community briefs; in the next section, this effectiveness of their skills and powers is compared with those of the community representatives during the two periods of procedural amendments.

**Powers and agency skills in Saskatoon and Windsor**

**School board actions**

Trustees proposed the first amendments to discontinue the use of the educator-parent committees. A trustee in Windsor concluded that "There's something seriously wrong with our existing policy when two schools that were recommended for closure last year are suggested for review again this year" (*Windsor Star* 1981). The trustee representative on the Albert committee in Saskatoon had "appreciated working with the committee but added it was not always pleasant" (*Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* 1978a). In Saskatoon, the amendment replaced the educator-parent committee with a "public meeting which provides the members of the school community with the opportunity to present their ideas and concerns", and the use of a small committee where the board "feels that additional information [besides the director's report] is desirable" (SPBE, 1978). Similarly, the amendment in Windsor established a 'resource' subcommittee, composed of professional educators, to provide information to a 'consolidation' committee having additional community representatives. The community representatives were the voting members who should "feel their input is legitimate and not manipulated ... Only community people are voting" (*Windsor Star* 1982).
The second major period of actual and potential amendment to the procedures occurred later during the mid-1980s. The Windsor public board had originally lowered its enrollment thresholds for reviews “because enrollment is so low that, under the former policy, too many schools would have been considered (for closure)” (Windsor Star 1982). Nevertheless, the community representatives complained, during the two indecisive reviews of groups of elementary schools, that the closure plans were ‘sprung’ on them without warning. This provoked a trustee to conclude that “The board has labored under a policy that is not operable” (Windsor Star 1983c). Accordingly, the Windsor public board raised its enrollment thresholds from 185 to 225 students for elementary schools, and from 750 to 1000 for high schools (BECW, 1983). In contrast, in Saskatoon during 1986, the public board rejected a comparable amendment and it immediately avoided reviewing at least six additional elementary schools, and possibly one high school, with enrollments below the higher thresholds (Fast, 1986; Norman and Reid, 1986).

Therefore, even though the actions of the two school boards were opposite to each other, the result was the same: both public boards reduced the community involvement in their ‘declining-enrollment’ schools. In recommending the rejection of higher enrollment thresholds, the administrators in Saskatoon instanced an educational and a communication structure, reflecting the individually competitive reasons of most community representatives for becoming involved in the reviews. They believed that specialized programs should not be introduced earlier into an older school to stabilize its declining enrollment, as this “could result in problems in the future”, such as “competition in which a community school group may ask, ‘Why don’t we get a special program here to keep the school going?’” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1986b). Also the earlier review of the school might “speed up the exodus” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1986b), and in any case, “if discussions take place too early, we raise alarm; if we talk about them too late, we are taken to task” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1986c).

To reiterate, the school boards’ first amendments, replacing the educator-parent committees with public meetings, relatively constrained the learning and the communication powers of the community representatives. Previously, these representatives were insubordinate and undiplomatic in the committees, and allegedly leaked a committee report to the media (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1978b). Moreover, the educator-parent committees were indecisive about closures. In Windsor, one of the two subcommittees recommended no closures in a group of four schools, whereas the other recommended three out of seven schools for closure. The later decisions of the school boards to amend, or not, the enrollment thresholds were complementary, and they further constrained the potential political power of their opponents. The mobilization of community representatives who would defend their individual school inhibited the transformation of a closure conflict into a more widespread community-based or social movement. As a consequence, the public boards exploited the public and private meetings to review and to close schools during a single academic year. Even though the possibilities of closure might be mentioned years before (tables 1 and 2), a premise was that “all of our [the Saskatoon public board’s] information suggests that the preference of the community and the school staff itself is for notification of no more than one year” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1986b).

Community actions
The insubordinate and undiplomatic actions of the community representatives during and after the committee meetings contributed to the procedural amendments. For example, the president of the Albert home-and-school association announced after
five months of study that “it was a hell of a painful way of doing it but we did the job” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1978a). However, he criticized the committee’s comprehensive report as coming too late to recommend any alternative than closing the school: “the board should have gone to the community in the first place ... and we could have worked with the board to solve the problem” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1978a). During one of the several similar, but less publicized, reviews in Windsor, one community representative alleged that “the committee members did not have input from, or feedback to the families of the communities until just previous to the last meeting of the committee”, another complained that the committee process “pitted school against school” (Head, 1983; Stammer, 1983; Windsor Star 1983b).

Public complaints by the communities about the unfairness of the closure reviews with the amended procedures were normal after the often unanimous decisions to close their schools (Windsor Star 1984). For example, in Saskatoon the public meetings fostered “no true dialogue between parents and board members. At the May 1 meeting, we presented our briefs and the board listened. On May 3 we listened while the board decided. They provided us no opportunity for questions and answers” (Hull, 1979). Also, during the private meetings, “We allowed them to coerce us behind closed doors” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1984a). After community allegations that “trustees have made up their minds [for closure] a long time ago. They have been wasting everybody’s time with this process” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1979b), even two trustees concluded that the “public hearings and board deliberations are then viewed with some scepticism by the community” (Norman and Reid, 1986). Notwithstanding these, these public complaints were belated and ineffective, as the actions of each community group had conformed with those prescribed by a board’s procedures during the review. By instantiating this structure during the sequence of closures, the community unintentionally reaffirmed their subordinate relationship with a school board, and reproduced it for the future. Accordingly, the director of the Saskatoon public board reiterated that “We have had little trouble closing schools with this policy in comparison to what has happened, with court cases and the like, in larger cities throughout North America” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1986b). Likewise, the chairman of the board of trustees “suspected no method of deciding a school must close will overcome the outcries from local residents”, a trustee rationalized that “those calling for more public involvement seem mistakenly convinced that it would guarantee the preservation of their particular school” (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix 1983). Otherwise, the actions of the community representatives rarely violated those prescribed in the procedures. In Windsor, some parents threatened during a review to take legal action, or to take their children out of the system (Windsor Star 1983a; 1985a). Others demonstrated after a closure by either picketing or keeping children home from school (Windsor Star 1979b; 1979c). Fewer in Saskatoon were activists, and most lobbied the trustees and the administrators in private and through the local media.

Conclusion
In Saskatoon and Windsor, even though the conflicts over the school closures were acrimonious, their identifiable consequences were the potential or actual amendments to the boards’ procedures for reviews. Otherwise, for example, in Saskatoon, only twelve ratepayers attended the public board’s annual meeting at the end of the 1983/4 academic year during which the board closed four schools. Incumbent trustees were reelected, and only one activist was elected as a trustee in 1985 in each city (Windsor Star 1985b); another was elected in Windsor in 1988. In this comparative study of the closures of schools in two medium-sized Canadian cities during the 1980s, I have attempted to explain this paradoxical outcome of the
conflicts having benign consequences for the geographical restructuring of a public service.

The concepts of social bases, agency skills, and structural powers have been operationalized for the understanding of the consequences of the interactions between the primary actors during a sequence of closures. In support of the theory, the answer to the first research question of the study was that the community representatives became involved if the closure of a neighborhood school impinged upon a social base of their lives associated with their individual attachment to their school. The answers to the second and third research questions were that representatives of both the communities and the school boards utilized agency skills and structural powers in their interactions during the closure reviews. These empirical findings clarified the complementarity between ‘real’ and ‘instantiated’ sources of empowerment for action. The school boards exploited their real legal powers to implement the procedures for restructuring that enabled their agency skills and constrained those of the affected community representatives. These procedures embodied the communication and political structures that the community representatives could instantiate as their sources of power during the reviews, assuming that they did not engage in radical activism. Accordingly, the school boards designed and amended their procedures in order to minimize the potential costs imposed on them by the necessary involvement of the community representatives in their administrative decisions to close schools.

The inaction of the people unaffected by school closures contributed to these manoeuvres by school boards. Everybody except those in vulnerable neighborhoods endorsed the school boards’ objectives to save money by closing schools. More ironically, the community representatives that had children in reviewed schools contributed to the geographical restructuring of the services even while they used them. Their actions during the reviews unintentionally contributed to the procedural amendments constraining their involvements. They did not mobilize to reconstitute their weakened communication and political powers in the reviews of closed schools. They did not upgrade their relatively weak first-hand experience in educational administration. In conclusion, these public organizations in two cities learned these comparative effectives in agency skills and structural powers, and thus they did not utilize exclusively technical criteria and fair procedures for restructuring the geography of their services.

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Technical appendix

Public schools in Canada are funded from provincial and municipal tax revenues, and are administered by local boards of education having powers enabled in an Education Act of a Provincial Legislature. Students may attend these schools by right. Similarly to other Canadian communities, Saskatoon and Windsor each have two distinct school boards administering public education: a public board of education, and a Catholic separate board of education. A board of education is composed of two interdependent groups of administrative decisionmakers: the board of trustees and the administrators. The trustees are elected either at large or for neighborhood wards in municipal elections held every three years. They appoint the administrators for the district, and the director of education is the chief executive officer.

Analogously to those in England and Wales, the Education Acts of the Provincial Legislatures codify the professional administration of education in a district (Adler and Bondi, 1988; Martin and Macdonell, 1982). The trustees execute the recommendations of the administrators about the day-to-day allocations of personnel and resources to schools. They lobby the provincial ministry of education for designated funds for construction and renovation projects. They establish the annual taxation rate for the public education component of the local property taxes (approximately one-half of the average tax bill for a property owner). These Acts prescribe relatively weak levels of consultation with the community either about educational administration and budgeting in general, or specifically in the procedures for reviewing a school for closure (MacKay, 1984).

Municipal taxes usually fund over one-half of a school district's operating budget, and the remainder comes from the grants awarded by a provincial ministry of education out of provincial tax revenues. Per-capita resource formulas from the provincial ministry guide a school board's allocations of staff and resources to its schools. Declining student enrollments in a school are associated with increasing average costs of operation unless staff and resources are reassigned. Also following provincial guidelines, most school boards have local policies for reviewing their schools with declining enrollments (Bureau of Municipal Research, 1980). Most importantly, these policies prescribe the enrollment thresholds at which a school will be reviewed for closure. These thresholds are functions of a particular school board's contractual staffing requirements, its educational policies for multi-grade classrooms, and its costs of operating specific-sized schools. For example, the Saskatoon public boards' enrollment thresholds are 115 regular in-district students for an elementary school, and 240 for a high school. Since the mid-1980s, the Windsor public board's enrollment thresholds have been 225 for reviewing an elementary school, and 1000 for a high school. The Windsor Catholic separate board's threshold is 150 for an elementary school.

The school boards' policies for closing schools with declining enrollments also prescribe the school and the student-displacement criteria to be considered for either a single school or a group of schools, the time schedule, and the decision procedure. The Windsor and the Saskatoon school boards have employed two of the three common procedures for gathering the information to decide whether to close, or not; they have not employed expert consultants to make recommendations (Bondi, 1987; Honey and Sorensen, 1984). In one procedure, one or more schools are reviewed by an educator-parent committee which is composed of a trustee, an administrator, a teacher, a principal, and several community representatives; multiples of these representatives may review a group of schools. In another procedure, a subcommittee of the board reviews one or more schools with information from the administrators and with briefs submitted by community representatives during public meetings. Regardless of the procedure, the trustees and the administrators
alone engage in the final debate and the decision about closure during a scheduled board meeting. The common timetable is to review and to close a school during the course of a single academic year. The future alternative use of a closed school and property is usually decided afterward.