St. John's University
EDU 5300 – Organizational Theory and Planned Change
Frank Smith

Unit VII. Part 4 – Political Arena
What are the competing metaphors/ theories about how organizations work?

We started our study of change and theory with a discussion of Cremin's essay on education and its discontent. In that piece he talked about Aristotle's observation that people have different values and therefore have different notions of the good society and of the school that will contribute to the achievement of their good society. Cremin noted that in a democracy these differences in values drive the discourse about how education is to operate and the policies it is to pursue. Democratic discourse about schools reflects a battle over our aspirations for the good society and its good school.

Deborah Stone in her book on political reasoning notes that our society is committed to 4 central goals: equity, security , efficiency, and liberty. While we all generally agree on these goals, we do not agree on their specific meaning. In commenting on how we differ in our sense of equity, she discusses how we might cut and share a cake fairly. She says there are at least 8 different definitions of fairness or equity; thus, 8 different fair ways to cut to cake. The paradox of political reasoning is that while this discourse about values seems to be dividing us and driving us apart, it is engagement in this very discourse that brings us together. Without this struggle to find a common ground, we would not have a sense of community. Thus the struggle over educational values is central to the furtherance of a democratic society. In other words, adults learn to "do democracy" by engaging in struggles over a sense of the good school.

Ira Shor in a text entitled Education is Politics (2000, p. 7) notes

> Because all forms of education develop student consciousness one way of another, all teaching is politics. All educators are partisan even if only some are willing or able to articulate the ideologies of their methods, because every teacher presents to students selected material in a structured learning process that helps form their values. Therefore, every method is political insofar as it uses some materials and methods rather than others to pull student development toward certain values and actions instead of others. Through prolonged

exposure to the discourses in curriculum, students take part in cultural action that develops their thought and feeling, their sense of right and wrong, their notions of what is possible and impossible in their lifeworld.

When people think about the school as an organization in society they have an image or metaphor in their mind that provides an interpretation of the reality before them. Most people think of the school in terms of a formal organization, with its official set of goals, ranked offices, prescribed ways of performing, and official assessments of its performance. While this is the predominant image or model of schooling, we know from our prior study that this is only one possible model for schooling. In viewing the school from a political perspective, we note the struggles over values and ideas, the alliances among interested parties, the loyalties that draw people together, and the continuing discourse that never settles on final solutions to common problems. Instead of engaging in objective, factual, scientific discourse, people construct strategic representations of their experiences in order to influence others in the community and to motivate them to action. While there is competition, there is also cooperation.

In 1981, Jeffrey Pfeffer wrote about "understanding the role of power in decision making." He discussed the difference between "authority" which resides in a formal position and "power" which results from interaction among people. He noted that in discussions of formal organizations, such as schools, people tried to avoid mention of power and assumed that any conflict among people was the result of incompetency or rebellion, and not the result of inevitable value conflicts. Since everybody in the organization was supposed to be committed to one set of official goals, conflict was neither desirable nor possible. He went on to talk about the function of this image of the formal organization as hierarchical authority. An emphasis upon formal authority did depress differences of opinion and it encouraged people to think that only rational decisions were being made. This rationality was especially important in personnel matters. According to this view, people were being hired, fired, promoted, and re-assigned on the basis of objective performance review, rather than on the basis of their alliance with other powerful individuals. In short the myth of organizational rationality made personnel decisions appear to be valid and therefore made unpopular ones easier to take. Pfeffer then compared the assumptions built into the rational/ bureaucratic model and the political/ power model of organization. While the rational/ bureaucratic model assumed goals were consistent, that

power was centralized in offices, that decisions were made by orderly procedures, that precedence ruled behavior, that information was supplied extensively and that everyone worked for efficiency and effectiveness, the observed "truth" was different. According to Pfeffer, organization are highly political: goals are pluralistic, not unitary; power is not centralized in authoritative position, but results from shifting coalitions and interest groups within the organization; behavior is not ruled by precedent, but by the free play of conflicting and legitimate ideas; information is not extensively available, but is provided and withheld strategically; and that people do not dedicate themselves to efficiency and effectiveness commonly defined, but instead, struggle to win for their interests and values, as practically defined.

The political view assumes that power is not granted with a position, but rather is established through interaction. Conflict over values is inevitable and leads to the formation of alliances among like-minded individuals. People do not rationally study the facts of a situation and come to some reasoned position; instead, they tend to be consistent with their values and loyal to those who hold similar values. While there is competition as in the market, there is also cooperation. While there is self-interest, there is also concern for the common good. Politics is the process of seeking this common good. Using this frame helps one see the dynamics within the school community and to see beyond the formal structure of authority. Leadership for change is a matter of political action.

Policy Paradox - Deborah Stone

CONCEPTS OF SOCIETY

	Market Model	Polis Model
1. Unit of analysis	individual	community
2. Motivations	self-interest	public interest (as well as self-interest)
3. Chief conflict	self-interest vs. self-interest	self-interest vs. public interest (commons problems)
4. Source of people's ideas and preferences	self-generation within the individual	influences from outside
5. Nature of collective activity	competition	cooperation and competition
6. Criteria for individual decision-making	maximizing self-interest, minimizing cost	loyalty (to people, places, organizations, products), maximize self-interest, promote public interest
7. Building blocks of social action	individuals	groups and organizations
8. Nature of information	accurate, complete, fully available	ambiguous, interpretive, incomplete, strategically manipulated
9. How things work	✓ laws of matter (eg., material resources are finite and diminish with use)	✓ laws of passion (eg., human resources are renewable and expand with use)
10. Sources of change	material exchange	ideas, persuasion, alliances
	quest to maximize own welfare	pursuit of power, pursuit of own welfare, pursuit of public interest