Making Sense of Plausibility

Understanding the Process of Plausible Meaning Constructions:

A Case Study of the New Brunswick Post-Secondary Education Commission

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Abstract

When exploring the disaster at Mann Gulch, Weick wrote, "the phrase that holds the world together is, 'You know what I mean'" (1993, p. 632). During times of change, people strive to understand what is happening in a way that makes sense to them within their socially constructed environment. This thesis is a study in sensemaking that focuses on how plausible meanings are constructed, accepted and expressed. At its core, sensemaking is about understanding "how different meanings are assigned to the same event" (Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010, p. 183). This thesis builds upon the 'how' using a framework of sensemaking process, sensemaking properties, and linguistic structure, developed to unpack how people create meanings that have value, are instrumental and are actionable – herein operationalized as functionally plausible.

The location of study is a single case of proposed institutional reform of post-secondary education (PSE) in New Brunswick, Canada and the process of sensemaking is explored using the events of the case as a contextual location. Expressions of confusion and meaning creation captured in official reports, government documents and news media form the data of the case. The data is examined within a range of sensemaking ideas, bringing together the more recent work on sensemaking as a process (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) with earlier writings surrounding sensemaking as a set of properties (Weick, 1995). The data is analyzed through textual analysis (McKee, 2003) and the structure of language is studied as a medium through which meanings are created and expressed (Saussure, 1972).

This thesis makes a number of contributions to our current knowledge. It refines the property of plausibility, pushing forward the importance of meanings that are functional. It uncovers the relationship of language within sensemaking, revealing the potential for multiple plausible meanings to exist, meanings that are attached to the same language symbols. It combines the multiple ideas around sensemaking, attempting to differentiate between the process of sensemaking and the constituent elements of sensemaking. Finally, it unpacks contextual pressures at play when sensemaking occurs both intra-organizationally and inter-organizationally.

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Chapter One – Plausible Meaning Construction

> "The world of sensemaking is different (from decision making). Sensemaking is about contextual rationality. It is built out of vague questions, muddy answers, and negotiated agreements that attempt to reduce confusion." (Weick, 1993, p. 636)

1.1 Introduction

Hundreds of times throughout the course of a day, we craft meanings and then judge whether or not these meanings are good enough to act upon. Accuracy, if in fact achievable, is of lesser importance to us than whether or not our constructed understanding is meaningful to us and are good enough that we can act on it. If the meaning is plausible, we move forward; if the meaning is implausible, we continue the process of making sense. However, plausibility remains underdeveloped in both how it is constructed and in defining the composite elements, making it a rich area for further exploration (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). This thesis focuses directly on the property of plausibility and is grounded in the heuristic of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Specifically, I explore how plausible meanings are constructed, accepted and expressed.

This investigation raises a number of important questions, including: 'what is the process used to construct a plausible sense?', 'how does one particular meaning surface as plausible among multiple, competing meanings?' and 'how are plausible meanings communicated within a socially-negotiated environment?' These core questions will be uncovered in this thesis. The idea that meanings need not necessarily be accurate but simply good enough to take action on has a long history, from Simon's idea that

meanings need only to be ‘satisficing’ (1956) to Weick’s proposition that the meanings which people accept are not accurate but ‘plausible’ (1974, 1985, 1995). To focus on the concept that plausible meanings need to be both instrumental and actionable, I suggest the employment of a new term: functional plausibility.

Working to address the questions surrounding functional plausibility, meanings are examined through a three-point framework. First, the constructions of meanings are explored through a process of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005). Second, the constitutive elements that are engaged to construct a meaning that is functionally plausible are surfaced through a focus on sensemaking properties (Weick, 1995). These two points build on the ideas formulated by Weick and his exploration of sensemaking. Finally, language actions, speech and written expressions will be studied both as a constitutive elements of meaning creation and as the means in which those meanings are communicated (Saussure, 1972). Linguistic theory marries well with sensemaking as language is the primary device through which sensemaking occurs (J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Weick et al., 2005). These language expressions will be treated as texts (McKee, 2003) within the sensemaking framework. In addition to this framework and in order to better understand which meanings surface as functionally plausible within socially negotiated environments, particular attention is paid to both intra-group context and inter-group negotiations. Shifting contexts have value in this study because “sensemaking is not a rational process, nor is the same meaning always given to the same experience” (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006, p. 272).

Sensemaking becomes more overt and observable during moments of shock and disruption (Weick, 1995). As such, this work focuses specifically on the disruptions of meaning found in a single case study of proposed change in the post-secondary education system of New Brunswick, Canada. Within this event, I uncover the creation of multiple, contextualized meanings made by various impacted stakeholders, initiated by the efforts to transform some university campuses into polytechnic institutions. A most unique aspect of this change initiative is that it failed to materialize in the way that was initially presented. By studying the language used by different stakeholders and the meaning(s) found within their language expressions, we should be able to increase our ability to work within multivocal circumstances (Czarniawska, 1997), as well as increasing the inclusion of various plausible accounts. This opens up questions for discovery, including:

- What is the process used to reach a sense that is plausible?
- What constitutive elements are engaged to construct a plausible sense?
- How are plausible meanings communicated within a socially-negotiated environment?
- How does one meaning surface as plausible among multiple, competing meanings?

1.1.1 Chapter Direction

This chapter sets out to investigate the role of plausibility within sensemaking, to explain why the exploration of plausible meaning construction is important, and to introduce the research that will help to reveal how plausible accounts are created. The case study topic and location will be introduced, specifically a proposed shift in the post-secondary education system in the province of New Brunswick, Canada. From there, the framework of sensemaking will be briefly explained and gaps in what has been explored

in the literature up to this point will be highlighted, particularly in how we use language both as a means to express context and a vehicle for meaning construction. These gaps establish a unique space for a contribution that increases our understanding of how people both create and accept meanings that are good enough.

To better understand the construction of plausible meanings through language use, this chapter brings together the duel literatures of sensemaking and linguistic theory. I begin by positioning this work within the realm of social construction, that meanings of our experienced world are a combination of both interpretation and invention, negotiated and shared between people. Following this, sensemaking is presented in a unique format, both as a process of understanding as well as a set of interdependent properties. The former serves as a recipe or way of making sense, while the latter constitutes the ingredients through which sense is made. I have chosen to build upon a more recent structure of the sensemaking process, as presented by Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005). Within the framework of this process, I explore the ingredients at play in the case study data, both the properties of sensemaking and language choices. Particular focus is paid to the property of plausibility as it has been argued that the property of plausibility remains underdeveloped (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004).

Later in this chapter, I explore classic linguistic theory, specifically Saussure's idea that language signs are a combination of both symbols and meanings. From this, I connect language and sensemaking by bridging the suggestion that different plausible constructions can simultaneously exist (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004) within the

potentiality of meanings that can be enacted in language use (Weick et al., 2005). Language has been put forward as a fundamental tool in the development of understanding (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994), a medium through which meaning is enacted by the sensemaker. As such, examining the process of plausible meaning construction through the frameworks of sensemaking and language, specifically in acts of expressions, will help to reveal how people arrive at plausibility that is functional for them.

1.1.2 The Challenge of Exploring Human Understanding

The act of sensemaking is hardly a clean process. Rather, it is a process "built out of vague questions (and) muddy answers" (Weick, 1993, p. 636) functioning indefinitely as understandings are continually crafted, altered and adapted. Weick reminds us that, "the sensible need not be sensable, and therein lies the trouble" (Weick, 1995, p. 55). As the process of making sense is a messy one, it is hardly surprising that researching the acts of sensemaking can also be an ongoing act in perpetual flux, requiring a detective's eye to identity, examine and interpret any visible clues exposed throughout the process of meaning construction. My intention is that this study will increase our insight into how meanings are crafted and sense is accepted as functionally plausible by people within their everyday lives.

1.2 Case Study

1.2.1 New Brunswick Post Secondary Education System

In the early part of 2007, the Government of New Brunswick commissioned a report called *Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches to Fulfill its Destiny* (referred to hereafter as the Miner Report) on the status of post-secondary education (PSE) in the province (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a). This report examined the current structure and effectiveness of New Brunswick's college and university facilities, with the purpose of reforming the provincial PSE system. Public consultation took place during the first six months of 2007 to gather input from various stakeholders, including leaders within communities throughout New Brunswick, industry representatives and PSE institutional administration. In September 2007, the provincial government released the Miner Report with the stated goal of proceeding with all recommendations made by the authors.

One of the core propositions within the Miner Report was to transform some of the current provincial college and university satellite campuses into polytechnic institutions. The polytechnic was a new post-secondary institutional structure to the province, one that proposed blending two traditionally distinct models: the practical skills-based 'training' obtained at college and the theoretical 'academic' rigour found at universities. University satellite campuses located in Saint John, Edmundston and Shippagan would be required to sever ties with their former schools, the University of New Brunswick and the Université de Moncton respectively, all becoming polytechnic

institutions. This particular recommendation made within the Miner Report disrupted the way that many stakeholders understood their environment, causing them to ask questions, such as ‘who are we?’ and ‘how do we do this?’ (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 188). This suggestion destabilized various stakeholders, both in how they understood their roles and in how they expressed their understandings of PSE institutions. These established universities were to take on a novel institutional structure, and through this, people would need to construct novel plausible meanings.

The reaction to the release of the report was dramatic, including mass protests and public demonstrations from stakeholders within both the educational community and regional municipalities. Following the resistance to the initial recommendations within the Miner Report, a revised report was crafted and released in June 2008, called *Be Inspired. Be Ready. Be Better: The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick* (The Working Group on PSE-NB, 2008), hereafter referred to as The Action Plan. Although this second report maintained most of the ideas found in the Miner Report, including focus on applied education and opportunities for institutional co-location, the language that was enacted starting with the formation of The Working Group no longer included the words ‘polytechnic institution’.

1.2.2 A Case of Shock and Disruption

I contend that the Miner Report served as the shock to pre-existing understandings around the concept of what a ‘university’ meant, propelling stakeholders into the act of

overt sensemaking. The disruption that followed the Miner Report, rooted specifically in the language eancted in the reports, led to overt resistance as many stakeholders sought to make sense of these changes. The reactions from stakeholders were captured in newspapers throughout the province through news stories, opinion editorials, and letters to the editor. Although three campuses were included in the transformation initiative, I focused on the Saint John campus of the University of New Brunswick (UNBSJ) as Saint John is the second most populated region in the province and the reactions were quite vocal from stakeholders. I looked specifically at how the proposed changes impacted people connected with UNBSJ and their subsequent sensemaking activities. Public government documentation, including the two reports and the consultation white papers, as well as newspaper stories and editorials spanning 18 months constitute the total data in this study.

The accounts surfaced from within the news media were explored in an iterative manner as distinct stories and acts of sensemaking emerged through the voices of those making sense. The expressions found in these texts reveal confusion, disagreement, and disruption, grounded in the contextual environment(s) in which the sensemakers were situated. Plausible understandings about what a 'university' meant became destabilized from this disruption. The characteristics that exist in plausible stories, including an ongoing understanding of the current climate, a consistency in meaning with other data, and the reduction of equivocality (Helms Mills, 2003, p. 169), were replaced with multiple versions or stories of events, some supportive, some resistant, but all with varying plots, characters, and themes.

What appear within these expressions are visions of post-secondary institutions that extend beyond the brick and mortar of the schools in which various competing meanings, many developed within a larger community of stakeholders, exist. As Weick expressed, "sensemaking starts with chaos" (2005, p. 411). People, particularly those with a vested stake in the institutions, were forced to address these disruptions and the chaos in meaning. Their expressions of sensemaking that were captured in the media served as texts, highlighting the expressions that were used to create plausible accounts in context during the sensemaking process. These expressions serve as accounts of retrospective sensemaking, highlighting the emergence of implausible meanings, and ongoing attempts to enact newer plausible meanings.

1.3 The Quest to Make Sense

Arguably one of the greatest challenges people face is interpreting events within their world and arriving at a meaning that is functional to them. People are continually faced with the pressure to make sense of events that have transpired, a sense that fits both who they see themselves to be (identity construction) and one that fits within a particular context (socially constructed contexts). Pugh and Hickson describe the sensemaking process as occurring when people "create and re-create conceptions of themselves and of all around them that seem sensible and stable enough to be manageable" (1996, p. 124), while Weick presents it more as a heuristic method that helps to surface explanations out of confusion based on discrepant events (1995). It is an ongoing process that is triggered

most intensely when important routines are interrupted, when there is a breakdown of coordinated activities, and when there are misunderstandings in speech-exchange systems (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 572).

Sensemaking helps people understand, move forward and take action; thus, "any assessment of the potential for sensemaking must pay close attention to action" (Weick, 1985, p. 53) or that plausible meanings are strong enough to act upon - functional. In the field of existential philosophy, Kierkegaard is attributed with outlining the importance of directionality when actively making sense. One of his original Danish writings roughly translates into 'life is lived forward but understood backwards' (Hong & Hong, 1978). According to Kierkegaard, how and what people understand is limited by the directionality of time; people generate meaning retrospectively based on what has happened to them and that sense needs only to be reasonable enough for people to continue moving forward (Pugh & Hickson, 1996). This thesis explores how meanings are constructed and become accepted as functionally plausible.

1.3.1 Sensemaking

The development of sensemaking as a field of study has been examined for the last few decades (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Helms Mills, 2003; Boudes & Laroche, 2009), most notably through the contributions of Karl Weick. Weick's model of sensemaking developed from a recipe, or set of "schemes of interpretation" (1979, p. 46), into a larger framework with "explanatory purposes" (1995, p. xi). His developed system

drew together a collection of seven distinct properties: 1) the ongoing and 2) retrospective nature of sensemaking based upon 3) the enactment of 4) extracted cues within 5) a socially mediated environment, grounded in 6) identity and focused on 7) plausible meanings (1995).

He posited through multiple case studies (Weick, 1993, 2001a, 2003, 2010) that sensemaking could be used as a method to uncover how people bring meaning to unknown events and how they "structure the unknown" (1995, p. 4). As a process of understanding, "sensemaking emphasizes that people try to make things rationally accountable to themselves and others" (Weick, 1993, p. 635), or reasonable enough to align with both their personal identity construction and their social environment. Sensemaking is an approach that allows for rich analysis of events and rests on the tenet that particular meanings surface as plausible, while also accepting that "multiple meanings abound" (Weick, 1995, p. 38). However, there has been minimal exploration of how or why a meaning becomes plausible to someone. There is also little exploration into what makes one particular meaning more valuable and actionable than others.

Over time, Weick's theory of sensemaking has developed into a style of analysis (Helms Mills, 2003). Helms Mills described sensemaking as a heuristic method, in that "sensemaking goes beyond just a way to give meaning to situations; it helps to clarify the issues that allow for the holistic exploration of change" (2003, p. 50). Sensemaking is especially effective when applied to disruptions or "shocks" (Weick, 1995, p. 84) in

which outcomes differ significantly from expectations, helping to reveal the process people used to construct meaning.

1.3.2 The Language of Sense

A focused discussion around language use and expressions could help to reveal how plausible accounts are constructed at the individual level, influenced both by who they are (identity) and where they are situated (social context). According to Mills and Helms Mills (2004), sensemaking activities undertaken by individuals are strongly linked to social interactions that occur through both discourse and language use. However, language and discourse are not synonymous. Discourse embodies a larger situational concept that influences meaning representation (Foucault, 1980; Hall, 2007). Discursive influences on sensemaking have been explored in situations of change (Thurlow, 2007); however, gaps remain in our understanding of the influences of language within the sensemaking process. These gaps include understanding the embedded meanings contained within enacted language and how individuals use language to craft plausible explanations during change.

Semiotics, or the study of the creation of meanings in and through language, provides a way to dig into these embedded meanings within enacted language. In this field, two key individuals surfaced the early value of structures in the production and interpretation of signs: Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure (Sebeok & Pabel, 2001). Saussure's concept of language, what he called semiology (Sebeok &

Pabel, 2001), brought together 'sound-images' or words with meanings (1972). In this study, I have chosen to focus on Saussure's study of language signs for numerous reasons. First, he treats linguistic signs as arbitrary, in that no word is meaningful or represents something else prior to the attachment of a concept to it. Second, the act of making a linguistic expression signifies an idea being represented by the speaker, or a denotation of meaning that can be studied. Third, that language is a social construct relying on communal agreement in order to work. Finally, Saussure's construction of language is a simpler dyadic structure compared to Peirce's triadic structure; following the idea that meanings are constructed quickly in order to take action, following a simpler language system seemed reasonable.

1.3.3 Language in Action

In an effort to understand how multiple divergent versions of sense can develop out of the same triggering event, all considered plausible and functional by the authors who are constructing them, I focus on language enactment. In this study, I refer to the enactment of language as expressions made by individuals during the course of the shock-resolution cycle of sensemaking. The context of this work focuses on the reactions to a proposed institutional post-secondary education change initiative undertaken by the provincial government in New Brunswick, Canada in 2007. I take up Weick's argument for richness, "for detail, for thoroughness, for prototypical narratives, and an argument against formulations that strip out most of what matters" (Weick, 2007, p. 18). Sensemaking is posited to be a perpetually ongoing and retrospective (Weick, 1995)

process. As such, this work explores the processes by which people attempt to make sense of change and their attempts to influence meaning by using one of the most primary devices of sensemaking – language (Gioia et al., 1994; J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Utilizing Weick's concepts of sensemaking to explore enacted language, contributions are made to the extant research by demonstrating how different meanings can simultaneous be embedded within language and yet influenced by the speaker and their context.

1.4 Gaps in Literature

Although the body of literature around sensemaking and meaning construction continues to expand, there remain unexplored avenues of research around plausibility. First, there is a call to explore the process of plausible meaning construction, currently considered to be one of the more significant properties in the sensemaking process (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004; Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006; Helms Mills et al., 2010). In defining plausibility, Weick said that a plausible meaning "essentially refers to a sense that one particular meaning or explanation is more meaningful than others" (2001b, p. 462). This description fails to expand upon what might make one explanation more meaningful than others, even though some have argued that "plausibility is the crux of sensemaking formation" (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004, p. 148).

Second, there exists a strong focus on the role of context in meaning construction (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick et al., 2005; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009),

frequently explored in terms of contextualized discourses in critical sensemaking. This dissertation does not pick up on the critical sensemaking perspective, a perspective that includes a focus on power, organizational rules, formative contexts, and discourse. Although issues of discourse and power will be visible as the case unfolds, I have chosen a direction that remains centred on the process of plausible meaning creation within the parameters of sensemaking, including identity construction and social environments. Understanding the socially negotiated context where sense is made is valuable in two ways: 1) it provides a location in which salient information can be uncovered and 2) it can help to establish the criteria through which meanings are both constrained and normalized (Weick, 1995).

1.5 Contributions

Four contributions will be made in this thesis. First, it expands our understanding of what constitutes a plausible meaning, a central but under-explored tenet of sensemaking. Plausibility was first laid out by Weick (1989) and has since been utilized as a core ingredient of sensemaking in various studies (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b; Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006; Mullen, Vladi, & Mills, 2006). The characteristics of what makes a meaning plausible have been suggested in numerous works (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Weick, 1995; Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b), yet the meanings so far have not strongly enough emphasized instrumentality or action. I intend to draw this out by advancing the term *functional plausibility*.

Second, this study builds upon the strong relationship between language and sensemaking, adding to the research around language choices made *in situ*. It challenges the problem of singular, often deterministic meanings by revealing multiple meanings enacted within the same words by various sensemakers located within different socially-constructed realities. The captured texts within the context of the case study provide an opportunity to explore expressions made in action and to unpack how people inhabit language as a way to make sense of novel situations. This builds on the concepts of *langue* and *parole* found in linguistic theory (Saussure, 1972), revealing the potential for multiple plausible meanings to simultaneously exist within the same language symbol and how meaning(s) within linguistic symbols can be influenced by those using language.

Third, the analysis in this case study pushes blends various ideas published by Weick between a difference in the process of sensemaking and the constitutional elements of sensemaking. It will align together two separate areas of sensemaking theory that have to this point not yet been brought together: process (Weick et al., 2005) and properties (Weick, 1995). I suggest a new approach, uncovering how plausible meanings are created by treating sensemaking as a process that draws upon properties as constitutive elements and language as a mode of expressing meaning. To do this, I will follow the language used by sensemakers during a change event, the clues of meaning construction, to see what they are saying and interrogating how these expressions come to create valuable meanings.

Finally, it expands upon the contextual pressures that exist in a socially-mediated world where sensemaking happens both within groups (intra-organizationally) and between groups (inter-organizationally). Flowing from the disruption initiated by the Miner Report, different stakeholder groups enacted particular meanings within their networks that were deemed plausible in their smaller, stakeholder-rooted context; when these differing meanings collided between groups, we could witness which meanings surfaced as plausible and implausible in a larger contextual environment.

1.6 Mapping the Process

This document is laid out to first explore the process of sensemaking and then the constitutive elements of properties and language. Chapter Two focuses on the current literature around sensemaking and language, with particular attention paid to the works of Weick and Saussure. Following that, the single case study on post-secondary educational change in New Brunswick will be presented in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, the methodology of analysis is explained, including the use of the case study as a location of data from which expressions made by impacted parties are featured.

Three Point Framework		
Sensemaking as Process	Constitutive Elements of Sensemaking	Communication via Language
• Organizing flux • Noticing and bracketing • Labeling • Retrospection • Making presumptions • Social factors • Being action oriented • Organizing through communication	• Identity construction • Retrospective • Enactive of sensible environments • Social • Ongoing • Focus on extracted cues	• Langue • Parole

The process of sensemaking is used as a framework, allowing these accounts to be examined via textual analysis. The application of the sensemaking process is completed in Chapter Five as the data is examined at various stages moving towards plausibility. It is here that expressions are pulled apart to reveal meaning creation in action. To bring together language and the applied sensemaking properties, I look more closely at the impact each property has on plausible meaning development in Chapter Six. Additionally, this chapter explores the pressures between and within groups of stakeholders as they made sense. This chapter concludes by addressing the failure of the change initiative put forward in the Miner Report. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this study by identifying key theoretical and methodological implications around the development of plausible accounts, acknowledging limitations that exist from choices made in this study and noting areas for future investigation.

1.7 Acknowledging my own Sensemaking

As a researcher, it is important to note my place within the context of this particular case study. At the time of the release of both the Miner Report and the Action Plan, I worked at the New Brunswick Community College, St. Andrews campus. As a close observer of events, I was witness to the uncertainty that arose from these organizational shifts in both labels and meanings; my colleagues at various levels began expressing their confusion, and constructing differing stories in an attempt to craft possible explanations as to what was happening around them. Many of my earliest conversations about the event were personal and casual and, thus, were not captured.

However, these early conversations became the catalyst for further exploration, my journey to make sense of their sensemaking process.

1.8 Closing Summary

According to Helms Mills & Mills, "plausibility is a *feeling* that something makes sense, feels right, is somehow sensible, (and) fits with what you know" (2000b, p. 5), and calls have been made for more focus on the property of plausibility (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004), especially as the properties of identity and plausibility have been drawn out as critical for both decision making and action (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking draws on "the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk… symbolically encoded representations of… circumstances" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). By focusing on a detailed examination of expressions made during organization change, our understanding of individual language choices made *in situ* is enriched. The disruptions examined here serve to magnify the way language is used in sensemaking activities. The nature of this research is inductive, uncovering how a process such as sensemaking takes place by examining language use and unpacking the embedded meanings found within real accounts during a change event.

In summary, this dissertation focuses on how plausible accounts are constructed, accepted and expressed, fusing the choices made within linguistic expressions and Weickian sensemaking. It adds to existing research in sensemaking by focusing on the various meanings embedded within expressions and the contextualized choices

individuals make to take ownership of their language-in-use. It brings together sensemaking and language, with a particular focus on the property of plausibility and contextualized meanings that exist through shared meanings within language. The choices made in meanings within language used by individuals can both define and confine events. During times of disruption and confusion, when prior plausible understandings no longer make sense, individuals involved in the disruption may well choose to extract and (re)define cues that are specifically salient to their particular perspective, thereby enacting a unique plausible meaning that makes the new situation seem ‘right’.

Chapter Two - Sensemaking, Language and Plausibility

> "In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioners as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations, which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain." (Weick, 1995, p. 9)

2.1 Introduction

To better understand the construction of plausible meanings through language, this chapter brings together two separate literatures: sensemaking and linguistic theory. I begin this chapter by positioning this thesis within the realm of social construction – that meanings of our experienced world are a combination of interpretation and invention (Weick, 1995), negotiated and shared between people and between groups (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006). Following this, sensemaking is explored both as a process of understanding as well as a set of interdependent properties, the former serving as a recipe or way of making sense while the latter make up the ingredients through which sense is made.

As part of my framework, I have chosen to draw upon a more recent structure of sensemaking as process (Weick et al., 2005), pushing it to the forefront as a framework of sense, while integrating his earlier work on properties (Weick, 1995) as composite elements used to make sense. This blends the work of Weick over the period of a decade in a way not seen in the literature of sensemaking or his writings, leading to a clearer delineation between the framework of sensemaking and its constitutive elements. Particular focus in this thesis is paid to the property of plausibility, as it has been argued

that the property of plausibility remains underdeveloped (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). To uncover plausible meanings constructions, I focus on language. Language has been put forward as a fundamental mode of communication and understanding (Gioia et al., 1994), and a medium through which meanings can be enacted by sensemakers. Later in this chapter, I present classic linguistic theory, focusing specifically upon Saussure's ideas around language signs as a combination of both symbols and meanings. I then connect language with sensemaking, all the while building on the suggestion that different plausible constructions can simultaneously exist (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004) within the potentiality of meanings that can be found and enacted in language use (Weick et al., 2005). This sets up the theory employed to examine how plausible meanings are constructed, accepted and communicated in this case study.

2.2 Social Construction of Meaning

2.2.1 Interpretations

The modern study of human interpretation, how we as humans interpret, incorporate, and extend meanings into our own understanding of what is happening to us and around us, traces back at least to the philosophical works of Immanuel Kant (Prasad, 2005) and Soren Kierkegaard (Gioia, 2006). These early writings formed the groundwork for exploration into how people interpret and invent meaning. Meanings that we accept as valid or plausible are a formulation of experiences and expressions, interpretations and inventions that are communicated with others and negotiated into shared meaning. As Gioia & Chittipeddi suggest, how we make sense "turns on the assumption that human

understanding and action are based on the *interpretation* of information and event" (1991, p. 434). As humans, we filter, interpret, and create our reality (or realities) within our own consciousness mediated by interactions within social systems that contain negotiated and accepted mental models (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Prasad, 2005); these systems exist at an interpersonal level. This idea does not necessarily deny that there are events and experiences that can be observed or measured as external 'facts'. But it does differentiate between what *might exist* or occur and how we, as reflective interpreters of those events, *might understand* those occurrences. Although 'facts' may exist external to us, how we come to understand and even craft meanings of them is a social construction, and meaning is the privilege of the actors bound inside the context of the event.

The quest to better understand plausible meaning and its construction is a journey to explore, perhaps even explain, the stability of social behaviour from the individual's viewpoint (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The assumptions of social construction serve as the underpinnings of sensemaking, both as a methodology and as an ontological focus. It is a practical area of study, grounded in how people interpret and create meanings in the lived world (Weick, 1995). A number of scholars in this field, including Kant, Weber and Husserl, were less interested in physical shifts in the external world and more intrigued in by the shifts in constructed meaning(s) happening within the subjectively-created world of the people making sense. They were fascinated by the ongoing nature of meaning, its processes, constructions, and mutability.

2.2.2 Habitual Understanding

Reaffirming routine meanings out of habit is a process that happens with such speed and efficiency that it is incredibly difficult to see. Habits act fast to stabilize continual disturbances, fluctuations and anomalies (Unger, 1987; Grant & Mills, 2006) as people find their places within not just 'the' world but within 'their' world. This is accomplished as people replicate meanings that already make sense to them. Particular cues are enacted with an underlying meaning already accepted by the sensemaker. The enactment of familiar meanings and structures helps to define space and creates boundaries in order to develop a sensible environment within which these interruptions become plausible. Relying on ongoing assumed meanings, or typifications (Schutz, 1932), allows for streamlined understanding to continue.

Habitual sensemaking simplifies the comprehension of novel situations but it is also problematic. The use of accepted definitions and unchallenged meanings creates boundaries around how individuals may create a shared sense of events. Depending on the impact of the fluctuations, an individual's understanding can be altered along a continuum; Weick outlined the power of impact and the range in magnitude of impact that might exist. On one end exists mild fluctuations that create minor impacts in interpretation; these minor shifts in understanding are a nuisance but are often quickly resolved by reaffirming habitual meanings within an embedded social context. On the other, more severe end of the spectrum are disruptions that occur with such shock that there is a failure in sensemaking that "throws into question the nature of self and the world" (Weick, 1995, p. 14), creating existential angst that requires resolution.

2.2.3 Surfaced through Language

Social construction also supposes that meaning creation is grounded in the perspective of the person making sense. Understanding a particular meaning creation from another person's perspective is called *verstehen*, yet this term is problematic and has been invested with various meanings in the literature. Some, including Dilthey, believe that understanding through verstehen can be done by "entering into the subjective experiences of other" (as cited in Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 238). Others, such as Gadamer and Giddens, feel verstehen helps delineate the frames of references through which sensemaking occurs (Giddens, 1976); these frames of references were also called 'mental models' some 30 years later (Weick et al., 2005). In this, language plays a pivotal role "as the medium of intersubjectivity" (Giddens, 1976, p. 56), mediating between various "frames of reference or traditions" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 238).

Gadamer went so far as to say that "being is manifest in language" (as cited in Giddens, 1976, p. 57). The idea of 'manifest' here moves strongly away from Dilthey's concept of 'entering'. Entering the experiences of others *with* language suggests that a meaning already exists and the challenge in being understood lies in selecting the correct language to properly express those experiences. However, the manifestation of being *in* language suggests that language is the vehicle through which meaning is both created and expressed; creation confers a certain level of intention and freedom with the language used in meaning enactment that provides space for agency.

People are not rigidly bound to pre-existing rules of order, following them in a deterministic fashion without free will. Instead, they participate and create an understanding of the world around them, possessing some ability to make choices based on both available inputs and within the context of their particular circumstances. This active involvement with meaning and language as a part of the process of sensemaking will be explored later and is one of the cornerstones of this investigation into how plausible meanings are created.

2.2.4 Creation of Sense

People construct the 'reality' of a particular situation through the interpretation, even the invention of meanings (Weick, 1995) that come from experienced phenomena in the lived world. As postulated by Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, "In the context of everyday life, when people confront something unintelligible and ask "what's the story here?" their question has the force of bringing an event into existence." (2005, p. 410). Experiences are interpreted and used to construct meaning for the phenomena, a constructed meaning that is acceptable both to the individual and within their societal context.

As individuals are co-creators in their social realities, the task of making sense occurs even in the most routine events, although these routine activities occur with such speed that researching them proves challenging. As Weick expressed, "sensemaking

tends to be swift, which means we are more likely to see products than process" (1995, p. 49). This is precisely why investigating the process of sensemaking is challenging; researchers must extrapolate the products and the evidence they find, then interrogate it through a process perspective that they believe reasonably resembles how the sensemaker approached their task. They are detectives attempting to solve a mystery, to explain the story of what happened based on the clues left behind.

2.3 Understanding Sensemaking

During 2007, I closely observed the activities that transpired around the efforts to transform post-secondary education in New Brunswick. As an educator in the province at the time, I was intrigued, and continue to be intrigued, with how people came to understand, accept and express a variety of divergent meanings around the same events, even to the point of using the same words. As a researcher, I was drawn to the approach of sensemaking, a process through which disrupted understandings are identified, information is selected, filtered, and interpreted through one's personal experiences and social environments, and meanings are constructed that are deemed good enough so that people can move forward.

Most interesting to me are the questions around a) what made a particular meaning good enough for a sensemaker and b) how this meaning was crafted and communicated. The acceptance that meanings need only to be good enough to act on, be plausible and not accurate, has a long history. Simon (1956) brought forward the idea of

bounded rationality, a situation where people make decisions with limited information and take action on meanings that might be less than optimal but are 'satisficing' in the moment. He contends that our understanding and meanings are malleable and can be adapted based on the individual making sense and the environment that they are in (1990). Weick continued on this idea within the sensemaking property of plausibility, describing how people accept meanings that are not accurate but simply 'plausible' (1974, 1985, 1995). By this, Weick includes the ideas of pragmatism and instrumentality to the property of plausibility (1995). I push forward the Weickian idea of plausibility with the term 'functional plausibility', a term that acknowledges accepted meanings as both satisficing and actionable.

There are a number of key aspects to the sensemaking approach that are central to this analysis. First, sensemaking is an approach that helps us understand how people understand, a "developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities" (Weick, 1995, p. xi). It is less a body of rigid theory and more a technique that helps us recognize and describe the way people come to understand. This is supported in various studies in which the sensemaking approach is referred to as a heuristic device (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b; Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010), or a rule of thumb tool that helps structure and clarify the process of making sense. It has been descriptively explained as "a way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action" (J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 275). As such, it is a suitable approach to investigate meanings that emerge within a case study where proposed change and shock play a central role.

Second, sensemaking is an ongoing process in which reality is continually created and recreated. It is a procedural method that builds upon social psychological properties (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009) to assist people in understanding experiences and behaviours (Helms Mills et al., 2010).This process has been expressed in various ways: a 'thinking' process that uses information gathered in a retrospective manner to explain meaning discrepancies (Louis, 1980); a process in which people build 'cognitive maps' of their reality (Ring & Rands, 1989); a process of activity, invention, and creation (Weick, 1995). It is an iterative way of constructing meaning and reality, albeit not necessarily linear or sequential (Thurlow, 2010), that serves as a recipe in which a set of ingredients interact to create sense, although the process of a recipe and the ingredients, components that influence each other in the mix, should not be treated as synonymous.

Third, sensemaking is constituted around a set of properties (Weick, 1995) "which have become the cornerstones of sensemaking and provide the analytic tools needed to understand the sensemaking process" (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b, p. 2). Weick presents seven distinctive and highly interrelated properties in his seminal work on sensemaking. According to Weick (1995), "sensemaking is understood as a process that is: 1) grounded in identity construction, 2) retrospective, 3) enactive of sensible environments, 4) social, 5) ongoing, 6) focused on and by extracted cues, and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (1995, p. 17). Through the use of the words 'a process *that is'*, Weick indicates that the process of sensemaking has constitutive ingredients, or properties, but infers that the properties, in and of themselves, do not

constitute the entire process but are simply elements within a larger structure. Additionally, the literature around sensemaking supports that certain properties, those of plausibility and identity, are arguably "more central than other properties to the sensemaking process" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004; Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006; Helms Mills et al., 2010).

The contention here is that some of the other properties, including the ongoing nature of sensemaking that is conducted retrospectively using extracted cues, serve to support other more prominent properties. These central properties focus on some simple questions: does my understanding of what has happened seem reasonable (plausible) and is there a personal connection at some level (identity)? For example, our self-perceptions of our own identity, or who we think we are, influence the cues that become salient, how we choose to enact them and the direction of interpretation. These choices serve as the information used when deciding who we are and how we interact with others, which in turn serves as additional information to include as we continue to self-define (Weick et al., 2005). I contend that the exploration of plausible meaning construction could position plausibility as a central property of sensemaking, that the creation and assessment of meanings as plausible is the fundamental element that either continues habitual understandings or initiates a more detailed sensemaking effort. Furthermore, I contend that it will surface an outcome property that binds together other interrelated properties of sensemaking – the personal (identity) and that person's socially negotiated contextual environment (social).

Recently, it has been suggested that the sensemaking perspective is constituted of triggers, processes, outcomes, and influencing factors (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014). In this conceptualization, processes include the creation, interpretation and enactment of sense, outcomes include whether or not sense was achieved and action could resume, and influencing factors include context, language, and identity. I support these constitutive elements of the sensemaking perspective. However, I expand Sandberg and Tsoukas in a few key ways. In this study, processes are expanded through the focus on Weick et al (2005), influencing factors incorporate sensemaking properties (Weick, 1995) along with a more nuanced exploration of language (Saussure, 1972), and outcomes are operationalized as accounts that are functionally plausible.

2.3.1 Shocks

Shocks can cause confusion and ambiguity. From them, people are forced to actively make sense of events and re-examine meanings. The importance of focusing on shocks as a moment to observe active sensemaking was grounded in dissonance theory, in that disruptions emerge "when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). The input for a sensemaking event is in the interruption from the expected; the output is an assigned meaning to the interruption that is good enough to act upon.

Shocks engage the properties of sensemaking in order to remove dissonance, especially when the accepted meanings and routines that exist no longer suffice to maintain a plausible understand of the situation. To study sensemaking then is to study some of the processes and contexts within which people respond to and cope with these shocks to meaning. According to Weick, "as long as the routines of everyday life continue without (significant) interruption, they are apprehended as unproblematic" (1995, p. 38). Normal events allow for the replication of existing meaning; shocks and disruptions to existing meaning initiate a more comprehensive and overt form of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

2.3.2 The Lived World

It has been asserted that the job of the sensemaker is to convert the world they experience into something intelligible (Weick, 2001b) by interpreting cues and investing them with meaning to make some sort of 'sense'. Yet the concept of 'sense' is itself problematic, a term that has been deemed "mischievous" (Weick, 1995, p. 55) as it can invoke multiple ontological perspectives simultaneously, those of realism and idealism. A realistic ontological perspective would purport that there is external truth to interpretations that can be sensed and measured accurately, should an investigator only look hard enough and remove distracting interpretations. Conversely, an idealist ontology would claim that there are only agreed or negotiated versions of truths to any experience, or our sense of it, and these versions need to be reasonable, relative and fit within context in order to have a plausible nature (Weick, 1995).

Researchers who focus on socially constructed meanings made by people during actual events, or in their 'lived world', accept certain levels of ontological oscillation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking flows from this acceptance of understanding within the ongoing and lived world. In sensemaking, the process(es) of how people gain understanding and create meaning within their lived world have greater value and greater interest than any requirement for ontological purity (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is a practical study of human processes and those who study sensemaking frequently "oscillate ontologically because that is what helps them understand the actions of people in everyday life who could care less about ontology" (Weick, 1995, p. 35).

Sensemaking takes more of a relativistic approach to the idea of 'truth' (Fiske, 1992; Weick, 1995), focusing on processes and the search for meanings instead of concentrating on any particular outcome than might be validated as 'true'. Within sensemaking, a singular ontological perspective is rare. Although there is an argument to be made that research projects should have common ontological underpinnings and that "only mindful eclecticism should be tolerated" (Jacobs, 2013, p. 112), Weick has stated clearly that those studying sensemaking only oscillate ontologically because it increases their understanding of what people are actually doing everyday (1995). If an acceptable, plausible account is most important, then the ontological distinction between where or even if something 'really' exists out there in an accurate form becomes secondary, only important to those who contextualize sensemaking theory without studying it in action.

2.4 Sensemaking as Process

The seven properties to sensemaking outlined by Weick in 1995 have been used in research studies as an explanatory framework, or as the process of sensemaking itself (Soffe, 2002). I disagree with this approach, seeing it as a conflation of framework and components, of process and properties; I support viewing sensemaking as a perspective with various elements (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014). The goal of this thesis is to explore how meanings are constructed, accepted, and expressed as functionally plausible; to use the 'property' of plausibility as a method of unpacking the 'process' of plausibility seems, on its face, to be circular logic.

However, there are additional perspectives that help to identify central features of the sensemaking process. I adopt the structure presented by Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005), a process-based structure that is action-oriented, more visibly focused on behaviour, including the behaviour of communication, and one that pays close attention to both the micro levels of action and macro influences of context (Weick et al., 2005). The central aspects of this framework are expanded on below and include the following eight areas:

1. organizing flux
2. noticing and bracketing
3. labeling
4. retrospection
5. making presumptions
6. social factors
7. being action oriented
8. organizing through communication

2.4.1 Organizing Flux

Although habitual sensemaking occurs constantly, it is difficult to observe. Explicit and overt sensemaking actions commence with a shock to an ongoing understanding, pushing our understanding into chaos that requires attention. This chaos does not occur within discrete moments of time, but happens in an ongoing environment that is influenced by prior events and future outcomes. This flow of activity, information, and people establishes an environment, or context, within which sensemaking operates. It also begins to sway which cues and other pieces of information might be extracted for consideration.

2.4.2 Noticing and Bracketing

The shock that prompts active sensemaking interrupts the ongoing, habitual understandings that people have about events. Once the interruption happens, the person making sense begins to notice particular pieces of information and quickly brackets this information within socially constructed structures. In their research on sensemaking in the medical field, Weick et al referred to this bracketing technique as the employment of mental models when they wrote, "The nurse's noticing and bracketing is guided by mental models she has acquired during her work, training, and life experience… mental models may help her recognize and guide a response" (2005, p. 411). This process highlights the interplay between cues, or selected pieces of information, and the mental modes, sometimes referred to as 'frames of reference' (Giddens, 1976), of the sensemaker formed from a combination of experience, identity and context. As Maitlis

and Sonenshein wrote, "sensemaking is… about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on" (2010, p. 552).

The combination of salient cues and mental models begin to produce an output of sense that is functional, or 'good enough'. Magala (1997) contends that this could include the invention of new meanings and new labels, in that sensemaking is about "inventing a new meaning for something that has already occurred during the organizing process, *but does not yet have a name* (italics in the original)" (1997, p. 324). This seems to assume that language is static and fixed, that one word (symbol) is attached to one meaning and that new meanings are invented for new symbols. I challenge this perspective of language later in this chapter, pursuing the idea that new meanings can be invented and infused into existing linguistic symbols (words), and that these new meanings are plausible for the inventor of the meaning.

2.4.3 Labeling

Part of sensemaking is increasing both the speed and ease in which it occurs, streamlining it through established categories and labels. The need for speed in understanding the world around us necessitates the creation of routines that regulate complex and challenging events so that they are in "a form that is more amenable to functional deployment" (Chia, 2000, p. 517). Through the use of the label 'functional', Chia seems to be describing the act of simplification, where the complexity of available information and meanings are reduced into more manageable, consumable forms that are

good enough to allow action. Labels and categories are socially negotiated and defined; as such, their meanings can be considered malleable to the circumstances that they are enacted in, what Weick called “plasticity” (2005, p. 411) of meaning.

2.4.4 Retrospection

Mirroring the seven fundamental properties of sensemaking, retrospection describes the process of looking backwards in an attempt to understand what has happened. Patterns emerge through retrospective review as the sensemaker notices certain cues, ignores other cues, brackets the information, makes observations and applies them through existing mental models and then label(s) events in a post-script manner in an effort to express sense (Weick et al., 2005).

2.4.5 Making Presumptions

The idea behind the sensemaking process is to outline the way that people arrive at meanings that allow for people to move forward and take action (Weick, 1995). As Weick et al. state, it “starts with immediate actions, local context, and concrete cues” (2005, p. 412). The shock that disrupts our sense creates an abstract situation, which the person making sense attempts to figure out for themselves. The plausible nature of the sensemaking process rests on the tenet that people accept meaning(s) that are good enough, not necessarily accurate or ‘true’, in order to more forward and take action. Action can occur when we presume something to be the case, even if the presumptions are less than accurate. Presumptions are frequently wrong but are part of an ongoing flow

of activities and, as such, get continuously recrafted as more cues and information becomes available.

2.4.6 Social Factors

The locus of knowledge and sense can be found in the social systems in which sensemakers are embedded in. Sensemaking does not occur in isolation but is impacted by a number of social factors. Because meanings are social constructions, interactions and conversations with those within your social environment (intra-organizational) can influence which cues are noticed and how they are bracketed, as well as which presumptions might get surfaced (Weick et al., 2005). Additionally, the interaction between various social groups (inter-organizational) influence how sense is made; some overlap in agreement and while others present differences in meanings. For example, a common expression of Canadian identity is expressed not by our own negotiated meanings of who we are but rather by comparison against what we are not (not American).

2.4.7 Action Oriented

The value of plausible meanings is in the action that someone can take once they have a meaning that is good enough. Presumptions can establish moments of acceptable meaning that are expressed through language; the actions, and resulting outcomes of those actions, are reviewed retrospectively for meaning which, in an ongoing manner, influences sense that may change existing presumptions and future action. In this way,

"action and talk are treated as cycles rather than as a linear sequence" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Sense and plausible meanings are shaped over time, through language use, and in action.

2.4.8 Organizing through Communication

Communication and language are fundamental parts of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Social construction of reality rests on the tenet of shared meaning. Public communication "draws on the resources of language in order to formulate [meaning] and exchange [share that meaning]" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). By searching for how plausible meanings are constructed, I have chosen to focus my attention on language, the symbolically encoded representations of both meaning and context (Patriotta & Brown, 2011; J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Weick sees this as part of the sensemaking process, in that people organize their sense through acts of communication and language use. The nature and make up of language is explored later in this chapter.

2.5 Sensemaking Properties

The process of sensemaking is a framework "to understand how people cope with disruption" (Weick, 1995, p. 5). It is a recipe developed around seven interrelated components or 'properties' that help people constitute meanings that are valuable to them. Sensemaking occurs as "a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues

and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

2.5.1 Grounded in Identity Construction

Unlike the suggestions that identity is stable, described frequently with terms like core, distinctive and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985), Weick contends that the construction of identity is fluid and perpetual, "constituted out of the process of interaction" (Weick, 1995, p. 20). Identity, from a sensemaking position, is relative; it is the label under which we attempt to classify "who we think we are" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416). The divide in the stability of identity constitution, reinforced by research implying identity mutability (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), highlights a difference in focus between outcome and process: identity either exists in a stable state or it is perpetually (re)constructed as people shift in experience, location, and context. One of the challenges faced by Weick in an underdevelopment of the issues of power, specifically surrounding identity and how people project their identities into their environment to see what happens (Weick, 1995; Helms Mills & Mills, 2000a). This remains a limitation in sensemaking and not an aspect picked up in this study, although it has been explored more fully in the realm of critical sensemaking (Thurlow, 2010).

The acceptance of fluid identity (re)construction and the existence of multiple identities bring into question any possible singular conceptions of self. Movement through different contexts can shift the constitutional elements from which a person

builds their identity. As Weick wrote, “to shift among interactions is to shift among definitions of self” (1995, p. 20). In the case of the proposed changes in post-secondary education, numerous impacted groups that included students, university educators, and community members all expressed identity-based connections to the entity of ‘university’ (S. Davis, 2007a).

2.5.2 Retrospective

A key aspect of the sensemaking process is directionality. Retrospection, and the clarity that comes from looking back on events, implies that we only understand and make sense of events in a clear enough manner after we have had an opportunity to look back on them and see what happened within the particular social context. “Actions are known only when they have been completed, which means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us” (Weick, 1995, p. 26). Acknowledging that our understanding is always a bit behind our actions is consistent with being actively engaged in real world events and then figuring out meanings that stem from action. The projection of interpretations onto future events may exist as a presumption, bridging past meaning with future actions, sometimes referred to as sensegiving (Soderberg, 2003), yet meanings shift as activities and goals change through action (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). These shifts create novel outcomes that are reinterpreted retrospectively.

An absence of any possible meaning is generally not the problem faced by people during retrospective review. Rather, it is the challenge of choosing from a multitude of

meanings available, because events can take on "many different kinds of sense" (Weick, 1995, p. 27). This can create part of the confusion during sensemaking, often mitigated by both time and feeling (Weick, 1995). The time span between action and reflection is typically short, forcing fast decisions to be made around meaning. Furthermore, sensemaking is rooted in a feeling; when an individual *feels* that they have found a meaning that is rational and clear, one that is good enough, satisficing or functional, then reflection stops (Weick, 1995; Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b).

2.5.3 Enactive of Sensible Environments

Enactment is a socially-negotiated process through which meanings are bracketed based upon a set of preconceived ideas and contexts, meanings that frequently reinforce the preconceptions upon which they are based (Weick, 1988). For a meaning to be deemed credible within a socially-negotiated reality, it must be one that is instrumental within an action-oriented environment. Meanings take on legitimacy when people take action on them. For example, an eight-sided red sign has no innate meaning. Yet within a society of automobile drivers, people chose to imbue that eight-sided red sign with meaning, specifically with the value of a stop sign. This choice of meaning has been enacted into a habituated custom, allowing drivers to interact safely on the streets. It has also been enacted in law, carrying legal penalties when people fail to comply with the message.

The traditions of social constructivism positions people as co-creators of their

environment, binding their actions within the process. As Weick described when he outlined decisions made by traffic controllers at an Atlanta airport, "people created their own environments and these environments then constrained their actions" (1990, 1995, p. 31). The term 'environment' appears to describe mental and social frameworks within which people operate. The property of enactment was leveraged by Weick, allowing him to introduce the influence of contextual rationality (2001b), blending the meanings people act upon with the social environment in which those actions take place and make sense.

There are numerous examples of enactment in the case study of post-secondary educational change. Based on the shock of the suggested transformation suggested within the Miner Report, stakeholders were pushed to take action, to enact meanings, and to express those meanings in a quest to reconstitute plausible meaning. Action affects meaning, meanings that are described through language either to the external world or within one's own imagination. For example, the provincial government was situated within a self-imposed agenda of self-sufficiency, positioning universities as educational structures serving economic outcomes, including increased wages for the educated graduates and the number of skilled workers to meet industry demands. In contrast, university educators acted as if a university was an institution focused on long-term social gains rather than short-term economic outcomes. Each group used the same linguistic symbol (university) as they interpreted the proposed changes. Yet they enacted distinctly different meanings in this symbol within their social environments, meanings upon which they took action.

2.5.4 Social

Action among and between people exists in a socially mediated world. People do not make sense in a vacuum; there is always a presumed audience of some sort that we are interacting against, providing context for action and meaning (Blumer, 1969). The value of sensemaking to this dissertation is the aspect that appreciates that social interaction is negotiated, as well as serving both as the process and means through which it is negotiated. Context acts as a lens that frames the possibilities of how we can understand our world. Meanings that are accepted as useful are constructed by interpreting experienced phenomena that have been constrained within specific contexts (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991); the most likely or reasonable meaning(s) crafted from these experiences (Schutz, 1932) and within these contexts are used to develop our version of 'reality'. This implies a focus on perpetual reditions of reality versus the conceptualization of any one externally existing reality as static and absolute.

It also underscores the influence of the social world on meaning creation. It brings forward the importance of interactive experiences between individuals and the social structures as they develop meanings that make sense. This is what Berger and Luckmann were referring to when they said that the social world was "an essential element of the reality of everyday life" (1966, p. 48) where subjectively-developed constructions lead to actions and consequences (W. I. Thomas & Thomas, 1928; Soffe, 2002). Additionally, these meanings, at some point, are shared with others. These expressions of meaning happen when people "externalize the internal processes of their minds through the creation of cultural artefacts", such as "works of art, literature, languages, religions and

the like…" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 237) which have the potential to become privileged as objective, non-malleable meanings.

Those taking a realist perspective might make claim to meanings as 'facts': the measure of time (one year is made up of 365 days), a person's positional power (John A. Macdonald was the Prime Minister of Canada), or an institutional title (a polytechnic institution is a combination of the best aspects of both applied college training and theoretical university education). Yet these 'facts', from a constructionist perspective, are simply meanings that we have previously agreed upon and are replicated through negotiated linguistic expressions (words and symbols) and their attached significations (meanings) (Searle, 2010). The danger is that these meanings may become reified, treated as if fluid and malleable meanings negotiated in a social environment existed external to the sensemaker as fixed, concrete and absolute.

2.5.5 Ongoing Nature

People making sense create meanings in an ongoing process. There is no point at which experiences stop, no point that allows for a pause in which sense can be made in the moment. Experiences are like a river that continues to move forward. Actions are in perpetual motion within and around people in ways that are neither neat nor simple. In the middle of this messiness, people strive to make some sense, if only to continue on in action. Much like the flow of that river, very little about the ongoing flow is noticeable without some change or disruption. This is the same with sensemaking. For sensemaking

to become apparent, there needs to be some interruption or shock in the steady flow of normal events (Weick, 1995) which triggers a response. Thus, when circumstances no longer fit the patterns to which an individual is accustomed, meaning construction demands additional attention. Quite often, an interruption to expected meanings "induces an emotional response" (Weick, 1995, p. 45), drawing in an affective aspect to the process of sensemaking, yet another influencing factor in the choice of a single meaning from the multitude available.

2.5.6 Focused on Extracted Cues

To fashion a sense of what has happened, people rely on cues, or "simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p. 50). As people are embedded in an ongoing flow of action, it can be challenging to collect sufficient inputs to craft an understanding of what is happening in the moment. Information is continuously collected by people, information that is filtered, quite often manipulated and even distorted as they process it. Because of the volume of information received on an ongoing basis, people make decisions about what is kept as valuable signal data and what is discarded as noise (Miller, 1978). The information that remains forms the cues enacted to help people to develop meaning.

Cues assist individuals to build a larger framework of sense out of the disruptions. However, "when cues become equivocal, contradictory, or unstable, either because individual preferences are changing or because situations are dynamic, people begin to

lose their grasp of what is happening" (Weick, 2001b, p. 462). For example, the Miner Report recommended that three established university campuses get transformed into polytechnics (2007a). The names of the institutions (university versus polytechnic) became key extracted cues used by stakeholders to rationalize a particular meaning within a particular context, in order to understand what was happening to them. However, as will be seen later, the language symbols of the institutions themselves were equivocal following the shock; multiple meanings were infused within the same cues by different stakeholders.

Context influences which cues might be extracted and how those cues may be interpreted (Weick, 1995). Cues can be contextually sensitive; the context in which the cue is enacted can strongly influence how it is interpreted and form a reference point for further meaning construction. Often, we make connections from a single cue to a larger, more general pre-existing idea (Weick, 1995) in our minds or from our experiences. This simplification of meaning through labeling (Chia, 2000) helps to make connections in meaning that facilitate forward motion (Taylor, 1989; Weick, 1995). The social contexts at play have the power to bind the actions of people together as certain behaviours get negotiated as acceptable.

2.5.7 Driven by Plausibility Rather than Accuracy

A plausible meaning draws upon cues that, when reviewed retrospectively, work within the individual's social environment and align with core identity concepts.

Sensemaking is about "instrumentality" (Weick, 1995, p. 57) and action; working with meanings that are plausible is highly practical and pragmatic. A plausible meaning must be credible, acceptable – just good enough – for the enactment of action, for individuals to accept the meaning and move forward (Weick, 2001b). The need for action often requires those involved "to simplify rather than elaborate" (Weick, 1995, p. 57). The acceptance of a plausible meaning keeps the action going. In order to take action, people frequently rely on the idea of Occam's razor, accepting the most likely interpretation at hand as one that makes sense.

Yet as words and objects can have multiple meanings (Weick, 1995); if this creates a state of equivocality, then the existence of equivalent meanings around the same object would lead to the prevention of action until one meaning rises as a preferred and dominant understanding. At the time that we first receive information, it is extremely difficult to determine if our existing meanings are reasonably accurate (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988), if they can be accurate at all. We do not cease doing things until 'the' right meaning is interpreted. Rather, making sense is a process "about discovering your own invention" (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b, p. 2) repetitively, over time in an ongoing manner while taking action.

2.5.7.1 What is a Plausible Meaning?

There are a number of thoughts about what constitutes a meaning that is plausible, although there does not appear to be any agreed upon definitions that *constitute* an

explanation as plausible (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). Golden-Biddle and Locke posited that plausible meaning exists along a continuum that is large enough to answer two key questions: 1) does this meaning make sense to me in my current context and 2) does this meaning offer something distinct (1993). In the first question, we are accessing whether the meaning we craft normalizes the novel; does this particular meaning work where I am currently assessing it. For the second question, we are examining whether the novel is actually distinctive enough to trigger the exploration of new meaning. Although Golden-Biddle and Locke posit a continuum, it essentially breaks at some point into a binary situation – either the meaning is plausible and makes sense or it is implausible and a new meaning needs to be constructed.

Others describe plausibility simply as "a feeling that something makes sense, feels right, is somehow sensible, (and) fits with what you know" (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b, p. 5). A plausible meaning "essentially refers to a sense that one particular meaning or explanation is more meaningful than others. It feels right within the range of possible explanations available to sensemakers in a given situation." (Weick, 2001b, p. 462). The idea of 'meaningful' here is an explanation that best satisfies both pressures of identity construction and the various social contexts within which a person is embedded. Here, it is strongly associated with "pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality" (Weick, 1995, p. 57). This idea of pragmatism and instrumentality are highlighted in a story by Hungarian Nobel Laureate Albert Szent-Gyorti about a regiment of Hungarian soldiers who were lost in the Alps and used an incorrect map to find their way to safety. From this, Weick highlighted that "an imperfect map proved to

be good enough" (Weick, 1995, p. 55) once it was accepted as plausible, thereby allowing for action to occur; the map was merely a reasonable means to an end. As active beings, we work with meanings that are to allow us to continue moving, that are functionally plausible.

What can be considered plausible has been placed in a colloquial question: "Does the story make sense to me as a reader... given where I am coming from?" Two key ideas come from this. First, the reader plays an active role in meaning interpretation and invention, as sensemaking is a process about authoring as well as reading (Mangham & Pye, 1991; Weick, 1995). Second, the situational context influences the reader's actions. Meaning makes sense when it "deals with common concerns, establishing its connection to the personal and disciplinary backgrounds and experience of its readers" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p. 600). Weick (1995) did suggest that a plausible explanation resonates most closely with pre-existing identities and accepted perceptions – who someone believes they are and their socially negotiated environment. Helms Mills et al. (2009, p. 152) have proposed certain *conditions* for plausibility to exist. These including meanings that:

1. fit an existing set of knowledge or make a very solid argument for challenging an existing, accepted system
2. present an argument for a particular meaning that is well structured, and
3. are seen as legitimate to those for which the meaning matters, often times legitimized by an external source.

The first idea focuses on contextual relevance within a group or social unit, or intra-organizational understanding. The second idea highlights the importance of clarity, that the meaning can be easily understood and consumed. The final idea invokes

legitimacy and acceptance, particularly from an external group or social unit, or inter-organizational understanding. Exploring both the creation and expression of plausible meanings entails pursuing these conditions while unpacking both the tools of meaning creation and the mental models that impact those meanings. Borrowing from Gioia et al. (1994), Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld wrote:

> "First, sensemaking occurs when a flow of organizational circumstances is turned into words and salient categories. Second, organizing itself is embodied in written and spoken texts. Third, reading, writing, conversing, and editing are crucial actions that serve as the media through which the invisible hand of institutions shapes conduct." (2005, p. 409)

2.5.7.2 The Instability of Plausible Meanings.

The process of sensemaking draws upon a multitude of moments, contextual influences and identity pressures. With all of these moments and pressures occurring simultaneously, plausible meaning can be quite unstable (Mills, 2010; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Meaning is challenged when the smooth flow of reality is interrupted by shocks that push ongoing meaning away from expectations. On a regular basis, individuals encounter minor interruptions that evoke responses of habit; sensemaking is happening, but so swiftly that it is hardly noticeable. More intense sensemaking action will come from a) challenges to highly habituated events and b) intense disruptions that either create extended puzzles or contain a high level of inconceivability (Schroeder, Van de, Scudder, & Polley, 1986; Unger, 1987). Interruptions may well create an emotional response, with anxiety and confusion arising to stimulate a process of reconciliation.

To explore plausibility is also to explore the concept of implausibility, bringing to

the forefront a very recent question: “How much incongruent information is enough to reach a threshold of implausibility?” (Waller & Uitdewilligen, 2009, p. 199). When does a shock present enough inconsistency that existing plausible meanings are no longer good enough to use? Some assert that implausibility, or the failure to reach a plausible understanding, hinges on the span of asymmetry between the context of the reader and the text (Davis, 1971; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). If the asymmetry is too large, the new information may be seen and interpreted as “fantastic or irrelevant” (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p. 600). If the asymmetry is too small and is simply repeating what is already understood, then the contribution may be dismissed as trivial.

2.5.8 Functional Plausibility

In this thesis, I push deeper into the Weickian idea of plausibility by suggesting a new idea – ‘functional plausibility’. This idea blends three distinct concepts around meaning. First, Simon’s (1956) notion that sensemakers function within a bounded rationality, often accepting meanings that are sub-optimal but adequately fit their identity and social context. Second, Weick’s (2001b) assertion that meanings have value to the sensemaker and that a plausible meaning is simply more meaningful than other available meanings. Finally, Chia’s (2000) idea of functional deployment, that through labeling something and enacting that label through language, sensemakers necessarily reduce complex and equivocal ideas into simpler forms upon which they can take action. As such, when I refer to meanings as being functionally plausible, they are enacted meanings that are satisficing, instrumental, and actionable.

2.5.8.1 Functional Plausibility in Context.

Plausibility is rooted within context (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Helms Mills, 2003; Weick, 2005) and the "possible explanations available to sense makers in a given situation" (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004, p. 189). Context relates directly to the social property of sensemaking, the structure of which presents stability to individuals (Jackall, 1988) that is then recreated through language used by those within that social network. Context influences sensemaking in a number of important ways. First, the contextual environment affects what is extracted as cues. Second, context influences how these extracted cues are interpreted, or their indexical nature (Leiter, 1980). Indexicals are linguistic expressions that shift or take on distinct meaning from one context to another context to create a convincing meaning.

Context becomes valuable for sensemaking as a reference point for meaning rationalization, affecting both "the saliency of information" and supplying "norms and expectations that constrain explanations" (Weick, 1995, p. 53). The contextual boundaries are impacted by socially constructed norms that filter cues used in the meaning-creation process. "The intended readers, steeped in their own personal and intellectual contexts, engage and interpret the text by relating their reading to these contexts" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p. 596).

2.5.8.2 Functional Plausibility in Language.

In this study, the clues of sensemaking that I choose to draw upon are words found in the written and spoken texts of the case study, language enacted to express meanings that are highly proximal or close to the time that they are making sense and influenced by the invisible hand of socially constructed contexts in which a sensemaker is embedded. Plausible sense is achieved in an ongoing manner through actions, choices and context. Yet the vehicle through which it is constructed and expressed is language.

> "Plausible stories animate and gain their validity from subsequent activity. The language of sensemaking captures the realities of agency, flow, equivocality, transience, reaccomplishment, unfolding, and emergence, realities that are often obscured by the language of variables, nouns, quantities, and structures." (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410)

Immediately following the release of the Miner Report, students at the University of New Brunswick Saint John realized that, should these recommendations be implemented, their university would cease to mean the same thing to them as it did in its current form. As Delsie Burke stated, "This suggestion is kicking me out of my home." (S. Davis, 2007a, p. B1). The university was a significant part of their identity creation. Weick noted that during the act of making sense, real life is time sensitive (1995). The PSE students reacted quickly in a powerfully defensive manner with an oppositional response that culminated in thousands of students protesting in the streets of Saint John (S. Davis, 2007b) and at the New Brunswick Provincial Legislature (White, 2007c). Due to the speed of most sensemaking acts, Weick said that "we are more likely to see products than process" (1995, p. 49). The products are revealed in expressions and language choices, word enacted that become "symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413) .

To effectively examine moments of sensemaking, two factors are valuable for consideration. First, surprises and unexpected occurrences serve as triggers for events requiring explanations (Weick, 1995). Events that occur in routine patterns fit predictive expectations requiring no additional information to satisfy an ongoing understanding, essentially completing a closed loop or "self-sealing logic" (Weick, 1995, p. 84). Discrepancies and surprises run counter to predictive patterns, breaking the loop between expectation and result; they require a post-diction process "through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed" (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Second, language choices are a very common vehicle for negotiating social understanding. Those interested in uncovering moments of sensemaking pay significant attention to expressions (Weick, 1995), both the choices in language symbols and the meaning therein. Thus, researchers can focus on how individuals process and respond to puzzles, events that are beyond predictive patterns through their language acts.

Prior research on how language was used during change events focused on the importance of changing the words used to express different meanings – new labels with new meanings. For example, Gioia, Thomas, Clark, and Chittipeddi wrote that when change is proposed, a completely "different symbolic language is used to herald the change and to articulate its nature" (1994, p. 365). Their work explores language symbols that were evoked during change. However, Leiter (1980) points out the importance of indexicals, or expressions in language, and how meanings within expressions can shift based on context. This thesis supports Leiter's concept of malleable meanings within

language symbols that are dependent on the context of the person enacting the language symbols and where they are contextually situated. Language is a foundational cue enacted by individuals in order to form a sense of meaning within particular contexts and, by extension, helps form their individual identities (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000). The use of language stems from and is ordered by particular discourses (Fiol, 2002), providing clues to individuals making sense of situations (Weick, 1995). Emphasizing the importance of the linguistic aspect of discourse highlights the dominance of organization through and with words (Mueller & Carter, 2005); words are chosen to represent particular constructions and reproducible forms of action (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Paradoxically, the context that "provide(s) the 'scaffolding' for meaning under construction" (Magala, 2009, p. 34) can exist as both a) established and enduring structures (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004) and b) malleable and shifting frameworks (Magala, 2009). Through a focus on language, I argue that we may be able to uncover a process of plausibility while exploring two fundamental questions: 'where/how are plausible meanings constructed?' and 'what tools do individuals use to create and communicate them?' (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Exploring language as a tool to craft meanings that are plausible aligns well with the tenets of sensemaking. Weick wrote that "sensemaking is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery" (1995, p. 8). I contend that the potential for freedom in crafting plausible meanings exists in language, where the speaker has the opportunity to author meaning(s) within their chosen words. 'Making' sense then is about

constructing meaning (Helms Mills, Weatherbee, & Colwell, 2006) not just selecting it; it is an active process.

2.5.9 Limitations of Sensemaking

Although the framework of sensemaking has been presented as both as a process and set of interrelated properties, it has also been criticized for failing to surface certain implications at play in the construction of meaning. One of these core implications is the impact that power has on the process of sensemaking and Weick's failure to address this issue (Helms Mills et al., 2010). It is contended that power impacts multiple sensemaking properties, including the influences both on identity construction and over which cues get surfaced as points of reference for sensemaking (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b). Weick's focus on sensemaking primarily rests with the individual (1995), and while he does acknowledge the influences of the social environment, it is contended that "he falls short of drawing implications of structural power for sensemaking" (Helms Mills, 2003, p. 144). I acknowledge these limitations. However, the examination of this case study using secondary textual data makes claims towards aspects of power problematic. There lacks sufficient access or insight into the expressions of all impacted parties to gain enough information to evaluate the influences of power; I speculate that many expressions were left unsaid, or at least were not captured to be reprinted in the public media. As such, I have attempted to hint at potential areas in which power may have surfaced, for example in the position of the New Brunswick Government and their initial support of The Miner Report, without making overt connections to power in action.

2.6 Making Sense with Language

The development of plausible meanings through the use of language, whether through interpretation or invention (Weick, 1995), is fundamental to sensemaking. However, the method(s) in which language is enacted remains an underexplored question. Gephart (1993) was one of the few whose sensemaking research focused specifically on expressions, or language use in action. His structure of language use had four areas: reciprocity, normal forms of language convention, interpretation, and descriptive vocabularies as indexical expressions. Two of these characteristics immediately surface as important: interpretation and indexical expressions.

Valuable to the work of ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel (1967), indexical expressions focus on the idea that a linguistic expression can only be interpreted by understanding 1) who is making the utterance, 2) the context in which it is made, and 3) the intended reference surrounding the expression (Bar-Hillel, 1954; Silby, 2007). Essentially, language only makes sense when its use is considered within the socially constructed environment in which it was enacted. However, Gephart (1993) considered interpretation as a passive activity, where the sensemaker chooses from a selection of pre-existing options without any space for invention in the process of meaning creation. However, the invention and authoring of meaning(s) is fundamental in the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995).

Although Gephart's work proves insightful, it also highlights a challenge in sensemaking. If the person making sense 'uses' the language of another person but is not embedded within that person's socially constructed environment, then the contextual filters in place for the sensemaker could potentially mutate meaning at the point of meaning interpretation. Put more simply, the meanings inferred within words change. This aspect of the communication process, the relationship between sender and receiver, is worthy of exploration. However, it will be set aside at this time only so that I remain focused on plausible meaning and its enactment in language.

2.6.1 Language as Social Construction

Language serves as a fundamental tool used by people to make sense of their environment, the tool through which they build and perceive their reality. Yet the idea of what language is and how the meaning within language expressions is constituted differs greatly. There is an ongoing ontological debate about language as it relates to meaning. On one side, language is considered as natural (Gioia, 2003), in which words have a single predefined or 'true' meaning. For example, "the essential business of language is to assert or deny facts" (Russell, 1974, p. x) carries an inference that words reflect external truth or 'fact' that exists outside of human knowledge or understanding. In his early work, Wittgenstein took on this perspective, positing that language creates a medium of common understanding, with each word corresponding to a single object, becoming that word's de facto meaning (1974, para. 3.203). A word corresponds to an object. It has a meaning, and logic dictates it to be immutable—according to

Wittgenstein, how else could we logically communicate? In this case, the sole challenge involved in expressing a clear meaning to others lies in choosing the right words; the right meaning can only be clearly shared when the correct words, or object representations, are found. The language that people use is only problematic around their selection of words. Facts and 'true' meaning live outside of the words used to describe them. Although facts are stated through language, facts are not linguistic entities, facts exist beyond language in the real world (Meckler & Baillie, 2003).

On the other side, language is mutable and the meanings that are captured within words vary based on the place and space of their enactment. Words are not simply the neutral medium through which facts are conveyed; they are part of the process that determines the meaning of those facts (Astley, 1985). The use of the word 'facts' implies some level of accuracy; as meanings have a level of plasticity for social constructionists, 'facts' would be replaced by 'plausible meanings'. An alternative perspective inclusive of a constructionist viewpoint exists in Wittgenstein's later work on language (2009), a perspective that acknowledges context, interpretation and invention. Wittgenstein questioned how people came to hold different meanings around the exact same thing, bringing forward the idea of a certain level of intentionality in meaning construction (2009). Silby was clearer, stating that "the meanings of words should be understood by the way in which they are used within their social context" (2007). Thus, application and desired outcomes may well be components in the creation of meaning.

2.7 The Structure of Language

Language expressions actualize choices in both the creation and expression of meaning. These choices also reveal how those making particular expressions constitute their social environment. This section identifies the composite nature of language and explores how the tools of language operate from the perspective of the sensemaker. As the primary communicative medium, a focus on language should increase how plausible meanings are understood to be enacted and how they are influenced by the socially constructed environment in which sensemakers are embedded at the time of meaning enactment.

2.7.1 Classic Linguistics

Ferdinand de Saussure is considered one of the founding architects of classic 20th century linguistics and language structure (M. Thomas, 2011). The dual notion of language signs was proposed by Saussure: the 'signifier' representing the word or phrase uttered and the 'signified', representing the mental concept or intended meaning behind the word. "A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern" (Saussure, 1972, p. 66). The sign itself is arbitrary, without an external, objective connection between symbol and meaning. Words, as either sound patterns or written symbols, are only 'signifiers' or representations. To hold meaning, they must be combined with a 'signified' value, or the thing itself, in order to form a meaningful sign. In an effort to be clearer, Saussure replaced the term 'sound pattern' with language 'signal' and the term 'concept' with meaning 'signification' (Saussure,

1972). Note that throughout this work, my use of the label of language symbol is being enacted with the same meaning as Saussure's label of language signal.

Language signs, the combination of signal and signification, face dual pressures of invariability and variability (Saussure, 1972). Part of the social construction of language hinders its ability to change; once a sign is negotiated within a social context, it gains a connection between a signal and signification. The community in which it was agreed upon becomes habitually bound to the continuation of that sign-meaning relationship. Yet language is also mutable and can evolve specifically due to the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. "A language is situated socially and chronologically by reference to a certain community and a certain period of time" (Saussure, 1972, p. 111). Time, context, and community all appear to play a role in shifting either the signal or, more importantly, the signification. As they shift, so can meaning.

2.7.2 Enacted Language

Enacted language and the meanings contained within language signs are forms of socially constructed and negotiated understanding. They enable the creation of a person's reality through representation (Searle, 2010), linking together signals and concepts at the psychological level (Saussure, 1972, p. 66). Colloquially, this is surfaced when people clarify their meaning with, 'This is what I *meant* when I *said* that.' Meanings float within symbols, open for creation and interpretation, durable in some moments and fluid in others. In the New Brunswick case study, the signifier/symbol 'university' was

demonstrated to frequently contain – for students – the concept of time, both past and future development. When university students used the word ‘university’ in conversation, it contained a shared meaning about their ‘home’, connecting the idea of a university to their identity. This personal relationship is not uncommon; Fiol noted that “language can reflect the strength of the relationship between individuals and their social groups” (2002, p. 663) indicating that meaning within language may well get altered by identity constructions as well as within social context. I contend these meanings can be observed in enacted linguistic cues.

Language is an action of expressing meaning to two audiences, the internal audience of the person making sense and the external audience of their environment; as such, it aligns with sensemaking, which is also about action. The composition of language and language signs, however, can be divided into two core areas: the sound/shape and the sense. The components – letters and their combination of shapes and sounds that make up the tools and structure of a language – are not in themselves a function of the speaker (Saussure, 1972), much in the same way that the composition of a hammer is not the function of the carpenter. How the hammer is sought to be used and the execution of this idea becomes an act of will of the carpenter. Saussure initially distinguished these two components as ‘language’ and ‘speech’, the code-knowledge rule and its actual application in action. For him, language is the sum of common symbols within an agreed-upon communication system; speech is the performance or what someone chooses to do with those tools.

> "The language is not a function of the speaker. Speech, on the contrary, is an individual act of the will and the intelligence, in which one must distinguish: (1) the combinations through which the speaker uses the code provided by the language in order to express his own thought, and (2) the psycho-physical mechanism which enables him to externalize these combinations." (Saussure, 1972, p. 14)

Speech is a summation of both how words are combined and presented (phonation), influenced directly by the will of the speaker (meaning) (Saussure, 1972). Language can be enacted in multiple ways; writing and speech are the dominant forms of linguistic expression. Saussure privileged the spoken word above written work, a form of logocentrism, believing that the written word was only a representation of the spoken word, much as a photograph of a person's face is only representational of the person's actual face. Yet in his opinion, the visual form of language has taken a more prominent position because the written word is considered a permanent object that solidifies a particular meaning (Saussure, 1972).

The relationship between the spoken word and the written word has been explored a great deal, especially through the work of Derrida (1976) and Rousseau (1998). Although the philosophical debate around phonocentrism, that speech is superior or comes ahead of written expression, has proponents on both sides, it is not one that I chose to take up further here. This is not to ignore or deny the philosophical debate at play; it is to remain focused on the active meaning creation that occurs in language use, whether in speech or written form, as it relates to the active process of sensemaking. To argue about the privileged forms of linguistic use and levels of importance between spoken and written words here would shift this exploration away from the lived world of

sensemaking and move it into a level of abstraction. As such, this study will focus on enacted language by individuals, in some cases captured speech acts and in other cases written expression.

Language acts, or expressions, connect well to sensemaking both as cues and through enactment. Weick (1995) highlighted the importance of invention, demonstrating an acceptance of multiple simultaneous meanings and a distaste for the ideas of univocality. Through the selection and enactment of cues to formulate a particular meaning, actors involved in sensemaking are authors, constructing meanings deemed plausible enough to act upon. The same event may well produce different 'sense' or multiple meanings to different participants (Weick, 1993), and the intended meanings may be different based on who is selecting the core expressions and the contextual factors influencing their position.

2.7.3 A Structure of Potential

Saussure's idea of language contains space for the potential of multiple meanings that are constrained at the moment of enacted language, when a single meaning gets selected for expression. It was structured as a differential system (1972) with a distinction between the system of language structure and how that language was actually used - a difference between how language was designed-in-theory and how it was used-in-action. This divides language into two areas, that of langue and parole (Saussure, 1972). Langue

structures the formal rules of language and symbols. Parole, or enacted language, is where speakers make choices to embed a particular meaning into expressions.

2.7.3.1 Langue.

Langue constitutes the system of language, including formal rules, structures, grammar, and vocabulary. Saussure referred to this as the physical part of the communication process (1972) in which sounds are vocalized into patterns. In the visual manifestation of language, langue would include letter symbols organized into word formations. Enacted meanings do not reside within langue; it is "merely language in embryo" (Saussure, 1972, p. 13), potential meanings that have yet to be manifested within action and context (Ermarth, 2000). The symbols themselves do not convey meaning alone. Rather, meaning is constructed within a negotiated social community that accepts the connection of a symbol to a concept or meaning. The meaning that is developed is at the psychological level and is a socially constructed phenomenon (Saussure, 1972).

2.7.3.2 Parole.

Parole is the way in which language is used in action, how it is applied beyond the confines of formal rule structures (Ermarth, 2000; Saussure, 1972). It constitutes the psychological portion of communication in which individuals create or infuse a sound word with meaning, developed within context and accepted within a social community (Saussure, 1972). This enacted meaning attaches a particular value and understanding to

the word symbol, removing all of the other potential meanings that could have been enacted and replacing it with a single realized meaning (Ermarth, 2000).

The difference between langue and parole is choice. Langue constitutes the word symbols and rules that govern language; it is routine and a replication of process. Within langue, the potential for sense in these symbols exists up to the point of enactment because a single meaning has yet to be attached to the symbol in order to complete the formation of the language sign. Parole represents the application of meaning, attaching signification to a symbol during a moment of choice and within a moment of action. Saussure (1972) uses the example of the Latin word symbol 'arbor'; it could be connected to the concept 'tree' in English or perhaps some visual concept of a tall, wooden plant growing within a particular region. The former concept would be accepted within a language class for English-speaking students; the latter concept may have been more relevant in Greece when describing particular types of trees. Each concept is contextually driven and socially negotiated as appropriate in order for that symbol to be used as a vehicle of meaning transmission. However, neither concept is langue; langue remains without attached meaning, thereby having the potential to hold many meanings. Once choice is made and a particular meaning is put into action, the focus shifts to parole.

2.7.4 Complexity of Meaning

The complexity of meaning in language can be seen when language signs are enacted by different individuals in relation to the same event but are found to contain

different meanings. What differs is the negotiated social environment in which the individuals are embedded. Alternative contextual circumstances that overlap around the same event may reveal multiple ongoing meanings, what Saussure might describe as multiple significations within the same signal. Meanings are interconnected within contextual circumstances. As such, to effectively explore the development of plausible accounts, it is valuable to observe shocks to meaning, observe the subsequent fractures and examine the (re)creation of plausibility within language, while acknowledging that all of these activities happen within contextual locations.

As an example, the PSE Commission authors applied the term 'polytechnic' over 100 different times within the Miner Report. In that language symbol, they inferred the meaning to be an institution serving both industry level training and university level education. This signification imposed by the PSEC authors within the symbol 'polytechnic' did not align with the signification espoused by university leaders, who invested the meaning of a polytechnic to be a "nebulous post-secondary institution" (MacKinnon, 2007c, p. C1).

2.7.5 Language as the Location of Meaning

Language is an application. It is how people express themselves and how they are understood within socially negotiated communities. It requires choice to put language into action. It is a tool through which individuals craft internal understandings and build meanings that are situationally acceptable. The meanings that people enact display both

the choices being made as well as the factors that influence those choices. Meanings expressed through and within language appear in the stories told by individuals within a socially negotiated environment.

As an illustration, a speaker expresses themselves in a series of stories, stories that are constructed from language that is encoded with a particular meaning. Both the speaker and listener de-construct the meaning(s) that have been embedded within those linguistic expressions, a deconstruction that is both invention and interpretation. Following this, the listener responses to the story with their own combination of expressions and meanings. This exchange continues back and forth as both parties attempt to show each other their plausible meaning constructions. Additionally, they highlight meanings that strike them as implausible interpretations. Through this, language supports both enactment and performance of meaning while simultaneously displaying some of the contextual structures that influence it.

Within the Miner Report, the authors expressed their stories of post-secondary education with meanings that privileged industry training and regional economic development over theoretical rigour. The receivers of the report then deconstructed these expressed meanings. For some, including university educators, these meanings were found to be implausible, meanings stretched beyond the point of saliency. This pushed university educators to enact particular words within their responses, replacing the implausible meanings they encountered with their own long-standing, habituated meanings that they continued to find plausible.

2.7.6 Language Revealing Social Environments

Language not only serves as a vehicle through which meaning(s) are enacted, it creates a person's particular context, or the environment for meanings. The freedom that comes from the malleability of language hinges on that idea that meanings are enacted to be plausible within specific social environments. In examining parole, we should find clues of what people meant when they used a particular word in a particular space. Weick has studied numerous cases in which he reveals the construction of different meanings around the same event (1990, 1996, 1997, 2005). These cases focused on sensemaking as related to identity construction, in which cues were enacted to craft meaning out of confusion. Yet, none of his case studies explored how actors, in the middle of the sensemaking process, developed contextually influenced meanings and embedded these into the very language signs they employed.

This case of proposed change in the NB post-secondary system helps to do exactly that. For example, within the Miner Report the language sign 'polytechnic' was used as the label of the newly proposed educational institution. When the commission authors used this label, they infused it with meaning as "a solid middle ground (institution), capable of meeting many of the labour market demands for skilled professionals in today's society" (McHardie, 2007e, p. A2). At the same time, some students believed the 'polytechnic' label to simply mean "fake universities" (D Shipley, 2007b, p. A6) while community members invoked the label 'polytechnic' to have a

meaning undifferentiated from a ‘community college’ (Golding, 2007). Within each context, the same language cue carried distinctly different meanings. Thus, when navigating differing contexts, language cues and meanings can become mixed, leading to the destabilization of the identity of the individual (Thurlow, 2007). The representational meanings of chosen words made in action and within contextual pressures become a rich area for exploration.

2.7.7 Communicating Plausible Meaning

Based on the multitude of available meanings and univocality of these meanings (Weick, 1995), those trying to make sense of a situation become meaning ‘authors’ as they create functionally plausible accounts of situations. To resolve the confusion and challenge that comes with addressing large amounts of equivocal information, sometimes called paralysis by analysis (Miller, 1978), people filter and distort signal information to minimize feelings of dissonance. In his review of the Space Shuttle Columbia accident, Weick outlined how cues and context work together to create environments of credibility (1997). Credibility and accuracy are, of course, not equivalent, as Weick observed throughout his work examining accidents during which the process of making sense became strained. The reduction of dissonance through the enactment of functionally plausible meanings allow for action to continue.

Meanings are often found within created labels and categories that help to articulate plausible identity structures (Gioia, Corley, & Fabbri, 2002, p. 623). Changing

labels, those overt rules and structures that exist in an organization, can create strong tensions. Yet the appearance of structural stability may be problematic if there is flexibility in how people can enact the meaning within language signs. How many times has someone said, 'I know what I *said*, but this is what I really *meant*.' Essentially, the meaning invested within their chosen words differed from the meanings others might accept as plausible in those same words, displaying a rift between meaning inference and implication.

2.8 Closing Summary

This chapter has positioned this dissertation within the realm of social construction, accepting that individuals both interpret and invent meanings as part of their sensemaking process. Due to the interrelated nature of the sensemaking properties, I brought forward a process of sensemaking that can be applied as a framework of analysis in which language plays a central role. The seven properties of sensemaking were surfaced with particular focus on the importance of plausibility. Language was attached to sensemaking as the vehicle through which meaning is crafted.

The value of understanding how meanings are expressed, influenced by identity and social environment, was highlighted as key to the creation of plausible meanings. The theory of language was explored from the constitutive elements presented by Saussure, acknowledging the potential for multiple, simultaneous meanings that present the opportunity for agency. It concluded by presenting enacted language as a tool to

understand both where sense is constructed within socially negotiated communities and how meanings are enacted during moments of language choice.

The following chapter will examine the case study as a tool of research, including the benefits and limitations of a single case focus. From this, the proposed changes to post-secondary education in New Brunswick will be presented, beginning with the Liberal Party coming to power in 2006 under a campaign promise of provincial self-sufficiency, moving through the formation of the Post-Secondary Education Commission, their six-month consultation, and the release of the PSEC Report in September 2007. I introduce the intense reactions that came from the shock of the Miner Report and the development of multiple plausible meanings within language that surfaced from a single change catalyst.

Chapter Three – Case Study

> "The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself." (Stake, 1995, p. 8)

3.1 Introduction

In this thesis, the investigation of plausible meaning construction is focused on a single case study of proposed change in the post-secondary education system of New Brunswick, Canada. The use of a single case in detail should provide the contextual focus to uncover both the environments where meanings are constructed as well as the process through which they are crafted, or the 'where' and the 'how' of plausible meaning development. The prior chapter brought together theories of sensemaking with the study of language, a vehicle through which people can enact meanings within expressions. This chapter explains the particular case study of interest, laying out the details of the event in a linear fashion, much as would have been experienced by those impacted in the case study itself. What follows is a presentation of the case of proposed educational reform in the province of New Brunswick, Canada. To begin, I outline what a case study is, including the valuable contributions that can be found when a single event is explored in detail. Although the selection of a single case study has many benefits, it also has limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations being acknowledged, I push forward into the richness that is offered by case study research, understanding that all research is constrained by necessary choices.

The case itself begins with a snapshot of post-secondary institutions as they existed in the province in 2006. This is the year that a new provincial government was elected, a government that campaigned on and earned a mandate for creating a self-sufficient province. The election details, as related to their espoused vision of transformative change, will be shared, demonstrating the initiative that led to the creation of the Post Secondary Education Commission (PSEC). The work of the PSEC will be presented, including who was involved in their advisory panel, the consultancy work that was undertaken throughout the province and the production of their report, *Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches to Fulfill its Destiny* (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a).

The intense reaction to the release of this report will be presented in order to reveal the moments of shock to ongoing meaning. This includes an exposition of specific comments and expressions of meaning that constitute the data in future chapters. The description of the case study concludes in 2008 with the formation of a new advisory panel and the production of a new report on post-secondary educational reform called *Be inspired. Be ready. Be Better. The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick* (The Working Group on PSE-NB, 2008).

3.2 Focusing on the Case

3.2.1 What is a Case Study

The case study at hand is the post-secondary educational change initiative put forward by the provincial Government of New Brunswick in 2007. A case study is defined by Robert Stake "not (as) a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (2005, p. 443). Case studies provide an opportunity to explore the stories people tell in their lived worlds because "people naturally think narratively rather than argumentatively or paradigmatically" (Woodside, 2000, p. 42). To borrow from David Silverman in regards to a perspective taken by social constructionist researchers when conducting qualitative research, the researchers "are more concerned with the processes through which texts depict 'reality' rather than with whether such texts contain true or false statements" (2000, p. 160). This idea marries well with the search for both contextual location and the linguistic processes through which people develop plausible meanings. It allows the case study to provide a larger contextual examination and particular heightened instances where meanings are constructed through espoused narratives.

Stake (1994) identifies three distinct types of case studies. The *intrinsic* case focuses on the case episode because the researcher simply wants to better understand the event better, either due to its uniqueness or the simple ordinariness of the event. The *instrumental* case shifts away from the particular event, focusing more on how the case pushes forward or refines a particular theoretical area of study. Finally, the *collective*

study occurs when a group of cases are brought together to be examined as a larger unit. My interest in the case of post-secondary educational change in New Brunswick began in the *intrinsic* realm. I was working at the St. Andrews campus of New Brunswick Community College, watching the activities that preceded and followed the release of the Miner Report and I was incredibly curious about what was happening and the different meanings being expressed by various stakeholders. However, as I pursued this area further, I saw the opportunity for the case to facilitate study in the *instrumental* realm. Throughout my PhD studies, I began to explore the theories of sensemaking. This, combined with my early education in language, served as the beginning of a larger area of theoretical study around the location and process by which people make sense and, more specifically, create plausible meanings. I felt the New Brunswick case could help provide value in this quest. Stake (1994) supports the co-existence of the first two case study types, between the *intrinsic* and the *instrumental*, noting that there is not a solid line between the two forms; as well, this type of blending is quite normal based on multiple levels of interests shown by a researcher.

3.2.2 The Single Case Study

A single case study "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). However, choosing the case study as a focus for research does bring forward a limitation in terms of causal outcomes or results that can be generalized or deemed valid. Stake noted that case studies "have been disregarded by some as less than, due to the focus on the particular without the ability to

obtain generalization" (2005, p. 448). The 'some' that Stake refers to include researchers working from perspectives, such as positivism, in which results from a sample can be applied as a consistent template or explanatory tool for a larger population. There is a growing school of thought that believes the human sciences can be moved forward through the study of single cases and that the quest for generalization with large samples has been both overrated and privileged (Flyvberg, 2006).

More importantly, Yin notes that "case studies are the preferred method when a) 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, b) the investigator has little control over events, and c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (2009, p. 2). This thesis focuses on how individuals develop and accept plausible meanings within their ongoing world, specifically through the use of language as a mode of communication; as such, it meets all three of Yin's criteria for the use of a case.

There are many benefits in choosing to explore events through the case study method. First, it aligns well with the theoretical underpinning of meanings as social constructions, centering on the influences of context around an event. Stake tells us that "through experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge" (2005, p. 454). Second, in studying a single case, attention can be focused upon a contained series of events, actions and reactions, while maintaining the freedom to use whatever methods of analysis are appropriate to pursue a particular line of investigation (Punch, 1998). The Miner Report case becomes the vehicle that brings together sensemaking and language within a particular event. Finally,

this case highlights a disruption to understanding within which stories are told as a way to (re)craft meaning. In discussing case study research, Woodside wrote, “Individuals seek clarity to make sense of prior conversations, events, and outcomes from others and themselves by telling stories” (2000, p. 43). As such, the case study is a strong basis for the exploration of stories and language use.

3.3 The Case Study

3.3.1 The New Brunswick Post-Secondary Education System

In 2006, the landscape of post-secondary education across the province of New Brunswick was quite diverse, including educational opportunities spread geographically throughout the province, offerings in both official languages, and a wide range of public and private institutions. The provincial post-secondary education system was composed of 11 community college campuses, 7 university campuses, 3 private-chartered universities, and 2 private for-profit universities.

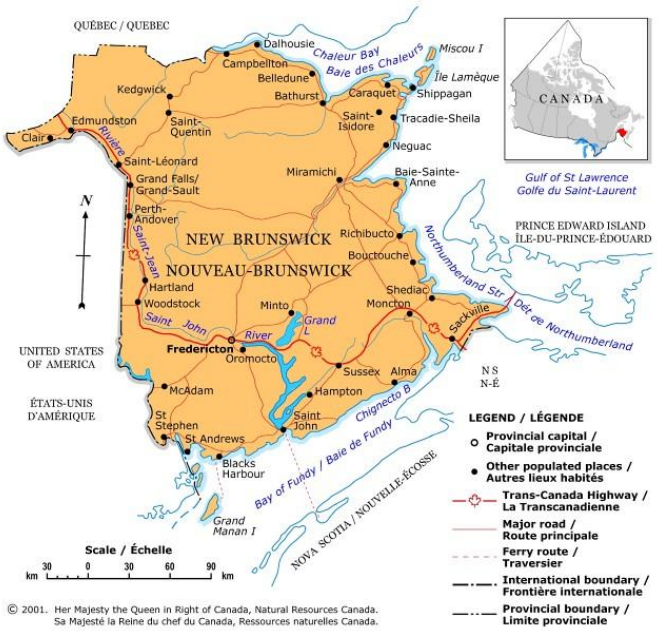

Figure 1 – Map of New Brunswick, Canada (Source: http://www.acadian-home.org)

3.3.1.1 Colleges.

In 2006, the primary provincial college system in the New Brunswick Community College was composed of 11 distinct campuses: five anglophone campuses under the name New Brunswick Community College (NBCC), five francophone campuses under the name Le Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB), and an artistic-based campus called the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design (NBCCD). The NBCC campuses were located in St. Andrews, Saint John, Woodstock, Moncton and Miramichi. The CCNB campuses were located in Edmundston, Bathurst, Campbellton, Dieppe, and the Acadian Peninsula. The NBCCD was located in Fredericton.

The community college system was created in 1973 "with a mandate for post-secondary non-university education throughout the province" (NBCC, 2005, p. 5). It was a crown-owned corporation, structured as a Special Operating Agency and reporting directly to the Minister of the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL). These schools offer regional training and education, as well as providing industry credentials, certificates and diplomas. Additionally, the province operated a separate educational unit called the Maritime College of Forest Technology to support the

large forestry industry within the Province of New Brunswick, with one English-based campus in Fredericton and one French-based campus in Bathurst.

3.3.1.2 Universities.

At the same time, New Brunswick was home to multiple forms of universities, including publically chartered schools, privately chartered schools, and private for-profit schools. The four publically chartered universities included the University of New Brunswick (UNB), Mount Allison University (MTA), St. Thomas University (STU) and the Université de Moncton (UdeM). Both MTA and STU were single campus universities; UNB operated a main campus in Fredericton and a satellite campus in Saint John, while UdeM operated a main campus in Moncton with two satellite campuses in Edmundston and Shippagan respectively. The province contained three privately chartered universities that were affiliated with various religious organizations: Atlantic Baptist University[1], St. Stephen's University, and Kingswood University. Two private, for-profit universities operated in Fredericton: the University of Fredericton and Yorkville University.

3.3.2 A Province Focused on Change

On September 18, 2006, the people in the province of New Brunswick, Canada, participated in the 36th general provincial election. In that election, the Liberal Party won the majority of seats in the provincial legislature and Shawn Graham was elected as New

[1] The Atlantic Baptist University officially changed their name in 2009 to Crandell University.

Brunswick's 31st Premier. During the election, the Liberal Party ran on a platform they called a 'Charter for Change,' pledging to focus on the economy, the energy industry, and education, as well as an ambitious change initiative to put the province on the path to self-sufficiency by the year 2026 (Mandel, 2007). On their first day in office, this new government reduced provincial gasoline taxes, increased grants to first year university students, adjusted how student loans were calculated, and committed provincial dollars to the Saint John Harbour clean-up. Clearly, they were demonstrating their commitment to their core campaign issues.

One of the cornerstones of the Liberal Party's vision was their party platform document entitled *Our Action Plan to be Self-Sufficient in New Brunswick* (GNB, 2007a). Premier Graham saw his tenure as Premier, as well as the mandate received by the Liberal Party, as an opportunity to change the trajectory of the province. In their guiding document, he wrote, "New Brunswick is embarking on a period of transformational change that will lead us to self-sufficiency. We will become a 'have' province, creating more of our own wealth and providing our people with the opportunities they need to build a self-reliant future." (GNB, 2007a, p. 4). During their first budget released on March 13, 2007, Finance Minister Victor Boudreau wrote:

> "This, Mr. Speaker, is how a Liberal government takes action to meet its commitments. We will be a government that looks to the future and does what is right, not one that lives in the past." (2007, p. 5)

The 2007-2008 budget document, at 30 pages from cover to cover, mentioned how the government would focus on action, using the word 'transactional' two times, a version of

the word ‘transform’ (including ‘transformational’) six times, and the word ‘change’ 27 separate times, not including the appearances of these words in figure, graphics, or the final eight pages of appendices.

3.3.3 Commissioners

On January 19, 2007, Premier Shawn Graham appointed two commissioners, Dr. Rick Miner and Dr. Jacques L'Écuyer, to lead the Commission on Post-Secondary Education. The role of this commission was to review the current post-secondary systems in place within New Brunswick and develop a series of recommendations that would reform the system (Miner & L’Écuyer, 2007a, p. i). Dr. Miner was the President of Seneca College, a position he held since 2001 (Seneca College, 2010). Seneca College is one of eleven community colleges that form the membership of Polytechnics Canada. Before being appointed President at Seneca College, Dr. Miner served for seven years as Vice-President at the University of New Brunswick and, prior to that, held various leadership positions at Saint Mary’s University. His career in post-secondary education began with faculty positions at the University of New Brunswick, the University of Toronto and Saint Mary’s University. Dr. L'Écuyer had served on provincial post-secondary education commissions in the past as President of *Le commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* under the direction of the Quebec Government (Office of the Premier, 2007). Prior to this, he was the Vice-President of the Université du Québec and served as the President of the Council of Universities for the Government of Quebec. Dr. L'Écuyer had previously taught at the Université de Sherbrooke and was a tenured

professor at both the Université Laval and the Université de Montréal (Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial, 2013).

3.3.4 Advisory Panel

On March 22, 2007, the Government of New Brunswick issued a news release announcing the advisory panel that would be involved with the Commission on Post-Secondary Education. The members, as listed in the news release (Gauthier, 2007b), included:

1. Isabelle LeBlanc, youth entrepreneurship development officer, Enterprise Greater Moncton, Moncton, NB
2. Anne Marie Levi, First Nations teacher education program field coordinator, Mawiw Council/Mi'Kmaq-Maliseet Institute, Jardinville, NB
3. Denis Losier, CEO of Assumption Life, Moncton, NB
4. Jean-Yves Ouellette, vice-principal, administration/finance, Polyvalente-Cité-des-Jeunes-A-M-Sormany, Edmundston, NB
5. Léo-Paul Pinet, Executive Director, Centre de Bénévolat de la Péninsule Acadienne (CBPA) Inc., Caraquet, NB
6. Gerry Pond, chairman and CEO of Marine Partners Inc., Saint John, NB
7. Andrew Steeves, vice-president, ADI Ltd., Fredericton, NB
8. Elizabeth Weir, president and CEO, Efficiency NB, Saint John, NB

The advisory panel included members from areas such as youth advocacy, entrepreneurship, secondary school education, industry, and a provincial crown corporation. In the news release, Dr. L'Écuyer stated that "The broad diversity of our panel members provides a range of views that we can rely on to make the best recommendations for the future of the post-secondary education system in the province." (Gauthier, 2007b, p. 1). Yet no members of the advisory group were directly connected with the current New Brunswick post-secondary education system.

3.3.5 The Post-Secondary Education Commission

At the beginning of the PSEC's process, the commissioners were provided with a broad mandate from the Government of New Brunswick for recommendations to reform the current provincial post-secondary educational system. The mandate focused on six distinct themes: accessibility, relevancy, quality, competitiveness, collaboration, and affordability (Office of the Premier, 2007). Three distinct challenges within New Brunswick were identified, including the current existence of an extremely diverse educational system, a commitment to maintain equality in bilingual education in Canada's only officially bilingual province, and the ongoing decline in the provincial youth demographic (GNB, 2007b). Under the Liberal government's platform for a self-sufficient province by the year 2026, the Commission was specifically directed to focus on education as it related to career success:

> "The Commission will recommend ways to ensure that the largest possible number of New Brunswickers can be assured access to and the possibility to complete a quality post-secondary education. Our graduates should be able to compete and succeed in the workforce and contribute their full potential to society and the economy, and our institutions should be able to compete with the best from across Canada and around the world." (GNB, 2007b, p. 2)

The theme of becoming a 'have' province was highlighted in this tight focus on economic benefits, outcomes that flowed from education to the corresponding benefits of both society and the provincial economy. These directives also made an inference that the current educational system was not yet competitive on a national stage, making change a necessity.

3.3.6 Consultation

In an effort to fulfill their mandate, the Commission sought input from many people throughout the province, including educational institutions, faculties within post-secondary institutions, public and professional associations, community organizations, advocacy groups, and engaged citizens. Thirty-seven individuals and groups registered to give presentations to the commission during a series of public consultations; at these meetings, there was also a large volume of commentary made by unregistered participants who came either with prepared statements and/or questions for the commission. Fifty two private meetings were held with groups and individuals to gather both data and various perspectives on post-secondary education. In addition, one hundred and six formal briefs were submitted to the commission for review (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, pp. 53–56), all of which were posted on the Commission website for public access. The submitted written briefs break down in the following manner:

- 26 from provincial post-secondary institutions or departments within those institutions
- 21 from communities or community groups
- 15 from various industry or non-profit associations
- 11 from student organizations
- 10 from faculty organizations
- one from a library organization
- one from a public school system
- 21 submitted by individuals, including:
    - nine from community members
    - two from community groups
    - one from industry
    - nine from faculty (one of these documents was signed by 20 faculty members)

3.3.7 The Miner Report

On September 14, 2007, the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick released *Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches to Fulfill its Destiny* (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a). Within the report, the commissioners built an argument for change around the six themes established by Premier Graham as fundamental to the PSEC mandate: accessibility, relevancy, quality, competitiveness, collaboration, and affordability (Office of the Premier, 2007). In the section titled 'Organizing the System', the commissioners introduced the new transformational structure intended for some of the post-secondary schools in the province – the polytechnic institution. They described it as "a new kind of institution that is emerging in other parts of the world and which we now wish to introduce " (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 17) in New Brunswick.

The commissioners argued that the current structure of multiple community college and university satellite campuses in the province was inefficient, neither serving industry nor community economic requirements. The four main university campuses would be adjusted to focus on either liberal arts education or designed for comprehensive studies, including graduate degrees and research, while the satellite campuses would change. The UNB campus in Saint John would be merged with the NBCC campuses in Saint John and St. Andrews to form the Saint John Polytechnic. The Shippagan campus of UdeM would merge with the CCNB campuses in the Acadian Peninsula, Bathurst and Campbellton to form the Northeastern New Brunswick Polytechnic. The UdeM and CCNB campuses in Edmundston would merge to form the Northwestern New Brunswick

Polytechnic. The suggested new structure of public post-secondary education institutions in New Brunswick was summarized as follows (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 273):

1) Two comprehensive universities:
   a) Université de Moncton in Moncton
   b) University of New Brunswick in Fredericton

2) Two liberal arts universities:
   a) St. Thomas University in Fredericton
   b) Mount Allison University in Sackville

3) One college system with four campuses (Moncton, Miramichi, Fredericton, and Dieppe)

4) Three polytechnic institutions:
   a) The Saint John Polytechnic in Saint John with a campus in St. Andrews
   b) The Northeastern Polytechnic in Shippagan with campuses in Bathurst and Campbellton
   c) The Northwestern Polytechnic in Edmundston

3.3.8 Reaction

Although the Miner Report was officially released on September 14, 2007, the content of the report, including the desire to introduce the polytechnic institution as a third educational model, was leaked to the press earlier that month (MacKinnon, 2007a). This began a period of disruption for many stakeholders in the New Brunswick post-secondary education system, ranging from faculty, students and university leadership to industry members, government officials and the local communities. Numerous editorial articles appeared in provincial newspapers the day before the release of the Miner Report. Three days after the release of the Miner Report, over 1,700 demonstrators in Saint John marched through the city's core, gathering in front of the office of Dr. Ed Doherty, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL), in protest (Davis,

2007b). Four days later, the Vice-President of UNB's student government presented Minister Doherty with over 2,000 signed postcards opposed to the prospect of UNBSJ becoming a polytechnical institution ("Students give 2,000 postcards," 2007). In the seven days following the release of the Miner Report, between September 14th and 20th, 68 articles and editorials were printed about the Commission's report just within the newspapers in New Brunswick; in the following 10 weeks, another 128 articles and editorials appears in provincial papers.

3.3.9 The Action Plan

In the last quarter of 2007, the provincial government decided to make a political move and established what was known simply as 'The Working Group'. The Working Group's membership was composed of eight individuals representing the current post-secondary education system in New Brunswick (The Working Group on PSE-NB, 2008):

1. Nora Kelly, Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (Chair)
2. Dr. Robert Campbell, President and Vice-Chancellor, Mount Allison University
3. Richard Doiron, Directeur, CCNB campus d'Edmundston
4. Thérèse Finn-McGraw, Directrice, CCNB campus de la Péninsule Acadienne
5. Yvon Fontaine, Recteur et vice-chancelier, Université de Moncton
6. Dr. Michael W. Higgins, President and Vice-Chancellor, St. Thomas University
7. Peter McGill, Principal, NBCC Saint John Campus
8. Dr. John D. McLaughlin, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of New Brunswick

On this new committee, all four universities held a position, while CCNB had two seats and NBCC had one. The Working Group was chaired by Nora Kelly, the Deputy Minister

of PETL. The mandate of the Working Group was "to review the Commission on Post-Secondary Education report *Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches to Fulfill Its Destiny* to make recommendations and provide an implementation plan to government on the transformation of the New Brunswick post-secondary education system" (The Working Group on PSE-NB, 2008, p. 1). While the Working Group met to process the Miner Report and produce recommendations that would be more politically palatable, Premier Graham announced that the idea of establishing polytechnical institutions, at least in name, was no longer on the table for discussion (Robichaud, 2008a).

The Working Group submitted their recommendations to the government in May 2008. The following month, the government released *Be inspired. Be ready. Be Better. The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick* (2008) (known as 'The Action Plan' hereafter), a working document to implement changes to post-secondary education in the province. The Action Plan ignored the core recommendation of the Miner Report to establish three polytechnic institutions throughout the province; instead, the report focused on "creating a modern, autonomous community college system" and "increasing collaboration and cooperation between New Brunswick universities" (The Working Group on PSE-NB, 2008, p. 8).

3.4 Exploration of Plausible Meaning Construction

The release of the Miner Report shocked many people in the province in regards to the direction of post-secondary education. Prior to September 2007, the PSEC was

following the mandate established by the provincial government and consulted with hundreds of individuals, groups and organizations with vested interests in education and training. These ideas were being explored only at the level of informal discussions. However, the official recommendations contained within the Miner Report, to transform three satellite university campuses and five community college campuses into polytechnic institutions, caused a shock to established plausible meanings. In turn, that led to a strong backlash and a complicated undertaking of sensemaking.

3.5 Chapter Summary

The focus of this thesis centres on how meanings are constructed and become accepted as plausible. I intend to explore not just the value of plausible meanings but also the processes by which accounts become plausible, particularly through language use. I contend that studying language acts can help uncover contextual positioning in which meanings are deemed plausible. This is the focal point of my study over the next chapters, exploring how various stakeholders, including students, faculty, administration, and community members, faced the shock of the proposed change to their institution and how they made sense of it as an implausible development.

This chapter has presented how a single case study is a valuable tool through which to explore the rich details of a specific event, particularly when it concerns matters of sensemaking process. The case study method has been presented, noting that case studies are frequently rich in data, particularly around stories and language use. This

particular case of change was shown to be important, highlighting the post-secondary educational reform efforts of 2007, a goal outlined in the 2006 provincial election platform of the Liberal Party, through the activities of the Post Secondary Education Commission in 2007, to the governmental reaction and adjustments, ending in June 2008. The following chapter focuses on the methodological choices made in exploring those expressions made surrounding the release of the Miner Report.

The case brings together a location of study; the reactions, explanations, and expressions made by people involved in or impacted by the change process become the 'data' of meaning creation. Through case studies, Stake contends that researchers can observe, analyse and interpret vicariously through the narrative descriptions found within the case data (2005). These 'narrative descriptions', or expressed reactions to changes in post-secondary education, were captured in open documents, newspaper articles and letters to the editors, all exposed in a public forum. The development and release of the Miner Report served as the starting shock in this research; however, it is the expressions made prior to and following the release of the Miner Report, particularly around the meanings found within enacted language where rich detail was unearthed. The value of these expressions in this case study will come to the forefront in Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter Four – Methodology

> "Whenever an expectation is disconfirmed, some kind of ongoing activity is interrupted. Thus to understand sensemaking is also to understand how people cope with interruptions.." (Weick, 1995, p. 5)

4.1 Introduction

The prior chapter focused on examining shocks in meaning that emanated from a single case study of proposed post-secondary education reform. The case study of post-secondary educational change is put forward as the locus of experiences and information to be studied, one that provides a rich setting in which people are impacted, take actions and tell stories within their lived worlds. As someone who was close to the events of this case, I found the disruption to be confusing and exclamations of multiple plausible meanings that occurred in 2007 to be intriguing. As a researcher, I believe this case provides insight into how plausible sense comes into being. The method of the case study aligns well with how people both make and communicate sense that is functionally plausible. Additionally, the case itself provides an episode of interest to understand events and expressions in an intrinsic manner, yet also serves to push forward and explore a particular line(s) of theory at an instrumental level (Stake, 1994).

Within this case, the events influencing the creation of meanings by stakeholders and the process of how plausible sense is reached will be pursued. The analysis will centre on the sensemaking process while the method of textual analysis will be used to surface linguistic expressions that will be explored through a) various properties of sensemaking and b) linguistic theory.

4.2 Case Study Data

4.2.1 Expressions as Texts

The data collected for this study comes in two forms: a) reports and briefs produced by PSEC authors, government representatives, and other involved members of the educational community, and b) print news articles that allow for access to directly attributable expressions made by impacted parties both prior to and following the release of the PSEC report. These serve as the data or 'texts', of captured meaning(s) found within language choices made by stakeholders.

At the centre of this case is the PSEC report, *Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches to Fulfill its Destiny* (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007). The prior chapter outlined the events within case study from the New Brunswick provincial election in September 2006 to the release of *Be Inspired. Be Ready. Be Better. The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick* (The Working Group on PSE-NB, 2008) in May 2008. All reports and briefs were made accessible to the public by the Government of New Brunswick. However, not every stakeholder had the opportunity to write a report or file a brief; some simply reacted in public forums to circumstances of implausibility that stemmed from the changes they were facing. These expressions were snapshots made by particular people at particular times and situated in particular places. They have value here because they were written down, can be attributed to a particular

author and were published by journalists in newspaper articles throughout the duration of the case.

Journalists were embedded within these events, making notes, gathering direct quotes and engaging with individuals. The danger of using accounts published in the media is that there exists the potential for creative interpretations and dramatic presentations made by journalists when telling their version of a story for publication (O'Connell & Mills, 2003). From these captured accounts, they made choices about what to include, and possibly exclude, in order to craft their articles. In an effort to mitigate these journalist representations of the meanings around this event and what a particular individual might have 'meant' when they made a public expression, I focused specifically on direct quotes within news stories, expressions made by stakeholders to whom I could specifically attribute the expressions. It is through these captured accounts that I was able to 'hear' the expressions made by particular stakeholders in context. For example, quotes made by students standing in the streets outside the PETL Minister's office as they were protesting the proposed changes put forth in the Miner Report became much richer when reviewed in the context that they were originally made. By focusing solely on speech acts that can be attributed to particular stakeholders, I attempt to focus on the sensemaking expressions of those in the act of making sense while minimizing the potential influence of journalists on the expressed meanings made in context by stakeholders. The choice to use these captured accounts provides direct access to time-specific events and expressions that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

4.2.2 Collection of Accounts

Prior to beginning my data search, I requested the assistance of a nationally recognized media research professional. Although access to print media databases were available to me through my university, I felt that having multiple people conducting similar searches for articles on the post-secondary education reform case would reduce the risk that articles would be missed by a single person. After discussing my area of interest and data needs, the external researcher conducted her own search of archived Canadian print media. When she was satisfied that she had completed a thorough search, I was presented with a database listing all articles and documents found. I left her list sealed until I completed my own search so as not to be influenced by her results; I continued my search until I felt it was exhaustive. At that point, I compiled the two lists into a single news database, removing duplicate entries.

The newspapers and/or sources of articles incorporated in this study include the Canadian Press, the Daily Gleaner, the Globe and Mail, the Telegraph-Journal, The Times-Transcript, and the Toronto Star. During the screening of media articles, it became apparent that the voices of students appeared infrequently. To ensure that I had captured as many newspaper articles containing the perspectives of students as possible, I manually reviewed hard copies of student newspapers held in the archives at the University of New Brunswick written during the school year 2007-2008. The newspapers included The Brunswickian (University of New Brunswick), The Baron (University of New Brunswick, Saint John) and The Aquinian (St. Thomas University).

The search for relevant content began with an initial exploration using a restricted date range of two weeks in September 2007 immediately following the release of the Miner Report. This was done in order to identify recurrent key words included in newspaper content focused on the Miner report. To capture as many newspaper articles as possible, the date range was then opened up to a three-year period, starting on January 1, 2006 and ending on December 31, 2008. This three-year period was established as the initial search parameters for news articles, adding six months of potential news stories prior to the election of the Liberal Party in 2006 and after the release of The Action Plan in 2008. As noted in the prior chapter, the intentions of the Liberal Party appear clear in the last quarter of 2006; however, provincial elections surface a large number of issues, and it appears that only after the formation of the PSEC did the issue of educational reform rise in prominence within public conversation.

The first round of data collection revealed that time periods outside of the date range from January 2007 to June 2008 provided minimal valuable media coverage on post-secondary education reform information. My data reflected overt expressions made around this event over a linear period of time; because of this, I was able to bracket the end of my data collection at the point in which further searches failed to yield results, mimicking the concept of theoretical saturation that occurs with interview accounts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The event(s) that created an initially large number of news articles ceased to be 'news worthy'. After July 12, 2008, news articles discovered in searches failed to further the discussion surrounding the Miner Report and subsequent Action Plan.

To establish a collection of search terms, I selected the daily newspapers published in the three largest cities in New Brunswick between Saturday, September 15, 2007 and Friday, September 28, 2007: the Telegraph Journal in Saint John, The Daily Gleaner in Fredericton, and the Times & Transcript in Moncton. The full newspapers were reviewed and articles were selected for inclusion if they related to or commented upon post-secondary educational reform. A collection of key words was developed from these articles that could be applied to an online database search. Words such as 'post secondary' and the variants (postsecondary, post-secondary) were initially used to cast a wide net on content; from this, other terms emerged, including university, universities, college, colleges, polytech, polytechnic, polytechnical, Miner, PSE, education, New Brunswick and UNBSJ. Key words were used both independently and in combination to garner the largest possible collection of potential mentions in the Canadian media. Duplicate articles written by the same journalist but reprinted in multiple newspapers were excluded.

My list was then compared to the external researcher's database. A high level of overlap was found between lists and any gaps between lists were reviewed for relevance. In all, 257 articles were included. By limiting the inclusion of data to the case study issues surrounding post-secondary educational reform and the shock stemming from the Miner Report, the first news article to be included in the data set was printed on January 19, 2007, the date the Liberal Government of New Brunswick named the members of the PSEC. The inclusion of student newspapers increased the number of articles included in

the case data by 27. The remaining written artefacts included eight reports written by the Government of New Brunswick, three documents produced by the PSEC and 11 reports summarizing the contributions of the public consultations that were conducted in April and May of 2007. All 306 documents selected for examination were included in the overall dataset. During the examination of this data, some documents yielded little in the way of directly attributable expressions and failed to be useful while other documents were rich with directly attributable expressions.

4.2.3 Coding and Organizing

In this research study, the quest is to understand how people make sense in their lived worlds (Weick, 2001b), with events happening in a particular sequence then being made sense of retrospectively following each sequential event. It follows that the process of analysis was not a straightforward one, even though the data collected around the change process was reviewed in a chronological manner. Exploring the impacts that occurred following the disruptive events of the Miner Report was both nuanced and complex. I began by following the flow of events in a traditional story-telling fashion: on this date, this happened, followed by a series of expressed comments on the following date, and so forth. This chronological ordering followed the experiences of individuals involved in this change situation as closely as possible to the ways in which they experienced them. Events unfolded in a linear manner; for example, the protests in the streets of Saint John by students and faculty members only occurred after the release of the Miner Report.

All of the documents were imported into the qualitative software system NVivo v.10. This particular software system was selected because it was at hand and provided the ability to contain multiple forms of print media. The benefit of using this software is that it allowed me to gather related information into one place. For example, while reviewing the data in an iterative manner, I could filter all expressions by the position of the person making the expression (PSEC author, Government representative, student, etc…), and then return to each of these sub-groupings at a later time for more in-depth review. Gathering related information into various sub-groups helped to provide focus on both denotative meanings with particular expressions and the relative position of the speaker. The software menu system refers to these sub-groupings simply as 'nodes'. Organizing and arranging this large volume of documents proved challenging and it was a task which a qualitative software program is well suited to manage (Becker, Gordon, & LeBailly, 1984). The software itself was not used to assist in the analysis of data in any way. The task of analysis was completed through continual deep reading of the organized information, making observations about expression, and questioning the data through the lens of sensemaking.

An initial review was made using all of the media articles included in the data from the two weeks in September of 2007 directly following the release of the Miner Report; this month had the highest number of data articles of any single month within the case study. The data was reviewed in an iterative manner in order to a) recognize any initial, distinctive stories, b) identify and extract key stakeholder groups within which

unique contexts were apparent, and c) begin constructing a list of the frequently used language that was potentially enacted with different meanings.

After multiple readings, the data was coded as patterns were noticed and identified (Berg, 1998). First, statements and expression made by various stakeholders were highlighted. In an iterative manner, these expressions were then coded by stakeholder groups as a way to bring together voice and meaning, as well as to understand both their reactions to the change stimulated by the Miner Report and their contextual positioning. These sub-groupings, or 'nodes', included the PSEC authors, New Brunswick government officials, educators, students, and university leadership. These groups uttered very distinct meanings and expressions around the idea of what constitutes post-secondary educational institutions. As stakeholder groups emerged from the initial screening of the data, I returned to the chronological beginning of the available texts and began coding them into nodes by stakeholder. The primary goal was to organize the data by social groups to surface socially negotiated networks or contexts.

Additionally, the data was coded into nodes around PSE institutions labels, including colleges, universities, and polytechnic institutions, plus a catch-all node for general references to post-secondary institutions. This second filter pinpointed language symbols that were used frequently around the change event, highlighting the same language signs being enacted in distinctly different ways. From the large quantity of articles and reports in this collection, I proceeded to focus coding only on expressions that could be directly attributed to actors that were impacted by the proposed PSEC

changes, whether these expressions were written or captured in speech by journalists. This capturing of direct expressions occurred simultaneously while engaged in coding; this allowed expressions around sense to be identified. Through the examination of the same language used by different stakeholders within various contexts, I found that the speech acts themselves revealed different meanings being enacted within the same words, part of the development of functionally plausible meaning. These expressions appear in Chapter 5, each identifying aspects of meanings for stakeholders and around different post-secondary education models.

For example, on September 7, 2007, B.J. MacKinnon published an article in the Telegraph Journal capturing the sentiment of the President of UNB, John McLaughlin. In her article, she wrote the following: "McLaughlin contends that the study of liberal arts is at the "heart and soul of a modern education." This, despite the fact that he's an engineer and past president of the Canadian Academy of Engineering." (2007a, p. C1). This whole quote was coded under the node of university leadership. However, only the first sentence where McLaughlin calls liberal arts education the heart and soul of a modern education can be attributed back to an impacted stakeholder and his expressions of sense. This short piece on the heart and soul of education was coded under the institutional label of 'university' as McLaughlin's expression revealed a piece of how he was enacting meaning within a language symbol. The second sentence juxtaposing McLaughlin's stance on liberal arts despite his history as an engineer is part of MacKinnon's journalistic license to make the story more interesting and salient to her readers; it is

writing trade craft. For this case study, I was less interested in journalistic exposition and chose to focus on the direct expressions of the PSE stakeholders.

By overlaying the contextual grouping expressed through narratives with the expressed meanings found within specific language signs, I hoped to surface contextualized meanings at a level of detail worthy for comparison. Once completed, the linguistic expressions found within the data were ready to be explored through the process of sensemaking and analyzed textually within the properties of sensemaking and linguistic theory.

4.3 **Framework of Analysis**

Throughout this work, sensemaking serves as the underpinning process used to dig deeper into the development of plausible meanings. The goal is to understand what constitutes a plausible account and how those accounts are crafted, particularly when one is faced with an event or moment of implausibility. When exploring how plausible meanings are constructed, events cannot be explained simply by stating that something appears to be plausible; questions arise about the *nature* of plausibility itself, how other properties influence an outcome deemed to be good enough to move forward, and how plausible meanings are communicated. By analyzing expressions and surfacing the sensemaking ingredients at play, we gain a glimpse into how functionally plausible meanings are developed through language uses and are informed by the other properties of sensemaking.

Delving into a sensemaking process of human understanding, interpretation and invention of meanings has the potential to be muddy. Weick (1995) acknowledges that humans live in an ambiguous state and in order to understand how humans make sense of the world around them, researchers must embrace some messiness. By drawing upon the process of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005), I attempt to contain some of the messiness for examination by applying Weick's sensemaking process as signposts: the organizing of flux, noticing and bracketing, labeling, retrospection, making presumptions, social factors, being action oriented, and organizing through communication. Some of these signposts in the sensemaking process are reiterations of individual sensemaking properties, blurring lines between a process of how sense is made and what sense is composed from. Three areas emerge across these lines: retrospection, social and enactment. Each of these three areas will be addressed as properties within the context of particular meaning creation acts.

By including only these three areas within the method of analysis and not the overall framework, the sensemaking process can be condensed into five items that a) maximize the ability to analyze the data with sensemaking properties and b) centre directly on the value of language during the act of plausible meaning development and expression. As such, the framework that will be applied during analysis is:

1. Organizing of flux
2. Noticing and bracketing
3. Labeling
4. Making presumptions
5. Organizing through communication

The data found in expressions captured in either written or verbal forms will be treated as texts. Although texts could be analyzed in great deal through each of the seven properties of sensemaking, that is not the goal in this work. Instead, the properties will be used to inform how plausible meaning comes to be. By surfacing how meanings are informed by the properties of sensemaking and constructed within language, the ways in which plausible meanings are constructed should be uncovered. The quest here focuses on process and development, not a justification of any one version of possible truths. What will be intriguing throughout the case analysis is not whose version of plausible meanings might be accurate but rather whose versions survive and endure.

4.4 Method of Analysis

This case study is grounded in texts, expressions made by key stakeholders within the PSE events in New Brunswick. My analysis positions these texts within the five-point sensemaking process that includes: organizing flux, noticing and bracketing, labeling, making presumptions, and organizing through communication. In each of these areas, I explore accounts made by stakeholders, accounts that reveal the presence of plausibility or implausibility as informed by the other properties of sensemaking and as expressed through language use. In this analysis, the process of how people make sense is as valuable as the property components; that is, the recipe is as interesting as the ingredients. The focus herein will be on process.

In every text selected for analysis, all of the sensemaking properties may not be explicitly identifiable. In some cases, certain texts may privilege a particular expression of identity construction, while other texts might reveal the ongoing nature of sensemaking. In each case, language use and enacted meanings will be explored to increase our understanding of how plausible meanings come to be. This analysis begins with a process followed by people to make sense. The properties that inform meaning within expressions are explored; however, the properties do not supersede the process in this analysis. The analysis and discussion in Chapter Five focuses predominately on the sensemaking process; Chapter Six shifts to the various properties at play along with an interrogation between intra- and inter-organizational sensemaking. Both chapters highlight how language is used as a tool for meaning construction.

4.4.1 Textual Analysis

The term 'text' is defined quite simply as "something that we make meaning from" (McKee, 2003, p. 4), frequently used to encompass something from which an interpretation is made. This might include print material, visual images and audio content. The term 'text' refers to something from which meaning can be produced. According to McKee, "We use the word 'text' because it has particular implications. There are no two exact synonyms in the English language – words always have slightly different meanings and connotations." (2003, p. 4). The term 'text' can encompass multiple forms of input, from written and spoken words to visual stimuli (McKee, 2003). I am intentionally using the 'text' as the *something* that I am examining to *interpret*

meaning in specific words and their application in expressions. I choose to tighten the focus and analyse word choices; as McKee explained when describing his techniques of textual analysis, "if you look at how people use the word… you see that they in fact use it to mean…" (2003, p. 17).

This research works to uncover shifts in meanings and attempts "to understand the likely interpretations of texts made by people who consume them" (McKee, 2003, p. 2), looking at socially constructed 'facts' that "are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 58). Textual analysis was chosen as a way to uncover how different meanings were enacted by an author and expressed through identical language signs, all while remaining plausible to the author. The focus was to unpack expressions, the 'text' provided by various stakeholders of their language acts, through an iterative process of noticing and identifying (Berg, 1998). Textual analysis is a technique that focuses on uncovering evidence of expressed meaning and, through this evidence, can provide insight into the process of creation (McKee, 2003). According to McKee, "we analyze texts using a form of 'forensic' analysis - treating them (texts) like clues (or 'traces') of how people have made sense of the world" (2003, p. 63).

4.4.2 Iterative Movement

Examining the enactment of meaning within expressions from the data was an iterative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss believed that "the adequacy of a theory… cannot be divorced from the process by which it is generated" (1967, p. 5).

The case study of post-secondary educational reform provides a rich opportunity to investigate shock in terms of meaning and plausible meaning (re)constitution through language acts and linguistic theory within sensemaking. Using McKee's version of textual analysis, I attempt to understand the "most likely interpretations" (2003, p. 2) of meaning as expressed by various sensemakers involved in or impacted by the Miner Report. We can observe how words are important to people, in this case words surrounding changes to post-secondary systems, and how people choose to use words for their own purposes and in their own ways.

Two examples that were coded from the data as expressed meanings demonstrate some of the malleability of language symbols, in this case around the invested meanings within a polytechnic. Immediately following the release of the Miner Report, Rick Miner was quoted as saying, "A polytechnic will mean students can benefit from the hands-on approach of colleges and the theory-approach of universities." (Dunville, 2007a, p. A1). This expression reveals some of the meaning being enacted by Miner, that a polytechnic is an improved combination of two historic institutional styles with greater benefit than either of the older styles. At the very same point in time, Trevor Holder, the former UNBSJ Student Council President stated, "The future of our young people to have access to a liberal arts education would be gravely at stake." (MacKinnon, 2007b, p. C3). For Holder, the language symbol 'polytechnic' is a lesser or weaker structure without the inclusion of a liberal arts focus. Both Miner and Holder are attempting to enact the language symbol 'polytechnic' with a particular meaning, a meaning that can be surfaced through a textual analysis of their expressions.

Discovered meanings should reveal acts of will made by the author and their choices in the creation of a plausible meaning, whether this is reinforcing a habituated meaning or creating one that is novel. By accepting that multiple meanings could exist simultaneously, I embrace Weick's notion of messiness while delving into the nature of sensemaking as a process through which the sensemaker integrates new events into a plot that then become understandable in relations to their ongoing context (1995).

4.4.3 Sensemaking Properties

Working within the process of sensemaking noted above, I draw upon the properties of sensemaking to inform the analysis of the text. This is done in an effort to draw out and highlight how plausible meaning is constructed. Expressing simply that a meaning is 'plausible' to the sensemaker is not sufficient; the notions of when a particular meaning is accepted as plausible, which sensemaking properties emerge to inform plausible meaning, and how is it expressed within a social environment all need to be explored. Contextual influences and constraints are fundamental to this ongoing examination and are frequently engaged through the study.

There are a number of core questions that align well with the properties outlined by Weick. Some of these include investigating which cues get extracted and surfaced by particular sensemakers and how those cues are enacted in an ongoing process of meaning development. Identity issues should prove valuable in uncovering which cues are selected

and how this relates back upon the constructed identity of the sensemaker. The social property will assist is situating the influences of negotiated contexts within which sensemaking is embedded. For this study, the clues found within the text can be interrogated through sensemaking properties that culminate in a plausible meaning expressed within a social environment to the public. It is predicted that multiple plausible meanings or 'interpretations' will be found to exist within enacted language, positioning this study in an area previously unexplored.

4.4.4 Language

Language is our medium of communication; making expressions puts language into action. The teller crafts or enacts through language what Saussure calls "an individual act of the will and the intelligence" made by the author (1972, p. 14). The choices made by the teller carry particular meanings as the teller attempts to create a plausible concept within their socially negotiated context.

During times without disruption, meanings are frequently just replications of past understandings. Things just make sense and people work on the level of habit and routine. There is no impetus to question an establishing meaning, only to continue to reaffirm what has already been accepted (Unger, 1987). As an example, before the appearance of the Miner Report, the university community was held together by various overlapping meanings of what was meant by 'university'. The language sign employed in the description of the institution was common. It was good enough to continue

unchallenged; people simply called the institution a ‘university’ regardless of how you interacted with it as a student, faculty member or government agency.

Expressions are ways that language is put into practice outside of the formal rule structures that exist. As presented in Chapter Two, langue structures the formal rules of languageand symbols. Parole, or enacted language, is where speakers make choices to embed a particular meaning into expressions (Saussure, 1972). Prior to the point when language is put into action, language signs hold possibilities in meaning. This potential is removed once language is activated and made explicit in acts of speech. These expressions have also been called enunciations (Ermarth, 2000), the moments of choice in meaning made at the point of putting language into action where the possibilities of multiple meanings become constrained into a single meaning (signified) that will be attached to a language symbol (signifier).

4.4.5 Language as Text

The common element in all of these documents is an expression, an act of language in action made within a social context and invested meaning that can be attributed back to a particular author at a particular time. These expressions form the texts to be analyzed. By text, we mean “constructed representations of the world based on complex sets of conventions” (Allen, 1987, p. 5); in this case the language and embedded meanings used during a time of change. Narratives and stories are forms of expression. They are crafted out of language within which we find the development of characters by

the participant ‘authors’ and the invention of plot(s) out of a sequences of events, all used to help structure the tellers’ understanding of what has happened and why. Texts exposing narratives bring into focus the influence of the social environment – the impact of place, space and intent upon people making expressions, or what Blackler referred to as “the imaginative schemas of participants” (1992, p. 279). By looking at stories, we come to understand where people are situated when they create meanings and the influences which help to mold those meanings.

4.4.6 Enacted Language

Linguistic expressions, particularly words that surfaced during the interpretation and speech acts during the events of the case study (McKee, 2003), were analyzed from a textual perspective. The goal was to explore the emergent enactments of meaning found within language expressions; said in another way, I was looking to see where different significations around the same language signs happened. Colloquially, the investigation at this micro level was, “what did that person mean when they said XYZ in a particular context at a particular time?” To conduct this analysis, I revisited the text frequently, attempting to identify what meanings were being enacted, when alternate meanings were offered, how they were presented and who was authoring the meaning.

Of particular interest are the enactments of specific words and terms used within the post-secondary education change, including ‘university’, ‘polytechnic’, and ‘community college’. It is here that the disruption between the language symbol being

used and the intended meaning embedded within that symbol, enacted by an author when used within a particular situation, may be revealed. As someone who was in New Brunswick during this change initiative, it was curious to watch individuals use the same terms in their expressions while obviously meaning very different things when they used them.

Textual analysis should interrogate the enactment of language and meaning; this aligns well with Weick's belief that the act of sensemaking and the issues around plausible meaning development occur frequently during times of ambiguity when people "are confused by too many interpretations" (1995, p. 91). An exploration of expressions using textual analysis should help reveal meaning choices made by particular speakers and expose sensemaking properties at work.

4.4.7 Making Sense of the Language in 'Texts'

When exploring this case study, I chose to focus specifically on expressions, both speech acts and written accounts, made by various stakeholders directly involved in and/or impacted by the proposed changes to post-secondary education. Drawing upon textual analysis aligned well with the quest to better understand the process of plausible meaning construction, while focusing on language and particular word usage aligned well with the properties of sensemaking: Weick (1995) explored how people draw on cues to help move through the unknown, enacting meaning from them; McKee (2003) described techniques focusing on how people use words with intended meanings.

By using expressions made by individuals embedded within an ongoing event, we should be able to see contextual pressures that help form meanings. For example, in March 2007, Miner and L'Écuyer stated that the post-secondary education system in New Brunswick faced many challenges, and "these challenges demand some bold new directions in post- secondary education. More of the same is simply not an acceptable option; it offers only the prospect of decline." (Casey, 2007a, p. A1). This expression is a cue identifying the contextual model within which the PSE commissioners are working.

Linguistic expressions provide access to expressions of meaning made within both a particular time and a particular context. There is an opportunity to pursue the question, 'what did you mean when you said that specific word or phrase at that specific time?' either through overt statements or implication. For example, two professors from the University of New Brunswick were captured stating that, for them, a 'university' was the "central institution devoted to the fostering of intellectual rationality" (Clow & Doran, 2007, p. D9). Yet, Miner stated that only "polytechnic institutions will offer the advantages of being plugged into the needs of students, surrounding communities, and cutting edge technology" (Robichaud, 2007b, p. A13), clearly implying that a 'university' did none of these things. Each statement had a particular meaning in space and place.

Additionally, these same expressions should highlight how the various properties of sensemaking come together in an interdependent way to support the plausible construction of meaning(s). Individual identity constructions made through extracted cues

should appear within the socially negotiated environment in which the sensemaker is situated. Each expression reveals a different yet plausible meaning for the author within their situated context, exposing a relationship between enacted language and the properties of sensemaking in the process that people work through when constructing plausible meanings.

4.5 Closing Summary

This chapter has presented the case study of post-secondary educational reform as the location of study, identifying which data in particular was collected for examination in the sensemaking process. As with all research studies, choices were made regarding the inclusion of data, choices that provide insight while also having limitations. It is impossible to move back in time to capture expressions made *in situ* in this case study. The 'clues' made available through official reports, briefs, and directly attributable expressions within news articles serve as captured accounts in the process of meaning creation. The method of analysis of this data was presented, using the process of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) as a framework in which texts are analyzed through both sensemaking properties and linguistic theory.

The following chapter pushes forward in the pursuit of understanding around the construction of plausible meanings by drawing texts from throughout the case study, treating those texts forensically like clues left behind by sensemaking that happened in the moment of change, and showing how stakeholders worked through from implausible

meanings to plausible meanings. The over-arching focus of the next chapter will be the five-point process of sensemaking, in which stakeholder expressions will be broken apart for analysis. The clues of the text will be analyzed for meanings and those meanings will be informed by various sensemaking properties in action.

Chapter Five

> "What makes something plausible depends on the context in which a sensemaking 'story' is being told or made sense of. A good story is the essence of plausibility, the medium through which plausibility is created." (Helms Mills, 2003, p. 67)

5.1 Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to better understand how meanings are constructed, accepted and expressed as functionally plausible. To do this, I have taken up a three-point framework that a) explores sensemaking as a process of meaning construction, b) unpacks the constitutive sensemaking properties employed by sensemakers as they build and negotiate acceptable meanings, and c) studies how enacted language influences the crafting and expression of meanings. This chapter focuses primarily on the opening portion of this framework, moving into the case study data while examining the process of sensemaking as laid out by Weick et al. (2005). However, the perspective of sensemaking is difficult to explore in isolated categories, as processes in one area and constitutive properties in another; they occur simultaneously, overlapping and blending. Appreciating this, the roles of various properties and language are acknowledged in this chapter but are not the primary focus.

Within each step of the sensemaking process, meaning creation will be uncovered for each stakeholder group through their expressions. These expressions are treated as textual data and help to reveal intra-organizational sensemaking; the constructed meanings for various stakeholders are exposed through their linguistic expressions. By

focusing specifically on process in this chapter, I work to isolate how various stakeholders construct meanings from their own perspective. Continuing the metaphor introduced in an earlier chapter, the sensemaking process serves as a recipe of construction while the sensemaking properties constitute ingredients; should sensemakers rely upon various properties in different proportions, their outcomes could differ even while the process remains intact. Although this might be a nuanced difference, it is one that reframes this sensemaking examination to look at both *what* is used to make sense and *how* sense is arrived at. The properties, as ingredients, will be the focus of the next chapter.

Three Point Framework		
Sensemaking as Process	Constitutive Elements of Sensemaking	Communication via Language
• **Organizing flux** • **Noticing and bracketing** • **Labeling** • **Retrospection** • **Making presumptions** • **Social factors** • **Being action oriented** • **Organizing through communication**	• Identity construction • Retrospective • Enactive of sensible environments • Social • Ongoing • Focus on extracted cues	• Langue • Parole

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 Textual Data

As previously noted, the data of this case study are expressions found in both written reports and/or published as direct quotes that can be attributed back to a particular speaker in context. These expressions were printed in newspapers articles, government reports or support documents submitted to public consultation meetings. All of these expressions were then treated as texts. I intentionally use the term ‘text’ here as the

something that I am examining to *interpret* meaning in specific words and their application in speech acts within context. According to Scott, textual analysis is a good method of analysis because it strongly relates to semiotic inquiry and, as researchers, "we must comprehend a text by understanding the frame of reference from which it was produced" (Scott, 2006, p. 297). I choose to tighten the focus of my analysis down to specific word choices and enactments of meaning as revealed in the expressions made by stakeholders in an attempt to see how the process of sensemaking was operating.

Textual analysis was chosen to uncover meanings embedded within expressions at the micro level of the actual words used in context, with the texts serving as "clues (or 'traces') of how people have made sense of the world" (McKee, 2003, p. 63). Sensemakers maintain a relationship with the subject matter of the text both as consumers of the subject matter as well as the co-authors of it (Mangham & Pye, 1991). Sensemaking properties and language will be drawn out to unpack various texts as they inform the construction of meaning(s) in an intertwined manner (1995). Accepting that plausible meaning is grounded in the perspective of the person making sense, I interrogate texts in order to gain access into both the actor's point of view and the meanings embedded and expressed within their language choices. For example, in describing benefits of the polytechnic institution, Rick Miner was simultaneously expressing his constructed meaning in the text for the current university structure:

> "Unlike universities, which are criticized for being bogged down in the political quicksand that surrounds massive boards of governors and untouchable, tenured faculty, and safe from the slow government gears that now control the community college system, the polytechnic is seen as

> a way to respond most quickly to industry's needs, according to the commission." (Robichaud, 2007c, p. A1)

5.2.2 Language Acts

I have chosen to carefully focus on the expressions and their enacted meanings, supporting the position that words themselves don't actually have a singular meaning; rather, they have *meanings* or connotations that are mutable, fluid and continually negotiated, grounded in situational constraints and negotiated between people within social systems (Gioia, 2003). Expressed meanings are formed as a combination of what is explicitly said, what is implied by speakers through descriptive phrasing, comparisons against espoused meanings made by others and completed by omissions. Expressions, what some refer to as 'speech acts' (Saussure, 1972) (but what I include here as both written and spoken acts), are the way that language is used in practice, outside of the formal rule structures that exist. In linguistic theory, language signs consist of signifiers, or hollow symbol forms, that are attached to particular meaning(s), or the signified portion of the sign. Prior to the point when language is put into action, language signs hold potential multiple meanings; this potential is removed once language is activated and a singular meaning is made explicit in the act of expression.

Through the expressions made by a speaker within context, differing significations, or meanings, around the same language sign emerge. I attempt to understand what McKee called "most likely interpretations" (2003, p. 2), meanings created through a process of sensemaking, and uncover what is happening in action while

acknowledging the double-edged sword of messiness in discovery and richness in understanding (Weick, 1995). To examine *how* meaning(s) are invested into speech acts by speakers, it is necessary to appreciate *where* that language is being put into use (context) and by *whom* (speaker). During the shock and loss of meaning found within this case study, meanings were enacted through contextualized cues extracted for a particular purpose and with a particular value, to both the identity of the sensemaking and their socially-negotiated environment. Meanings that emerge as plausible for the sensemaker were grounded within a "community of readers and their relationships to the subject matter of the text" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p. 600).

5.3 Stakeholders in the Sensemaking Process

5.3.1 Organizing Flux

Sensemaking begins with a shock to accepted meaning. The plausible meaning that has been recurring in an ongoing manner now no longer works and our attention is required to resolve it. The shock itself is the precursor to the interpretation and/or invention of meanings, whether these meanings are replicating existing sense or pushing towards novel sense. Flux begins a process of destabilization that concludes with resolution, meaning(s) that are good enough, plausible enough, to take action and move forward. Shocks and flux do not start the sensemaking process afresh, or *de novo* (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411), each time they occur. Instead, shocks impact an ongoing environment influenced by prior events and future outcomes; they interact with both who is making sense and the social environment in which that person is making sense. In this

case study, the shock stems from the proposed transformational changes found within the Miner Report to transform three university campuses in New Brunswick into polytechnical institutions. What follows unpacks both the shock and the organization of flux experienced by various stakeholders within their particular contextual environments.

5.3.1.1 University Leadership.

In the months leading up to the release of the Miner Report in September 2007, stakeholders were asked to express their visions, hopes and ideas for the PSEC to focus upon. Leaders like Dr. John McLaughlin, President of UNB, understood that a commission report would very likely contain suggestions of change, some that could have the potential to seriously disrupt an ongoing sense of meaning. Expressing what leaders hoped would come from the commission's review just moments after the announcement of the formation of the PSEC by the Government of New Brunswick in early 2007, McLaughlin said:

> "What I would like to come out of the commission is a strong reaffirmation of the particular strengths of the institutions, what is it we do really well, where are ways we can collaborate to further the goals of the province's education needs and how can we find ways of being extra-provincially competitive." ("PSEC Named," 2007, p. A5)

In this expression, McLaughlin enacted a series of cues that exposed a particular constructed identity upon which he built an acceptable meaning. This is what leaders appear to be using as their known and accepted context when they are required to organize flux. The environment in which he and other university leaders were embedded situates his identity position – universities are collaborative partners that should take a

leadership role in pushing forward educational goals and priorities. The University of New Brunswick has existed in the province since 1785 and McLaughlin, as President, is part of the school's ongoing legacy; his role in this context influences the construction of his professional identity. It, the 'university', is a language symbol, a cue enacted with a meaning that he and other leaders replicate as they make sense of their roles and the roles of their institutions.

University leaders are also situated within a socially mediated world where educational structures possess high status. In McLaughlin's statement, he appears to assert that universities are educational leaders within the PSE structure and their value need to be situated beyond the borders of any single province. The language symbol enacted here of 'university', unsaid by McLaughlin but clearly assumed by the institutional position he holds and his focus on competitive status, indicates both the influences of identity and social context in his expressed meaning. McLaughlin and other university leaders were situated in a particular ongoing sense that was deemed, by them, to be plausible. When they encountered the shock of the Miner Report, they organized their flux around this ongoing sense.

5.3.1.2 Government.

The Government of New Brunswick was also situated in their own ongoing sensemaking process. Theirs was an identity structure that commenced in a successful 2006 political election campaign and was reaffirmed as a portion of their party platform

in early 2007 in a document called *Our Action Plan to be Self-Sufficient in New Brunswick*. This strategy document would guide provincial policy decisions throughout their elected mandate. In the opening letter of this document, Premier Graham's first two sentences signaled a clear sign of change. He wrote. "We're talking about transformative change. It's no small task and we don't want to waste a moment." (GNB, 2007a, p. 2).

The government constructed their meanings upon the pillars of change and self-sufficiency (GNB, 2007a), meanings grounded in context and identity from which they could act. Their socially constructed mental model was continually reinforced through rhetorical expressions, such as when Minister Doherty stated that "the status quo is simply not acceptable" (Church, 2007, para. 2). The Liberal Party enacted an identity of forward thinkers and change-makers, allowing them to push away from historical environments and habitual circumstances. Premier Graham expressed this change-maker perspective clearly when he said, "We welcome the input that New Brunswickers want to provide. But at the end of the day, our government recognizes the responsibility that we have to make difficult decisions to build a better system for post-secondary education." (Southwick, 2007a, p. A1). The language used by the government enacted a parental perspective; they welcomed input but recognized the responsibility to make difficult decisions. These remarks foreshadowed the shock that emanated from the PSEC Report, as well as how the government would bracket their construction of sense. According to Premier Graham, "for transformational change to occur, we have to make difficult decisions. We recognize that the status quo cannot remain." (White, 2007a, p. A3).

5.3.1.3 PSEC Authors.

To align with this particular direction, the two lead commissioners for the PSEC selected by the Government of New Brunswick were embedded in similar socially negotiated context, matching with the government's vision for change and economic development. Dr. Rick Miner held senior administrative positions at both Saint Mary's University and the University of New Brunswick before relocating to Ontario to assume the role of President of Seneca College in 2001. Dr. Jacques L'Écuyer was previously Vice-President at the Université du Québec and served as the President of the Council of Universities for the Government of Quebec before assuming the role of President of Le commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial, a government organization focused on college education and skills training in Quebec.

The ongoing histories and identities of both Miner and L'Écuyer meshed with their current positions in post-secondary education to influence how they approached the crafting of the Miner report. Although both commissioners began their respective careers as university faculty members, for years leading up to the formation of the PSEC they established themselves as champions of applied learning and industry-focused education outside of the province. Joining the PSEC was not a beginning for either of these members; it was an event within a larger ongoing tapestry that uniquely positioned them

to propose a transformative shock to the New Brunswick post-secondary educational system.

After their review and consultation process throughout 2007, they released the Miner Report. Of all the recommendations presented within their report, the greatest shock came under the heading "A New Kind of Institution for New Brunswick", where they proposed the transformation of three university campuses into polytechnic institutions. This suggestion disrupted the enduring and replicated sense held by a number of groups that function within the university institution.

> "Now the hard work begins. You and your government will be tested. The recommendations are not easy ones to implement, but you asked us to be bold, as did many of the individuals we met. There will be controversy and resistance. Yet, we do think the direction provided is the one that New Brunswick should follow, and we are convinced it will provide the province with the educational advantage you directed us to achieve." (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 6)

Within this flux, the PSEC authors acknowledged that they are embedded within the context set forth by the government and organized themselves accordingly; they were asked to be 'bold', a term selected to highlight the need for large scale change within the provincial educational system. This change was initiated by the government as one requiring significant transformation. The authors were not just tasked to recommend any sort of educational advantages; it was apparent that they had been directed to work within the mental model developed and accepted by the provincial government. The identity of the authors as champions of applied learning aligned closely with the directions of the

government's focus, an alignment that created the power to privilege one direction for change as more plausible that others.

Through their expressions, the authors recognized that their proposals for change initiated both 'controversy and resistance'. I unpack this more throughout the following sections as the process of sensemaking continues, including how the appearance of controversy and resistance manifested as groups noticed, bracketed, labeled and communicated meanings. This shock, the idea that three university campuses could be transformed into polytechnic institutions, destabilized many habitually replicated understandings held by various stakeholders, instigating the sensemaking process and the subsequent production of more specific, personalized and individual meanings.

When the idea of the 'polytechnic' was put forth as a recommendation by the commission authors, it was expected that university leadership would not react positively ("Name change faces backlash," 2007). As former students, educators and institutional leaders themselves, Miner and L'Écuyer knew that what they were proposing would create a flux in sense for many people. For both educators and university leadership, this particular idea of post-secondary education, with an applied focus at the expense of a richer, more liberal arts focus of study, was so incongruent that it no longer fit within their existing mental model to make sense (Waller & Uitdewilligen, 2009); they would not be able to identify with it because it had no saliency to their identity.

5.3.1.4 Educators.

Following the shock of the Miner Report, Willis D. Hamilton, a member of the UNB Senate, exposed how some educators were organizing their flux and confusion in one particularly strongly expressed meaning of 'university'. He wrote that "university professors are institutional employees only in part. Beyond their scheduled duties, they are intellectual stewards and explorers with responsibilities that transcend the day-to-day demands of the workplace" (Hamilton, 2007, p. A10). The ongoing environment of academics as intellectual stewards revealed a socially negotiated space in which educators see higher education transcending short term industry demands, infusing the latter with a sense of short-sighted impracticality. This appears to be the context in which educators organize flux, part of their process of crafting sense. Hamilton enacts cues of historical explorers and future thought leaders that allow him to connect individual identity to the identity of the institution; his vision of the 'university' entity appears to be constituted by who he identifies as the core players – faculty.

Additionally for educators, any perceived suggested changes to their institutional structure, such as transforming a university to a polytechnic institution, brings into question issues of long standing academic freedoms: the freedom of unimpeded intellectual inquiry, as well as the freedom to teach content in the manner of their own choosing. As Glen Jones remarked about the strong reaction to the flux in meanings for educators instigated by the Miner Report, "Of course people are uncomfortable with the idea [of the transformation of a university to a polytechnic]. They've defined their lives by the kinds of jobs they have at these institutions" (Dunville, 2007c, p. A1). For these stakeholders, a shift in the meaning of post-secondary education towards training for

industry-based outcomes destabilized the ground upon which they constructed their own identities or “defined their lives”.

5.3.1.5 Students.

Students also responded to the flux created from the Miner Report, organizing and expressing how their idea of a ‘university’ connected with how they constructed their personal identity. One student at UNBSJ spoke of the limited opportunities that would exist regionally should university campuses be replaced with polytechnic institutions. “If UNBSJ is closed, our future will be limited due to the lack of choices given to us in Saint John. Those who want an education that is outside the fields offered at a polytechnic institute will have to leave the region and go elsewhere, and may not come back.” (Hattie, 2007, p. A8). The disruption in post-secondary education, as proposed in the Miner Report, was enacted by students through cues of the future, of potential, and of hope. These are all incredibly personal, even visceral, meanings held by students who connect with the impacted university campuses, meanings they chose to defend when faced with disruption.

Other students expressed their particularly held meanings of post-secondary institutions while criticizing the shock from the Miner Report. Janice Harvey, a graduate student attending UNBSJ, stated that what was:

> “troubling in all of this is the undercurrent in the commission's report that industry should dictate higher education priorities. University research programs should evolve based on faculty expertise and natural advantages (e.g., marine biology at UNBSJ), not on fickle government priorities

> (government departments change gears every four years - universities should not have to)". (2007, p. A7)

Within the middle of this disruption, Harvey was able to identify the environment where the government constructed their sense, influenced by the 'fickle' nature of political decisions and employment based on election popularity. The cues highlighted by her in development of sense by governments, particularly the pleasing of industry members and economic outcomes, results in a distinctly different set of meanings than the meanings that might make sense through enacted cues from faculty expertise and research. In her expression, she identified that the government was making sense in a very different mental model.

5.3.1.6 From Flux to Mental Models.

At the time of the report's release to the public, L'Écuyer believed that the report "would be greeted with a chorus of controversy, mainly from those people in the post-secondary sector who opposed the commission's vision for more collaboration among institutions." (McHardie, 2007b, p. A1). From the position of the PSEC authors, if you were against their vision of transformational change, you were also against collaboration and teamwork between different levels of education and, in their mind, you valued silo-style thinking and protectionism. These were two very distinct mental models applied to meaning interpretation.

Yet, the flux in meaning that ensued from the shock of the Miner Report began a process of sensemaking for many different groups. Like a rock causing ripples in a running stream, this shock of suggested transformational change impacted a great deal of people, not just in isolation but within their lived and ongoing worlds. As the process unfolds, these people begin to sort and filter information through their own mental models, based on their history, experiences and identity, in an effort to reach some sense that is good enough for them to accept.

5.3.2 Noticing and Bracketing

From the chaos and flux that occurs when meanings become implausible, sensemakers begin to retrospectively examine information and experiences. They selectively notice certain pieces of information, or cues – items Weick refers to as "familiar structures that are seeds" (Weick, 1995, p. 50) to future understanding. Simultaneously, they discard or ignore other information considered to be just noise, cues that are irrelevant to their particular sensemaking activity (Miller, 1978). These selected cues are bracketed quickly into mental models through which sense can be made. What follows is an analysis of expressions made by stakeholders that illustrate the process of noticing and bracketing while unpacking the enactment of particular sensemaking properties and language acts. The process of processing cues through mental models to assist in developing an account that is plausible is essential to sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 552).

5.3.2.1 Government.

Based on the government's ongoing environment that focused on economic advancement and quest for self-sufficiency, economic ideas and goals became privileged over other potential streams of understanding. The government used the context of their election platform as a framework through which to notice and bracket information. For example, when they stated: "We must ensure that our post-secondary institutions provide New Brunswickers with the opportunity to learn and acquire the knowledge and skills our economy requires" (GNB, 2007a, p. 22), their central notion of the economy was noticed and surfaced. The mental model held by the government around financial growth bracketed the interpreted meaning about the economic value of post-secondary institutions. Their identity, that of a force for self-sufficiency that was constructed even before the establishment of the PSEC, constrained the meanings that could possibly be expressed and enacted within the concept of post-secondary institutions.

For the government, post-secondary education is contextualized to encompass "ongoing workplace training" (GNB, 2007a, p. 12) that best prepares students "for the jobs of today and tomorrow" (GNB, 2007a, p. 7) so that the government can "address the growing shortage of workers with appropriate skills" (GNB, 2007a, p. 12). The meanings within post-secondary institutions reflect the identity held by the government and become a vessel through which the government can rationalize industry training and labour requirements for the province. As Minister Doherty stated succinctly, "We certainly want to develop a marriage between business and government to develop the best institutions that are possible." (Church, 2007, para. 3). Within this linguistic expression of

'marriage', he infers a union of economic focus that brings the requirements of industry and, by extension, the financial prosperity of the provincial government together. This inference brings to the forefront the bracketing at play for the government.

5.3.2.2 PSEC Authors.

The process of making sense for the government and the commission authors overlaps closely. Hired by the provincial government, the commission authors frequently reaffirm the mental models used by the government, acknowledging that the recommendations within the Miner Report focus on the applied end of the post-secondary educational spectrum (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a). Grounded in an identity construction connected to polytechnics, both PSEC authors were uniquely well-suited to support this applied perspective. Each author had most recently been situated within institutions focused specifically on applied learning. This primacy of applied learning was very influential in how they constructed their environment. It also influenced how they would notice and bracket information. It made sense for them to envision opportunities for extending applied skill development within these institutional shifts. For example, at the very beginning of the PSEC process, Miner stated:

> "I think the people then have a stake in what I think to be one of the most critical decisions the province is going to make in the next decade. If you look at what is happening around the world, all governments are now looking at the role that education is going to play in their social and economic development." (McHardie, 2007a, p. A1)

In this statement, Miner is surfacing cues surrounding economic progress and development; these cues get noticed as they are strongly influenced by his identity as the leader of a polytechnic institution that focuses on industry-based training. By stating that 'all governments' are now looking at connecting education with economic development, he enacts a particular, even natural, justification for the change directive found in the Miner Report.

Following the release of the Miner Report, the authors continued to express justification for their suggested changes. Miner showed his belief that transforming some university campuses into polytechnic institutions would be beneficial for the province when he said, "Polytechnics are not a step backward, but are a great opportunity for the province." (Dunville, 2007b, p. A3). As the leader of a polytechnic, Miner's identity would hardly allow him to express that the very model his own school was based on was lesser than other post-secondary models. He functions within a polytechnic environment that has its own socially negotiated meanings and strengths. L'Écuyer also functions within this environment and brackets information around this through a powerful mental model. According to L'Écuyer, "Polytechnics clearly represent a significant evolutionary force occurring across North America." (Gauthier, 2007a).

As part of their bracketing process, the PSEC authors appear to be utilizing their mental models by looking retrospectively at their own experiences, extracting cues and constructing meaning. In their initial discussion paper released in March 2007, Miner and L'Écuyer opened their report by stating they needed to "find ways to break down the

silos that too often stand as barriers between parts of our post-secondary system, imposing too heavy a price or even preventing individuals from progressing through what should be a seamless system" (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007b, p. A10). By surfacing the linguistic cue 'silo', they overtly enact what they see as an existing environment that is split. This meaning is supported within the Miner Report itself with the statement "the present bifurcation into colleges and university is no longer viable." (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 21). The authors work carefully to highlight the current divide between colleges and universities, painting a picture of an antiquated, dyadic relationship.

The mental modes used by the authors are revealed as they express what they believe has value and what does not have value. Instead of avoiding any expressions about other post-secondary structures, the authors frequently describe alternative structures as being implausible to them, based on who they are, where they are located in a social context, and their ongoing influences. They structure this older institutional model as one which cannot be accepted anymore – it is implausible. For example, in the Miner Report, the authors reference the university structure frequently as a traditional, well-defined institution (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 17), one burdened with hefty overhead and research costs and high tuition fees for students (2007a, p. 36). Miner frequently refers to universities as institutions driven by theory (Dunville, 2007a) and in their report, he crafts an anonymous case study example of a fictitious student who left university for a better path in industry-focused skills training.

However, their bracketing criterion also appears to be enacted within identity cues – the pride of who they are and how their PSE model can be successfully transferred into the NB situation. L'Écuyer frequently points to the polytechnic as a model that provides a higher level of education that focuses on both industry needs and skill competencies while benefitting regional economic development (Robichaud, 2007a). Miner explicitly states this in a government press release issued on the same day that the PSEC report was made public. In it, Miner states:

> "As is a characteristic of polytechnics, they will offer a broad variety of credentials (certificates, diplomas, undergraduate degrees, some graduate degrees, and apprenticeship training) including, where appropriate, first and second year arts and science programs for transfer into other institutions. A particular focus on applied research and commercialization is another hallmark of the polytechnic philosophy and is included as part of the commission's recommendations." (Gauthier, 2007a, p. 2)

The authors notice very particular cues that relate to their mental modes, modes that influence how they create their identities and where they are contextually situated in their socially-negotiated environment. Through their linguistic expressions, some of what they notice and how it gets bracketed en route to the development of a functionally plausible meaning can be seen. Their meaning, privileging change and the polytechnic model, begins to establish a functionally plausible position for them from which to move forward, specifically the realignment of UNBSJ from a university to a polytechnic institution. Although both Miner and L'Écuyer hold doctorates and have extensive experience teaching and conducting research at the university level, their mental models are no longer dominated by the patterns of either students or educators.

5.3.2.3 University Leadership.

University leaders identify closely with their institutions and this relationship influences how information is noticed and bracketed. University leaders are interconnected with the schools they represent; however, they also have quite personal identity connections. Leaders within the university system typically come from the ranks of educators. This progression from student to educator to leader embeds them within certain mental models in which they notice certain cues over others, bracketing information to fit their environment. Additionally, they carry with them certain ideas about the constitutive nature of post-secondary education. The institutions they represent encompass meaning that reflects who they see themselves to be – their contextually grounded identity. In the same way that Miner and L'Écuyer privilege a marriage between industry and education through the polytechnic model, university leaders highlight extracted cues that include progressive thought and idea advancement, surfacing the university as a distinctly unique entity.

One poignant expression that exemplified how university leaders invest meaning in the long-term value of university education came from Don Desserud, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies at UNBSJ, when he stated that "universities, real universities, serve up banquets, prepared slowly and with great care" (2007, p. A7). In this expression, universities are constructed as educational agents that care, investing value over a long period of time. Conversely, he positioned the idea of polytechnic institutions presented in the Miner Report as quick service training that provides little in the way of educational nutrition. And that, to Desserud, is not what constitutes a university. This is explored

further in the following section on labeling, including an examination about the constructed meanings with the linguistic labels of post-secondary institutions as well as a discussion about what is enacted as 'real'.

During flux, university leaders position their institutions as independent centres of thought and research. The identity of the institution is constituted by deep critical thinking that exists in a historical and socially negotiated context. This mental model was revealed in another expression made by Don Desserud. Just after the release of the Miner Report, he expressed the importance of the pursuit of knowledge free from industry influences, part of the embedded nature of academic freedom. By leveraging the role of faculty as a critical defining cue to what the institution represents, he wrote,

> "Our professors teach in their areas of expertise, and bring the results of many years of research and scholarship into their classrooms. Sometimes, we do this very clumsily. We have complicated things to say, and it can often take us a long time to say them. And it's true that professors can be an eccentric and unruly lot. But we teach with integrity, and not at the beck and call of local industries." (Desserud, 2007, p. A7)

Bringing forward the 'many years of research and scholarship' that faculty at universities possess, Desserud surfaced a retrospective value on socially constructed notions of historical practices and actions. The university system has a high level of integrity within the realm of knowledge creation, not simply the reactionary reply to commercial demands. Information faced by the leadership is noticed and bracketed through this model that celebrates the pursuit of complicated things.

Strengthening their mental model is the comprehensive nature of university education that includes less focus on training and greater focus on increasing the breadth of knowledge of the human being. By providing access to professional studies and liberal arts, universities offer an educational experience more valuable than the short-term gains of training. McLaughlin contended that liberal arts "enrich(es) our lives culturally and intellectually and inform(s) us as citizens" (MacKinnon, 2007a, p. C1). The expression here focuses on an informed citizenry, not a well-trained one. The identity of university leaders is embedded in a well informed society. As McLaughlin stated, "If the idea is we don't need to give the same focus and importance to the liberal arts education, then I think that's dead wrong." (MacKinnon, 2007a, p. C1). The comprehensive nature of post-secondary education was highlighted with liberal arts serving as the "heart and soul of a modern education" (MacKinnon, 2007a, p. C1). McLaughlin expressed his belief in the idea of a university as an entity with life, breadth and substance, having a heart and a soul.

5.3.2.4 Educators.

University educators demonstrated a very different set of criteria for noticing and bracketing received information. They rarely, if ever, surfaced the importance of a comprehensive liberal arts education. They revealed a different mental model, one formed around their own professional identities of providing richer and deeper knowledge experiences to students. University professors and faculty spend a great amount of effort in their careers seeking to adjust themselves in order to fit into the social

and professional structures of academia. This occurs early in their educational journey within the process of earning their graduate degrees (Murray, 2007).

Educators bracketed their stories differently. In their socially constructed world of learning systems, they are embedded within and accept that a progressive order in educational institutions exists – in colloquial terms, a pecking order of 'value'. The vast majority of post-secondary educators hold post-graduate degrees and have spent many years working 'up' through the ranks of various schools as they gain additional designations. It is a part of their identity and who they have learned to become. This upward leveling that orders the various institutional models (college, university) appears frequently in the expressions of educators as a need to differentiate 'education' and 'training', a message that comes through in their stories (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007; White, 2007b). Constrained through identity constructions that exist as educators become part of an academic community (Murray, 2007), the ability to envision their institution simply as industrial partners enacting workplace training runs counter to what they can conceive as plausible.

For those who teach at universities, practical outcomes failed to emerge as important cues of meaning. By 'practical', I refer specifically to economic and industry outcomes stressed by the government as valuable.

> "In the process of learning, new understanding arises, new perspectives are developed, and lives are deepened and changed. The whole person is at stake. And it is the whole person who leaves the university and brings an educated perspective to their personal lives, to their workplace and to the public forum." (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007, p. A5)

Educators enacted a meaning that magnifies the value of university to the whole person, expressing that the whole person is actually ‘at stake’. There is a strong identity component, such as when faculty members enacted the ideas of rich traditions and values of education, in contrast to the government who, embedded in a model of fiscal responsibility, enacted education as a marriage partner with industry.

Richness and depth become enacted within expressions made by educators. Educators spoke of the deeper impacts made by the academic outcomes of the university – very rarely does the idea of practical, industry-based skill sets arise as an important filter through which educators filtered information. This leaves a negative space hanging in their construction, an exclusion that is as telling as what is included. This negative space becomes visible when the depth of university education is enacted as something that permeates the personal, professional and public forums. As an educator, Smith managed to pull these ideas together to acknowledge that although skills gained through university education can be quite marketable, marketability is not the core objective of a university in the eyes of educators; it is not the dominant frame through which information is bracketed.

> “Analytical skills and critical thinking, writing ability, understanding of humanities - arts, culture, history, and the methods of science - are all fundamentals in liberal arts. They are also marketable skills, but that is secondary to learning.” (2007, p. A7)

5.3.2.5 Students.

In the process of making sense that is functionally plausible, students at UNBSJ bracketed information cues noticed during the chaos of flux in a similar fashion as educators. However, unlike academics who have completed an identity construction process, committing large amounts of time and resources to earn a place within a university community (Dunville, 2007c), students are in transit, engaged in a process of becoming. They are still making sense of who they are and how their identity is being reconstituted within a larger community of learners (Murray, 2007). For them, the institution is not simply a place to learn. It is a home fixed with pseudo-familial connectivity - a powerful cue with equally powerful emotional links revealing an ongoing environment that is intimately connected to their identity.

Expressions made by students reveal their techniques of bracketing information through the filters of personal connection and development of self – the institution has been constituted as their home. In one expression, Delsie Burke said, "This is my home. This is the first home I had since I had come out of school. This suggestion [of transforming UNBSJ into a polytechnic] is kicking me out of my home." (S. Davis, 2007a, p. B1). Through this, she reveals the mental models that are in play with her as she notices and reacts to information around proposed changes. What a university was to Burke transcends any particular skill set or outcome; her expressed meaning indicates how she has attached the language sign of 'university' into her constructed identity.

In a different expression, Heather Sager, a student at UNBSJ, wrote, "The campus is home to students from all corners of life. I am here from Ontario, not because I had to

come but because I chose to." (Sager, 2007, para. 4). Through the use of terms like 'home' and 'because I chose to', Sager connects who she sees herself to be with the institution she committed to join. Her choice links the institution to her identity; information suggesting change to that institution is bracketed as a suggested change to her constructed identity. By extension, those suggested changes of transforming UNBSJ to a polytechnic may quickly be bracketed as not good enough to accept, or implausible.

Students exist within a very different model, reflected in the very personal connection that post-secondary education has to their identity. Their school is an intimate part of who they are and who they are becoming. As Burke expressed about UNBSJ, "This is my home." (S. Davis, 2007a, p. B1) while Sager described UNBSJ as "a place to grow and learn and build ourselves into enlightened thinkers" (2007, p. A4). The mental models through which they filter information and cues have been constructed around their ongoing, socially-negotiated environment and the identities they have crafted for themselves. From this step in the process of sensemaking, noticing and bracketing, sensemakers build labels using language which help them to develop and accept meanings that are continually informed by the properties of sensemaking.

5.3.2.6 From Bracketing to Labeling.

Through this process of sensemaking so far, sensemakers in the case study have been exposed to flux in meaning and subsequently leveraged available informational cues in an effort to reconstruct meaning(s) that are acceptable or plausible. Informed by the

properties of sensemaking, the information available to sensemakers has been noticed, or conversely not noticed, then bracketed through their existing mental models as meanings begin to be reconstituted. Meanings that emerge as plausible are grounded within a "community of readers and their relationships to the subject matter of the text" (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993, p. 600). As sensemaking is frequently as much about invention as it is about interpretation (Weick, 1995), the establishment of labels and the meanings embedded within these labels play a role in sensemaking. Additionally, functionally plausible meanings seem to emerge not only through choices of which cues to emphasize but also through choices of which cues will be de-emphasized or omitted outright.

5.3.3 Labeling

The process of sensemaking is streamlined as categories and labels are created, transforming complex volumes of information into simpler routines of understanding. Labels, typically language symbols, have meanings that are developed in a socially negotiated fashion. As such, the same label could have various meanings, shifting based on who was crafting the meaning and the social context in which the meaning was negotiated. Saint John resident Edward Farren captured this idea of labels succinctly when he wrote that "those who support the polytechnic issue in Saint John dismiss others as emotional or unable to accept change. Others ask what's in a name, whether it is called a polytechnic or a university. Words have meaning." (2007, p. A4).

Words do contain meaning invested in them by speakers in context. Perhaps Farren would have been more accurate to state that a *word* has *meanings* reflected in the various individual meanings enacted in the same word. Of particular interest during this process is how the same linguistic labels are enacted with very different meanings. These shortcuts of arriving at a place of sense appear informed by the properties of sensemaking while highlighting the malleability or plasticity (Weick et al., 2005) of language symbols.

A small number of important labels surface throughout the case study. Firstly, post-secondary education, as a label, appears to split along the lines of industry training and the creation of knowledge, as revealed in the expressions made *in situ* throughout the case study events. These labels carry distinct values rooted in both the identity of the sensemaker using the label and the ongoing social environment that they are centred in. Secondly, the two labels of university and polytechnic institution have become core extracted cues used by many stakeholders, primarily due to the central role that these labels play in the suggested changes in the Miner Report.

5.3.3.1 PSEC Authors.

Building a workable sense through the lens of economic self-sufficiency, the New Brunswick government positioned education as directly connected to industry skill-based training (GNB, 2007a). 'Training' acts as a label enacted to convey a focus on industry skills in demand by employers in the region. The PSEC applied this label 41 separate times in the Miner Report (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a). Thirteen uses of 'training' were

applied when the authors referred to the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Twenty seven instances of the label 'training' occurred when the authors wrote about studying industry-related skills, apprenticeship, or some blend of on-the-job development. Only one time in the 64 page report did the authors combine it with the label 'education' (education and training) while on five different occasions, the authors distinctly separated these two labels (education or training). For example, when referring to the accessible nature of post-secondary education in the province, the authors wrote:

> "We put this principle first, because it lies at the heart of our commitment to serving the needs of current and future students and of the province. New Brunswick needs to expand its post-secondary enrolment, to persuade a larger percentage of the population to pursue post-secondary education or training." (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 3)

As a label to focus upon, the term 'training' simplified what the authors, and by extension the government, deemed to be reasonable enough for continued forward motion. Establishing a consistent meaning in one label allowed space for the invention of meaning in other labels. If the PSEC authors inferred skill-competencies within the label of training, then this could be connected to the meanings of institutional labels. Expressing his connection of training to particular institutions, Jacques L'Écuyer stated that "what we want is institutions that will offer programs that are more focused on the needs of regions and that are directed toward providing competencies" (Robichaud, 2007b, p. A13). Here, the term 'competencies' refers to skills needed by regions, more specifically the skills needed by industries that provide jobs in those regions.

By substituting the label already invoked by L'Écuyer, he is expressing that they want institutions that train people. The labels used, including the particular meaning enacted within those labels, helped the authors craft a story that worked for them. As a label, the meaning of the institution remains vague; they have situated it as a location of skills training, but without a clear name. In the Miner Report, they re-label their particular 'institution' as the polytechnic. They praise the polytechnic model as a progressive system towards which to aspire: "This new kind of institution, the polytechnic, involves the combination of university and college activities into something greater than the sum of the two parts." (Miner & L'Écuyer, 2007a, p. 17).

In a subsequent expression, Miner presented a more detailed constructed meaning of a polytechnic (although he appears to speak in the third person):

> "The authors of a recent report on the future of post-secondary education in Canada say that polytechnics are rapidly emerging as the third stream that blends applied skills with broad subject-matter expertise. They say that polytechnics are seen as a solid middle ground, capable of meeting many of the labour market demands for skilled professionals in today's society… A particular focus on applied research and commercialization is another hallmark of the polytechnic philosophy and is included as part of the commission's recommendations." (Gauthier, 2007a, para. 10)

Within the language sign 'polytechnic', the authors infuse a basket of outcomes: meeting industry-specific training needs, providing credentials that run from simple certificates to graduate degrees, and providing a home for some liberal arts education.

One label that the PSEC authors avoided defining was 'university'. However, it remained a term frequently applied by the authors. Throughout the Miner Report, the

words ‘university’ and ‘universities’ were used a total of 250 times. Miner did make one telling comment after the release of the PSEC report: “A university education is not for everyone. Sometimes an emphasis on theory is unattractive to the practical mind.” (2007a, p. 31). Theory, and by extension the institution in which that theory is cherished, is unattractive to matters of practicality. The cue of practicality gets extracted as a value upon which their meaning, and by extension identity, is grounded. By indirectly implying a meaning of impracticality within the language sign ‘university’, the PSEC authors appear to be attempting to infuse meaning into the label. L’Écuyer strengthened the signification of these institutional labels upon their creation of sense, declaring that “polytechnics clearly represent a significant evolutionary force occurring across North America” (Gauthier, 2007a, para. 11).

Based on the socially-negotiated environment of the PSEC authors in which their meanings are enacted, the labels of ‘training’ and ‘polytechnic’ appear to be consistently used to support industry-based skills and a positive connection with economic development. Yet, meaning is more complex and nuanced based on the perspective of who is using the term; I use the label ‘perspective’ here to include both the sensemaker’s own identity construction and their social context. For educators, ‘training’ encompasses a negative connotation. The attachment with industry skills is enacted in a negative fashion and the differentiation between ‘training’ and ‘education’ are contrasted to create a caste system.

5.3.3.2 Educators.

For educators in this case study, labels became a core area of contention. Their sensemaking process diverged at the point of noticing and bracketing, with their intimate connection of universities central to how they constructed their identities. Much like the PSEC authors, educators differentiated the labels of training and education. Not long after the release of the Miner Report, Peter Buckland, a former educator and current business operator in Saint John, NB, expressed this division:

> "The distinction between "training" and "education" is important. Both are significant, and both are needed within this community. The one prepares students to participate within specific industrial sectors. It is important to recognize which areas are of importance to the economy of a city, and to take steps to ensure that a capable labour-force is ready to drive its initiatives forward and to promote growth in these chosen sectors. It is equally important that a community maintain its other educational priorities at the highest level possible." (2007, p. A7).

According to Buckland's statement, training focuses on preparing learners in the skills and abilities required by industry, to become members of a "capable labour-force" and "to participate within specific industrial sectors" (2007, p. A7). Training focuses on "marketable skills" (Smith, 2007, p. A7) that students can apply directly to obtain and sustain employment.

What becomes clear are the different meaning implications in the same labels used by the PSEC authors. Whereas Miner and L'Écuyer privileged the label 'training', educators surfaced the label 'education' as one with greater value, a meaning that included liberal arts and a focus on the whole person. Peter Smith captures this idea in his small but power expression: "a training program can prepare you for a job; liberal arts can prepare you for the world" (Smith, 2007, p. A7). In this statement, liberal arts is a

fundamental cue included in the label ‘education’ used by educators, one supported at the level of teaching and administration (MacKinnon, 2007a). Smith differentiates skills-based training from education with the inclusion of liberal arts as part of the core educational mandate (2007).

Part of the bracketing process for educators included filtering in cues that supported their mental models of a university, cues that are interpreted and/or invested with meaning. For educators, certain cues around practical training appear to have been ignored, likely filtered out as they did not align with the identities that educators had constructed for themselves. However, the PSEC authors brought forward a new label within their proposed changes – the polytechnic institution. When confronted with the new language sign ‘polytechnic’, educators began to construct their meaning of the label in various ways.

Firstly, some educators sought to connect the label ‘polytechnic’ with the label ‘training’. In doing this, they referred to the focused direction of other polytechnics in different regions. For example, Smith wrote specifically about the polytechnic offerings within Canada:

> “Arts programs are very limited in the seven polytechnics represented by Polytechnics Canada. Some of the institutions do have applied arts programs, but there isn't anyone graduating from Seneca College with a B.A. in English. A polytechnic, by definition, specializes in applied sciences and technology.” (2007, p. A7)

Smith leveraged his interpreted meaning of existing Canadian polytechnics to reaffirm his own expressed meaning. By examining their actions in programming, he crafts a more tightly focused meaning of a 'polytechnic' as an institutional structure designed specifically for applied science and technology. By enacting this meaning, the label 'polytechnic' becomes shorthand for an unacceptable structure to university educators; it simply does not align with their core identity features.

Secondly, some educators sought to question the already expressed meaning embedded within the label 'polytechnic'. In some occasions, the process of accepting the enactment of one label results from the process of understanding other labels which are unacceptable, or implausible. This is an enacted rebuttal or an active part of the sensemaking process that challenges alternative label meanings. For example, educator Leslie Jeffrey frequently published articles focused on the proposed changes in the Miner Report, regularly placing the label 'polytechnic' in full quotes. This appeared to be her symbolic way of questioning the validity of the polytechnic label as a legitimate mode of post-secondary education through sarcastic inferences (Jeffrey, 2007). Such a reaction is informed by both identity and socially negotiated understandings, as if she is inferring 'We could not possible be identifying with "this label" at all, could we??'

In a more explicit challenge to the meaning of the polytechnic label, Chris Doran, a professor at UNBSJ, invoked a study conducted around the polytechnic initiative undertaken in Europe. Based on the research of John Pratt around the failure of polytechnics in England in the later part of the twentieth century, Doran noted that a

proposed polytechnic immediately started in a disadvantaged position because the "exact nature of their institution was frequently misunderstood" (2007, p. A5), creating confusion among students, parents, and employers. Pratt's research revealed that some of those involved in the creation of the polytechnic system in England described the results as having become "an educational soup kitchen for the poor" (Doran, 2007, p. A5). By drawing from historical experiences of change in educational systems, Doran sought to contextualize polytechnics in an ongoing state; this was not a new label with a novel meanings – it had a history and results that can be learned from.

John Johnston, another professor at UNBSJ, highlighted the lack of clear vision and need for sensemakers to rely on their own agency. He stated, "We don't know what it (a polytechnic) is. It was poorly defined, so we are on our own really to look at some examples and some of which we might question the appropriateness if you are reading the (Miner) report" (McHardie, 2007i, p. A3). According to Johnston, people are left to their own devices to learn, explore, and develop a meaning of the label 'polytechnic' that makes sense to them. He introduces the question: if people don't know what the polytechnic is, then how can they assess it against or connect it with their constructed identities?

As a counterpoint label to the polytechnic, educators brought forward the label 'university'. In much the same way that training and education emerged as dichotomous, the labels polytechnic and university emerged in opposition for educators. The former label had little connection to their identities while the latter aligned well. In a joint

presentation by 34 faculty members from UNBSJ, they expressed a strong connection between the labels ‘education’ and ‘university’. They wrote that education “is what happens to individuals when they are introduced to centuries-old traditions and philosophies as well as to contemporary methodologies and theories” (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007, p. A5).

First, when the educators here speak of ‘centuries-old traditions and philosophies’, they are clearly expressing a meaning for the university label. Second, they appear to be describing an identity transformation in university that ‘happens to individuals’; a university is a transformative institution. Finally, by extracting time-based cues of education, a combination of ‘centuries-old traditions’ and ‘contemporary methodologies’, educators situate their meaning of both university and education within their ongoing social environments. They connote a depth and history existing in ‘education’ that, through inference, does not exist in ‘training’. With ‘education’ comes history, tradition, philosophy and the merging of centuries of thought, infusing a level of overall societal value not found from the results of ‘training’.

5.3.3.3 Students.

As part of their process of making sense of the propositions presented in the Miner Report, students spent time reacting to the new label ‘polytechnic’. In the bracketing process, they repeatedly expressed a personal link with the university, using their identity connection as a mental model and filtering information cues, while also

investing in the label ‘university’ as their home (S. Davis, 2007a; Sager, 2007). However, there were also frequent challenges as to what a ‘polytechnic’ was from their perspective.

The Vice-President External of the UNBF Student Union, Jordan Graham, added a student voice to the ongoing work by educators about confusion in meaning. His expression centred on credibility of meanings. If people fail to understand what a polytechnic is, how it is connected to who they are, and what the perceived value of education is to their community, then stakeholders will be hesitant to make and/or support change. According to Graham,

> "We could lose professors. Student may not trust the credibility of an institution like that. It could have a negative impact through the entire UNB community. It takes away its identity and personally, I don't want to go to a university that's suffering that bad." (Dunville, 2007a, p. A1)

Graham appears to be inferring that a university that is suffering an identity and personality crisis is not one to be trusted and will inevitably push away both teachers and students, who will search for institutions with more stable, predictable identities.

This confusion with the polytechnic label was reiterated by a large target market for UNBSJ – international students. Brandon Zhan, a student at UNBSJ, spoke of the dangers of shifting labels when he stated, “in the culture where we are from, polytech, we call them fake universities” (D Shipley, 2007b, p. A6). In the Asian market, students and their families deem polytechnic institutions to be implausible alternatives to universities. The meaning underlying the label ‘university’ appears to be socially constructed as the dominant model of post-secondary education; to them, polytechnics are simply lesser

than universities, without the same inherent value or prestige. Speaking on behalf of Persian students, Khaled Abed stated that, for university students, "the word 'polytechnic' doesn't mean that much to them" (White, 2007d, p. A3). In both examples, it is the word 'university' that holds valuable meaning within the socially negotiated environment between international students and their families on the international stage.

5.3.3.4 University Leadership.

Similarly to educators, the university leadership adopted certain labels that were a natural extension of the bracketing criteria unpacked earlier. Not surprisingly, they defended the label 'university', a label with the strongest connection to their identity and social context as leaders of those institutions. At the same time, they questioned the validity of meanings presented by the PSEC authors around the label 'polytechnic', a way of setting the label as an implausible counterpoint to their preferred position. On two separate occasions, Tom Condon, the former Vice-President of UNBSJ, questioned what a 'polytechnic' actually represented. His first reaction to the proposed transformation of UNBSJ into a polytechnic was to describe the new idea as "some Saint John post-secondary abstraction" (2007, p. A7). By abstraction, he appeared to state that a polytechnic was a theoretical model without a clear direction or mandate. His second reaction was to refer to the new structure as a "nebulous post-secondary institution called a polytechnic" (MacKinnon, 2007c, p. C1).

Yvon Fontaine, president of the Université de Moncton, dismissed the entire suggestion of polytechnics within New Brunswick. The label being proposed under which two of his university campuses would be transformed could not be accepted as plausible. Defending the current 'university' label within the proposed shift in governmental direction, he argued that "We have applied programs; UNB has applied programs. This has existed before this (polytechnic) concept, this ill-defined concept came about" (McHardie, 2008a, p. A5). According to Fontaine, the ill-defined concept led to excessive conflict over labeling and less progressive movement to help both the institutions and the economy. In an overt attack against the PSEC authors and their plan, Fontaine claims that, after dismantling nationally recognized post-secondary institutions, the PSEC authors and the provincial government "seem piously to hope that something wonderful will magically arise, Phoenix-like, from its ashes" (Condon, 2007, p. A7).

As a counterpoint to the 'training' label applied by the PSEC, UNB President McLaughlin continued to enact the 'university' label with great long-term value, an education that "enriches our lives culturally and intellectually and informs us as citizens" (MacKinnon, 2007a, p. C1). Here, the idea of 'education' seems to transcend industry objectives, possessing human cultural value that exceeds the gains made from short-term commercial outcomes. UNB Board of Governor and local business leader, David Ganong contributed to the ongoing development of meanings within labels by focusing on reputation, a socially-negotiated idea within sensemaking. Ganong questioned what level or 'league' the province wanted to play in when he said,

> "The University of New Brunswick is the only national university in New Brunswick and it is only there by the skin of its teeth… It's important for New Brunswick that (UNB is) in that league. Once it is not, we would see a diminishment of the quality of teaching, the quantity and quality of research and development as (UNB) kind of wound down to be a 'regional' institution." (D Shipley, 2007a, p. A1)

Asking this question reveals a retrospective examination by sensemakers focused on who they would like to be – what identity they would like to build for themselves working with these linguistic tools. Will UNB transform into a regional institution or remain an institution on the national stage? This question of identity transcends the institution itself, impacting current students, faculty, alumni and the very cities that are home to these schools.

In one of the few attacks focused directly on the meanings within labels developed and enacted by the PSEC and presented in the Miner Report came from Don Dessurud, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, UNBSJ. His statement invoked how people envisioned themselves and exposes the contextual position in which they were crafting their meaning. Dessurud stated, "The PSE Commission sees education as fast food, picked up in the drive through. Universities, real universities, serve up banquets, prepared slowly and with great care." (Desserud, 2007, p. A7).

5.3.3.5 From Labeling to Presumptions.

Up to this point, the volumes of information that appear during times of flux and disruption from the shock to ongoing sense have been processed; some cues were noticed

while others were bypassed or ignored, then bracketed through existing mental models held by the sensemaker. As a device used to simplify getting to an acceptable meaning, labels were developed and enacted to create routines and predictable understanding within complex circumstances. From the meanings embedded within labels, stakeholders made presumptions to speed up their sensemaking process. As more action occurs, more information is collected, instigating a hermeneutic cycle of reviewing cues and recrafting meanings. In the next section, I explore the process stage around making presumptions, focusing with particular closeness on the presumed concept of what is real to various sensemakers.

5.3.4 Making Presumptions

In the lived world, people attempt to do their best to figure out situations on the go with limited information, filtered through mental models and simplified by labels. Presumptions are tentative conclusions made *in situ* in order to take action because "sensemaking starts with immediate actions, local context, and concrete cues" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Actions are taken when we can presume a meaning or interpretation is good enough to move forward, or plausible. According to Paget (1988), it is this interpretation and experimentation with meanings that helps people making sense to connect abstract ideas with concrete actions.

Looking back at the process steps of bracketing and labeling, presumptions were made at each stage. The government appeared to presume a focus on self-sufficiency

might rationalize the transformation of multiple university campuses into polytechnic institutions, an action grounded in their election mandate. Educators appeared to presume a role of gatekeeper around education reform and knowledge development, rooted in both their embedded position in education and their history within the post-secondary education system. Each group seemed to presume meaning within the Miner Report, some in favor while others were against the proposed changes.

What most stakeholder groups had in common was the presumption that the labels they enacted were correct, or at least the most correct meanings at hand. This attitude of correctness was focused around the label ‘real’, a term frequently used in expressions by speakers. By explicitly extracting and using the linguistic term ‘real’, sensemakers expressed a belief in one thing, the real item, holding a position of prominence when compared, either directly or through inference, to another thing that was, to them, not real. Speakers frequently enacted the language sign ‘real’ as a signification of their personal limits, expressions of their boundaries within which meanings can be deemed acceptable.

5.3.4.1 PSEC Authors.

In the crafting of their report, Miner and L’Écuyer pushed change in a particular direction, focusing on skills training and industry relevance. They took immediate action to change the post-secondary environment in New Brunswick; the mandate they received from the provincial government and the platform upon which the government won their

majority both contributed to a presumption of support. When describing their report, the authors acted as if their suggestions for change were real, that they would address the current issues of self-sufficiency, and that they would be understood as a real solution. After the release of their report, Miner stated "A polytechnic will mean students can benefit from the hands-on approach of colleges and the theory-approach of universities. Polytechnics would be authorized to offer college-level programs and university-level programs, with professors encouraged to teach at both levels." (Dunville, 2007a, p. A1).

In explaining the concept of the polytechnic in the abstract, Miner expresses his belief in how this institution will function, making presumptions in order for their report to be enacted. The presumptions around what course levels would be taught at a polytechnic, both college and university level courses, could have been influenced by their former experiences with polytechnics in other provinces. Presumably, what worked in other locations could well be adopted by New Brunswick. By extension, college and university faculty would want to teach at this type of institution and students would immediately see tangible benefits after graduation. The presumption made by the PSEC authors appear to be that the polytechnic model is a natural progression in the post-secondary education system and was evolutionary (Gauthier, 2007a). In the government press release that was distributed in conjunction with the release of the Miner Report, Miner wrote,

> "The authors of a recent report on the future of post-secondary education in Canada say that polytechnics are rapidly emerging as the third stream that blends applied skills with broad subject-matter expertise. They say that polytechnics are seen as a solid middle ground, capable of meeting many of the labour market demands for skilled professionals in today's

> society. As is a characteristic of polytechnics, they will offer a broad variety of credentials (certificates, diplomas, undergraduate degrees, some graduate degrees, and apprenticeship training) including, where appropriate, first and second year arts and science programs for transfer into other institutions. A particular focus on applied research and commercialization is another hallmark of the polytechnic philosophy and is included as part of the commission's recommendations." (Gauthier, 2007a, p. 2)

This particular presumption surrounding the positive nature of polytechnics aligned with the components that the PSEC authors drew upon to make sense. The identities of the authors were personally embedded within the polytechnic concept, based upon their positions as leaders of these types of schools.

They retrospectively reviewed and interpreted the impacts made by the institutions they led; having experienced success in their polytechnic institutions, it was a short step to presuming the same institutions could succeed in New Brunswick. The label 'polytechnic' was very real to the authors. Yet when these presumptions manifested into action, tested against the sense made by others, they discovered that the meaning that was implied with this institutional label was not accepted as plausible. The authors acted as if everyone would understand and accept their meaning of polytechnic, something that did not turn out to be the case. In an effort to adjust this error in presumptive meaning and their enactment of the polytechnic cue, movement away from that particular label was reiterated multiple times (L'Écuyer & Miner, 2007; McHardie, 2007g; "Name change faces backlash," 2007; Robichaud, 2008b). Just three days after the release of the Miner Report, Miner said, "I guess in retrospect we probably should have rethought what we named this to minimize some of the visceral reaction" (McHardie, 2007f, p. A1).

5.3.4.2 Students.

Some of the 'visceral' reaction that Miner referred to came from the university student population. Students incorporated the location of their education as a cue, enacted to influence the formation of their personal identity. The intimate connection of the university to student identities was evident in how students bracketed informational cues. Reaction to the Miner Report by students seemed to show a presumption of attack and required a defense. Terra Joyce clearly expressed her constructed identity around UNBSJ: "This is the only place I can get an education. For me, this is the end of the line." (S. Davis, 2007a, p. B1). Joyce takes up action in support of UNBSJ and against the concept of the polytechnic institution. To her, and to the thousands of students who protested at the PETL Minister's office in downtown Saint John (S. Davis, 2007b; White, 2007c), the polytechnic is presumed to have significantly lesser value and must be immediately opposed.

This same deduction of polytechnics as a lesser model, one rooted in the process of noticing and bracketing of information, was revealed in a number of different expressions made by students. Immediately following the release of the Miner Report, Jordan Graham, Vice-President External of the UNBF Student Union, revealed his presumption of the polytechnic institution. He stated that, "Student may not trust the credibility of an institution like that. It could have a negative impact through the entire UNB community" (Dunville, 2007a, p. A1). By presuming that the meaning of a

polytechnic lacks credibility within the scope of post-secondary education, especially at the university level, it becomes simultaneously more difficult to accept the idea of a polytechnic as a plausible option and easier to take action opposing its development. The revelation is that an underlying process is at play; the expression allows that process to be seen and examined in the form of clues.

One of the presumptions that students, as well as other stakeholders opposed to the changes in the Miner Report, is the idea that as the university goes, so shall the city. Hattie stated that "if we lose UNBSJ, then surely in the long term, the city of Saint John will lose" (2007, p. A8), while Burke believed that the death of the UNBSJ campus would devastate the city (S. Davis, 2007a). Much like dominos, should they lose the university to the form of another post-secondary institution, they believed that they would also lose future prosperity, inevitably leading to the city's downfall. The idea of an attack on the university and the city served as valid reasons to act in opposition to the Miner Report.

5.3.4.3 Educators.

Educators bring into existence their own connection of meaning to the label of polytechnic; their expressions reveal presumptions about the impact and value that a polytechnic institution would have on post-secondary education in New Brunswick. A considerable portion of their presumption focuses on directionality. For example, the day before the release of the Miner Report, Leslie Jeffrey wrote that "If UNB Saint John is

destroyed in order to erect a technical college, it will be a huge step backwards for the city and its citizens." (Jeffrey, 2007, p. A7). These meanings appear embedded around protecting an ongoing identity and maintain the context of the current educational system. Greg Allain, a faculty member at Mount Allison University, extended this thought even further, stating that "the whole process [of change] could set the province's universities back more than 40 years!" (Allain, 2007, para. 13). Both of these educators express a presumption that post-secondary education systems have a hierarchy and progressive value system. Their actions of protection against the transformation of universities into polytechnic institutions appear to flow as if their presumed meanings were accepted or normalized meanings.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) supported this presumption about polytechnic institutions. They were less concerned with knowledge creation and dissemination and more "driven by private-sector management fads" (White, 2007b, p. A2). In a press release issued by CAUT, they state,

> "The post-secondary education system envisioned in this report would be a step backward for New Brunswick. Everywhere else in Canada, the movement is in the opposite direction - to expand options, with colleges becoming university colleges or polytechnics, and university colleges and polytechnics becoming universities." (White, 2007c, p. A2).

The identity relationship that faculty have constructed is made clearer in the remarks of Dr. Winnifred Bogaards when she said that "faculty are already looking for jobs at real universities" (2007, p. A6). She expresses a belief that educators who have immersed themselves into the university culture cannot presume to see themselves as a member of a

different institution. Not only would there exist a change in the institution but also a change in who they would 'be', or their identity. This concept pushes some faculty outside of their established boundaries of acceptable meaning, prompting action.

The linguistic cue 'real' is telling, inferring the belief that educators are working from – that universities have status levels and work on a value system. By extension, they are a place that educators seek to work, students seek to attend and are worthy of being aggressively protected. Another group of faculty spoke in terms of hierarchy, curious "if polytechnic degrees will be accepted by 'real' universities" (Nugent & Buchanan, 2007, p. A7), inferring that within the social community of university institutions, there exists an insular identity, both subjectively and contextually constructed (Weber, 1947). The idea that the only degrees 'accepted' by universities that are ones from 'real' schools only serves to raise the university label to a higher level of legitimacy. Valid degrees not only pass external review but are accepted by peer institutions, of which the polytechnic should not be included.

5.3.4.4 University Leadership.

As academic leaders worked through their sensemaking process, making presumptions about meaning allowed them to take action. Their meanings aligned with those of educators. Looking at the relationship between educators and university leaders, this is hardly surprising, considering the overlaps in identity and context shared between these two groups. University leaders immediately acted in opposition to the

recommendations of the Miner Report. The presumption about what is real can be found in the expression made by UNBSJ's Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, Don Desserud, who said that real universities "serve up banquets, prepared slowly and with great care" (2007, p. A7). By leveraging this idea of real-ness, Desserud infers the counter point – that polytechnic institutions are not real and, thus, not an acceptable alternative. Not content with leaving this alternative perspective unspoken, Desserud clearly expressed his presumed understanding when he wrote that "the PSE polytechnic would be an education factory. It would treat faculty as if they were assembly-line workers, and students as if they were merely machines programmed to complete tasks assigned by others" (2007, p. A7). For a university leader, the idea that the proposed change might remove either intellectual freedom from students or academic freedom from faculty runs counter to an environment that could be deemed plausible.

Status also appears important in the presumptions held by university leaders; universities get constituted at the top of the PSE scale, with other post-secondary institutions coming in at a lower level of status. As a member of the UNB Board of Governors, David Ganong called the idea of converting university and community college campuses into polytechnic institutes would be a "backwards step" (White, 2007d, p. A9). How their school is perceived on a provincial, national and international level forms a key contextual component for leaders to protect; if there is a reasonable presumption that the status is under attack, then the subsequent action by leaders would be to defend it. Tapping into the large international population at UNBSJ, Kathryn Hamer, the Vice-President of UNBSJ, spoke directly to status and identity when she said,

“Without a university they (international students) will not settle down with their families in the city. Without a university, we're losing face to the world." (“Fake Universities,” 2007, p. A1).

5.3.4.5 From Presumptions to Communication.

By crafting meaning through expressions, speakers are searching for a meaning that works for them within context, something that fits their reality. Yet, meaning isn’t static; it flows in a continual manner, shifting to be good enough for action to occur based on the ‘evidence’ available to a sensemaker at a particular time. What we understand appears to be more of an ongoing, ever-changing series of presumptions made by the sensemaker that is continually re-evaluated as more information appears, is noticed, bracketed and labeled. The next step in the process analyzes how some of these presumptive understandings were crafted in language and communicated into a social environment.

5.3.5 Organizing through Communication

Social construction of reality rests on the tenet of shared meaning; the equivocal nature of meanings that exist privately are made explicit when they are communicated publicly and are relevant to the situation (Weick et al., 2005). Communication and language are fundamental parts of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Communication occurs through circumstances involving interactive talk and draws “on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk…

symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). In this case study, people were forced to explain how they understood the ongoing situation, or how they overtly articulated their own ideas of what makes sense (Benner, 1994). Prior to the shock of the Miner Report, meanings had been routinized within particular social environments, becoming accepted, assumed and unspoken.

During this case study, meanings were made much more explicit through overt linguistic expressions as people were forced to reflect on what they thought they understood. The existence of multiple meanings developed and became a point of discussion following the release of the Miner Report. As Weick stated about expressions necessary to make sense, public communication "draws on the resources of language in order to formulate [meaning] and exchange [share that meaning]" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). This final step in the sensemaking process surfaces various articulations of meaning employed as different groups attempt to communicate their sense. These include the expression of meanings encoded in language signs and how some of those meanings either gained or were denied acceptance.

5.3.5.1 Educators.

Each expression made by sensemakers served as an articulation of their understanding at a point in time and as informed by various sensemaking properties. During their ongoing process of sensemaking, university educators established and communicated meanings that were acceptable to them. The language that they used

symbolically represented meanings they considered acceptable. The meanings encoded within the labels of post-secondary institutions were fundamental in allowing university educators to express who they were and who they were not. As Glen Jones, a professor at the University of Toronto, explained about the connection between identity, social environments and communication, "Of course people are uncomfortable with the idea. They've defined their lives by the kinds of jobs they have at these institutions." (Dunville, 2007c, p. A1).

For educators, expressed meanings reinforced their status within the post-secondary educational system. Larry Smith, an Adjunct Professor, expressed that universities "quite rightly serve a broader social mandate" (McHardie, 2007c, p. A1) focused on the education of the entire person. His statement communicates status among institutions, with universities serving a higher purpose, if not the highest purpose in post-secondary education. To connect the value of university education to long-term prosperity, other faculty came together to express that the university "produces people equipped with a creative and flexible intelligence that may be applied to ever-changing areas of activity in an ever-changing world" (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007, p. A5).

One of the strongest articulations of meaning came from two professors, Michael Clow from St. Thomas University and Chris Doran from UNBSJ. They expressed that universities are knowledge creators, writing that "the university became the central institution devoted to the fostering of intellectual rationality; that is, to the pursuit of independent knowledge" (Clow & Doran, 2007, p. D9). Beyond who they are as

educators, this is where their institution is situated in time, both historically and presently. This expressed meaning, rooted in their identity and environment, was also communicated by another educator attempting to make sense of the new polytechnic entity. Peter Smith simplified the equivocal meanings active around post-secondary institutions, at least for himself and other educators, when he stated: "This distinction between training and education is the key difference between a community college and a university." (Smith, 2007, p. A7) The absence of any mention of a legitimate third stream institution is a powerful articulation.

5.3.5.2 University Leadership.

Leaders like John McLaughlin frequently articulated meaning of universities as institutions that offer students "richer understanding of the world" (MacKinnon, 2007a, p. C1). Conversely, they expressed their understanding of the polytechnic as "an educational factory… [that]… would treat faculty as if they were assembly-line workers, and students as if they were merely machines programmed to complete tasks assigned by others" (Desserud, 2007, p. A7). These leaders offer up an idea of polytechnics in opposition to their own identities, as institutions of impersonal, mass-produced industry training that function by rote without any of the necessary intellectual curiosity or abstract thought development one thinks of in higher education. Moving to this model disrupts an ongoing context of their schools, framing faculty as simple assembly line producers and students as machines in need of programming. The richness and depth of

learning, a fundamental cue that is included as core features of the university structure and by extension their own identity, would be lost within the polytechnic system.

As the process of sensemaking includes both action and communication, two distinct acts were noticed by university leaders in their response to the Miner Report, part of their effort to challenge the more dominantly espoused meaning by the commission authors. University leaders brought into question the meanings assigned to the label polytechnic. Yvon Fontaine, President of the Université de Moncton, frequently questioned what the newly proposed institution was, referring to it as the "ill-defined concept" (McHardie, 2008a, p. A5). Fontaine consistently questioned how change to an unknown, unclear idea of the educational structure could be supported. Tom Condon, former Vice President of UNBSJ, utilized a similar tactic, employing negative phrasing, such as referring to a 'polytechnic' as some "nebulous post-secondary institution" (MacKinnon, 2007c, p. C1). The bracketing of polytechnics as unclear and articulating this into the label of the institution helped to provide leaders with a background upon which to build their particular meaning.

Additionally, they attempted to infuse their meaning of polytechnics into the ongoing conversation, describing it as a myopic training centre shackled to the will of industry, running counter to the identities developed by the leaders, educators and students. Desserud came out with a strongly expressed meaning which served to communicate a vivid image to his listeners' imagination. Surfacing the idea of post-secondary institutions reflective of mass production lines, he stated that the "polytechnic

(recommended by the PSE Commission) would be an education factory. It would treat its faculty as if they were assembly line workers, and students as if they were merely machines programmed to complete tasks assigned by others" (Desserud, 2007, p. A7).

5.3.5.3 Students.

For students, the communication about the institutions representing their homes and the connection with their personal identities appeared frequently. One reason that students had fewer opportunities to have their expressions of meaning publically communicated was that they were not included in the PSEC process (Southwick, 2007b; Starkey, 2007). They also took offense to how the PSEC minimized their attempted re-encoding of institutional language symbols.

> "Not only are these so-called leaders recommending the dismantling of a university; in the press and to our faces, they continue to insult our intelligence (especially with comments claiming that if the new institution was not called a 'polytechnic', we would not be so angry)." (Starkey, 2007, p. B5)

Students responded quickly to the proposed changes in the Miner Report. Not only did they express disappointment, they challenged the concept of polytechnic institutions as one worthy of replacing their university. Starkey articulated her bracketing filter, in that her university was being dismantled and destroyed, not replaced by another valuable institution. However, she articulates a clear understanding that the meanings flowing from the Miner Report existed separately from the label 'polytechnic'. There appeared to be an understanding that two actions were occurring by the PSEC in tandem. First, linguistic symbols were being overtly changed. Second, a nuanced series of meaning

reconstructions were being enacted and communicated. The ‘university’ that students became members of was not the same ‘university’ being presented by the PSEC; the expressed meanings within the words were shifting.

5.3.5.4 PSEC Authors.

Based on their bracketing of meanings around progress and transformation, as well as their expressions of how their vision of the new polytechnic institution made sense to the self-sufficiency of New Brunswick, the PSEC authors appeared to have been caught by surprise about when sense became implausible for many groups. Miner continually expressed surprise about the confusion surrounding what he considered simple language (Keenan, 2007; McHardie, 2007f). From his position, words have ‘a’ meaning found within a singular ‘reality’. The confusion at hand was simply a matter of misunderstanding by other people; to the PSEC authors, meanings surrounding institutional identity were not equivocal and their expressions had been quite clear.

Five weeks after the release of his commission report, Miner admitted that it was “amazing that people were obsessing about nomenclature” (Keenan, 2007, p. A7). This articulation of his sense demonstrated a perspective of language as an absolute structure, linking a signifier with a single signified meaning. Miner’s puzzlement about the shattered sense of so many stakeholder groups speaks to an overly-casual appreciation of how people invest meaning into language, discounting the process of noticing and bracketing meanings en route to embedding meaning into labels. Miner conceded that “in

retrospect, we probably should have rethought what we named this to minimize some of the visceral reaction" (McHardie, 2007f, p. A1).

The challenges encountered by the commission authors were two-fold. Firstly, by attempting to enunciate such a comprehensive meaning into the polytechnic label, a language symbol that was new to most people in New Brunswick, they actually created more confusion. They simultaneously expressed the polytechnic to be both a distinctive middle-ground institution situated between traditional college and university systems and an improved combination of both institutions that could provide greater value than either colleges or universities could offer separately. The idea that a polytechnic could be tightly focused on industry skills yet widely inclusive to abstract educational pursuits seemed contradictory and weakened its potential acceptance as plausible.

Secondly, without a clear distinction in meanings between labels, their suggestion to remove a previously accepted institution and replace it with a new but unclear concept simply amplified the shock. Their gap in fully appreciating the impact of their language use appeared in a commentary describing Miner's amazement about language. In an article discussing the various names of post-secondary institutions, Keenan, a political advisor and community member, wrote that,

> "[Miner's] confusion is somewhat comical. The polytechnic concept didn't materialize out of thin air, or out of some obscure corner of the commission's report. The 'polytechnic' concept is the heart of the report (the word itself appears more than 100 times)." (Keenan, 2007, p. A7)

Keenan found Miner's surprise about the impact of language and meaning to be, at best, disingenuous.

5.3.5.5 The Government.

The articulation of meaning made by the Liberal Party is prominent throughout the case study. It begins as a government initiative, ensconced in their election platform as a goal pushing the province towards economic self-sufficiency. They continually stated their desire to refocus post-secondary education on industry needs and economic outcomes. In the words of Minister Doherty, they sought to "develop a marriage between business and government to develop the best institutions that are possible." (Church, 2007, para. 3), a message they attempted to embed within their communications. Similar to the PSEC authors, the government minimized the influence of language and meanings found within expression. Premier Graham continually echoed surprise about the emergence of so many varied meanings stemming from the proposed changed in the Miner Report, even saying plainly that "there is a lot of language around the term polytechnic. Well I'm not hung up on the language" (McHardie, 2007i, p. A1). His inference was that, to him, the name is less important that the meaning and Graham appears to desire his meanings to move forward under the guise of different language.

Stakeholders paid extremely close attention to both the words expressed by the government and the inferred meanings within those words. Instead of acknowledging the significance of language use, its relationship with identity and context, and the potential

existence of multiple, often conflicting meanings within language signs, the government dismissed this as distraction. Yet within weeks of the release of the Miner Report, the government began avoiding language symbols that they believed to be the root of the shock. At that time, Premier Graham articulated that he "doesn't want the debate to get bogged down in semantics" (McHardie, 2007i, p. A1). Minister Doherty began supporting the Premier immediately, avoiding the use of institutional terms in public presentations, expressing that "it was more important to talk about the real issues as opposed to semantics" (Robichaud, 2007d, p. A1). Both the government and the PSEC had failed to communicate meanings within language symbols that were accepted as plausible.

5.3.5.6 Communicating Plausibly.

Making sense occurs as a process that begins with the disruption of an accepted circumstance, causing situations to slip into ambiguity and meanings to be deemed implausible. The process comes to conclusion when meanings are communicated and accepted as plausible. In between, people struggle with the question 'what is happening here?' Information that is reviewed in a retrospective fashion gets noticed and bracketed within an ongoing environment. Labels are invested with meaning(s) to both simplify understanding and help people take action and move forward. This action is facilitated on presumptions about what will happen next, allowing for additional information to be collected and the sensemaking to continually adjust their understanding in an ongoing

learning circle. Throughout this process, knowledge is made explicit through linguistic expressions in which people encode meaning into the words they choose to use.

5.4 Sensemaking through Language

My goal in this analysis, with the available data, being expressions that could be attributed directly back to specific stakeholders, is to expose the process of sensemaking and, more importantly, discover how people construct plausible meanings. The process of sensemaking serves as a recipe, one that is informed by the properties of sensemaking, or the ingredients, throughout. To observe how people move through this process, I have analyzed on the language, texts of expression made throughout the case study by different impacted parties. We can observe how words are important to people, in this case the words surrounding changes to post-secondary systems, and how people choose to use them for their own purposes.

The messiness of crafting sense, something acknowledged by Weick (2007), is also an opportunity to discover richness in human understanding. It can exist between the movements from the abstract freedom in language (langue) to the enacted expression of meaning (parole). Issues of identity construction, the enactment of distinctly different cues, and the ongoing nature of sensemaking have all appeared throughout this analysis. What is fascinating about the enactment of meaning is how it moves from an abstract idea with multiple simultaneous options into an actualized singular outcome for the

sensemaker. Once a speaker invests a particular meaning into a language symbol during an expression, they cause, in that moment, the removal of all other alternative meanings.

5.5 Closing Summary

In this chapter, textual analysis was applied by drawing out thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of events and observing how they fit into the sensemaking process. The focus was on the first of a larger three-point framework, one that also includes the exploration of sensemaking properties and the enactment of language. Clearly, these three areas are interrelated and it was not feasible to cleanly separate properties and expressions; however, in this chapter I focused more specifically on process. The data reveals a strong level of shared meaning within various stakeholder groups without resolution between them, leaving conflict and disruption to exist and groups to remain in a state of flux, defending one particular enacted meaning over multiple posited meanings. Yet what is revealed is only indicative of intra-organizational sensemaking.

According to Helms Mills and Weatherbee, "sensemaking is not a rational process, nor is the same meaning always given to the same experience" (2006, p. 272). The next chapter pushes deeper into the properties of sensemaking, simultaneously observing where properties are invoked and how they are applied in order for sensemakers to reach outcomes that are functionally plausible. The linguistic symbols of university and polytechnic will bear closer examination at the micro level to review expressed meanings. Additionally, the idea of meaning convergence between inter- and

intra-organizational sensemaking will be discussed when attempting to understand which meanings surfaced as functionally plausible.

Chapter Six – The Path to Plausibility

> "Now, at the outset, I want to assure you that the name of the institution is not a major issue and leaving the term "university" in the title shouldn't be a stumbling block." (L'Écuyer & Miner, 2007, p. A9)

6.1 Introduction

The prior chapter concentrated on analyzing the case study through the process of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) as part of a larger three-point framework. Textual analysis was used within the process steps to expose how functionally plausible meanings are crafted. As well, expressions made within particular contexts were unpacked to expose how multiple meanings are enacted within the same linguistic signs, particularly within the intra-organizational environments of stakeholder groups. Yet in this case study, the sensemaking process did not cease once a certain level of agreement was achieved within the stakeholder groups. The Government of New Brunswick pushed to have their meanings generally accepted by all stakeholder groups through both their own efforts of communication and through the work of the PSEC authors. In their case, the idea of a polytechnic institution was progressive and transformative, an institution that would meet the needs of both academia and industry. At the same time, educators, students and university leaders pushed to have their meanings of a polytechnic accepted as an institution confused in focus and reductive in academic design. Ultimately, the proposed changes made by the PSEC failed.

Moving into this chapter, the remainder of the framework is explored, focusing on two main issues: 1) the properties of sensemaking and language expressions that assist in

the constitution of meaning(s) that are functionally plausible, and 2) an investigation into the exchange of ideas and meanings during inter-organizational communication. The first issue pushes deeper into the properties of sensemaking, simultaneously observing where properties are invoked and how they are applied in order for sensemakers to reach functionally plausible outcomes. The linguistic symbols of university and polytechnic will bear close examination to uncover expressed meanings at an intra-organizational level. The second issue explores the failure of the recommendation by the PSEC to transform three university campuses into polytechnic institution. Here, meaning convergence, or lack thereof, at the level of inter-organizational sensemaking (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006) will be discussed when attempting to understand which meanings surfaced as functionally plausible.

Prior to the commencement of this case study, the overlapping meanings of institutions, of a university for example, were enacted in a similar enough manner to operate as a loosely-coupled system (Weick, 1976), so that the vast majority of people in the system functioned without any dissonance in their understood meaning. Although data was not collected before the events of the PSEC case study, it would not be unreasonable to assert that multiple meanings were indeed present. For example, the meaning held by students of what a university ‘meant’ was likely different from the meaning held by faculty, or in turn, the meaning held by government agencies. Yet, these meanings were enacted with enough similarity that they overlapped and allowed people to continue to function. Faculty continued to teach and students continued to attend

classes without perpetual arguments about where they were, the purpose or related outcomes.

During the disruption, stakeholders were forced to reexamine their understanding of these educational institutions down to the micro-level of language sign meanings. They enacted these meanings, some habitual and some novel, through their enunciations regarding the various proposed educational institutions. They were active in surfacing particularly important cues, valuable to them in context, simultaneously creating and constraining potential meanings (Weick, 1995).

Three Point Framework		
Sensemaking as Process	**Constitutive Elements of Sensemaking**	**Communication via Language**
• Organizing flux • Noticing and bracketing • Labeling • Retrospection • Making presumptions • Social factors • Being action oriented • Organizing through communication	• **Identity construction** • **Retrospective** • **Enactive of sensible environments** • **Social** • **Ongoing** • **Focus on extracted cues**	• **Langue** • **Parole**

6.2 Intra-Organizational Sensemaking through Properties

Sensemaking occurs on multiple socially-negotiated levels or layers, much like a set of matryoshkas, or Russian nesting dolls, as groups within groups. The epicenter of disruption of meaning in this case study flows from the Miner Report, revealing the emergence of multiple stakeholder groups that are all seeking to construct and accept meanings from a disruptive shock. These stakeholder groups were explored in the previous chapter. The central element of the disruption was grounded in the shifts in

meaning, both at the level of labeling and bracketing and the meanings constructed using language within those labels and brackets. Throughout the process of sensemaking, meanings were negotiated within groups, or intra-organizationally, and between groups, or inter-organizationally. Multiple alternative meanings appeared around both the idea of a university and that of a polytechnic institution.

In this section of the discussion, I carry forward my original analogy of sensemaking as both a process and set of properties, a recipe and a set of ingredients, through which plausible sense is made. Whereas in the previous chapter, focus was on the process taking place, I now move deeper into the role of particular properties of sensemaking and language use. Weick has argued that the process of sensemaking has constitutive ingredients (2005), or properties, but many researchers have inferred that the properties, in and of themselves, might not constitute a clear sensemaking process (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004; Helms Mills et al., 2010). To focus on the more dominant properties that emerged during intra-organizational sensemaking, I have chosen to look separately at each stakeholder group through both properties and language use.

Being true to both the data and the focus of this examination, I attempt to uncover which properties appear in greater or lesser amounts in particular expressions. The prior chapter focused on the process of how functionally plausible meanings occur; this section looks at what properties are used in that process. To avoid the challenges with inferring intentionality into a sensemaker's expression or *why* certain properties surface more than

others, I have endeavored to remain rooted in the evidence of the expressions and properties as they appear in the data.

6.2.1 Students

The properties of identity and social context seem to appear in the expressions made by students more clearly than other properties, such as retrospection and the ongoing nature of sense. One of the key expressions of identity came from UNBSJ student Delsie Burke when she said, "This is my home. This is the first home I had since I had come out of school. This suggestion (to change UNBSJ into a polytechnic institution) is kicking me out of my home." (S. Davis, 2007a, p. B1). The language choice made by Burke in her expression to connect the symbol of university to the meaning of an educational 'home' represents a choice in meaning, called parole in linguistic theory. She applies meaning to the symbol 'university' that departs from an institutional definition of classes, content or credentials, choosing instead to enact a sense of intimacy and personal connection. Gone is the potential that exists in langue, that a university could mean anything in an abstract theoretical setting; Burke makes a choice in her expression, one reaffirmed multiple times over by other students (Hattie, 2007; Sager, 2007). They enact, through their constructed identity, a sensible environment of home. By framing their meaning in this way, their home, and by extension their identity, is being threatened by the proposal in the Miner Report.

Eric Savoie, the Vice President (External) for the UNBSJ Student Representative Council, reiterates this personal connection to the university in Saint John when describing the visceral and defensive position taken by students in the days following the release of the Miner Report when he said, "they (students) feel threatened that maybe (university education) could possibly be taken away from them" (D Shipley, 2007a, p. A1). Savoie infers that a shift in institutional identity in Saint John, transforming UNBSJ into a polytechnic institution, would remove part of how students constitute themselves; for students, the removal of the university is a removal of part of who they are.

As a group, students performed to an aspirational audience of peers and alumni, many of whom enjoyed a personal connection with their post-secondary institution. Within this social environment, they envisioned the potential of their education as a journey to move them beyond their current level, both in status and growth. In a letter to the editor just days following the release of the Miner Report, Guinevere Hattie, a student at UNBSJ, wrote:

> "If UNBSJ is closed, our future will be limited due to the lack of choices given to us in Saint John. Those who want an education that is outside the fields offered at a polytechnic institute will have to leave the region and go elsewhere, and may not come back." (2007, p. A8)

Her application of the term 'our' shows that she believes her words are representative of many students within her social group. The enacted parole, or expressed meaning, within her idea of a university is one of a future that includes choice, hope and prosperity. She puts the two institutional structures in juxtaposition; by applying meaning to 'university'

as an institutional of choice and the future, she simultaneously infers that a 'polytechnic' is about limits and boundaries.

For students, the intra-organizational enactment of meaning became a story of hope versus loss around their identity. Jordan Graham, Vice President (External) for the UNBF Student Representative Council, said, "Students may not trust the credibility of an institution like that (a polytechnic institution). It could have a negative impact through the entire UNB community. It takes away its identity and personally, I don't want to go to a university that's suffering that bad." (Dunville, 2007a, p. A1). Becky McBriarty, a student at UNBSJ, expressed that "For the gain of technically trained workers, we will lose so much – our youth, our culture, our city as we know it. These are losses that cannot be accepted. We cannot lose UNBSJ." (MacKinnon, 2007c, p. C1). In her parole, McBriarty connects the identity of not only students but the entire city to the existence of the university, the two culturally intertwined.

In her expressed meaning, the loss of the university would fundamentally alter identity as well as the larger character of Saint John. What is fascinating is that students enacted cues of connectivity and identity with their institutions that were aspirational, relating neither to current jobs nor career outcomes. In all of the data collected in this study, not a single student constructed their meaning of university in relation to future employment, prosperity or income level. For students, identity seems to surface as their most valuable property element, one enacted frequently in expressions of meaning

6.2.2 Educators

Much like students, university educators also drew heavily on properties of identity and their social environment. However, perhaps related to their length of committed involvement with universities, they also enacted retrospective conditions, rooting their present and future work in historical meanings. Their meanings flowed from the past and their present, perhaps reflecting an ongoing nature without explicitly stating this type of flow. To become faculty, they studied for extended periods of time, obtaining multiple university degrees while the schools at which they studied helped to define who they are, both personally and professionally.

The social environments in which educators were rooted were quite personal and held strong connections to identity. Faculty members were deeply embedded within a strong professional academic community with complex behaviours and barriers to entry (Murray, 2007). This social environment is protective against external changes to long-earned academic freedoms and sensitive to who retains control over both the content and structures of work. The social dynamic for academics demanded a defense to be mounted, beginning with the expressed meanings in their language during the case.

University educators positioned themselves as providing a value to their community, both culturally and intellectually. We have observed cues thus far extracted within particularly salient social contexts, including the importance that faculty place upon the ideal of academic freedom. As a contextual filter, this freedom would increase the importance of cues that support knowledge acquisition free from external pressures

and demands for industrial applications. In a report authored by 34 different faculty members from UNBSJ, they state that "the university is of inestimable social, cultural and economic value to the city and region" (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007, p. A5).

What differs here between the parole expressed by students and educators is where identity is connected. Students turned the lens inward; educators appear to be pushing it outward, applying a meaning to their work within the label 'university' that provides value outside of their own being. The value produced by the symbol 'university', and in turn those who educate at universities, is significant and creates status. Geoff Martin, a faculty member at Mount Allison University, expressed, "How do you deal with the fact that every significant community in the province seems to have the main campus of a university or a satellite campus" (Casey, 2007b, p. A2). Here, he attaches the value of significance to the symbol of university. This thought was reiterated by Leslie Jeffrey, a faculty member at UNBSJ, when she stated:

> "We will lose our dynamism and attractiveness as a city at precisely the moment that many sense a new vibrancy and hopefulness for the community. Few people will be attracted to a city that does not have the dynamic energy that is created by a university; few people with other options will want to stay." (Jeffrey, 2007, p. A7)

The enacted meaning here infuses attractiveness and significance within their meaning of a university, an act of parole within this style of institution from the perspective of a university educator. The contextual constraints in which a person finds themselves embedded appears to influence which cues get enacted and the value those cues possess within their social constructs.

However, for educators, it is also their individual identities constructed over years of academic and professional investment that influences one particular meaning over others. As Glen Jones stated, "Of course people (educators) are uncomfortable with the idea. They've defined their lives by the kinds of jobs they have at these institutions" (Dunville, 2007c, p. A1). In this statement, faculty members are looking back retrospectively at their careers and the identities defined by those careers; they are questioning the enormity of the shift that would necessarily occur to their identities should they find themselves employed at a renamed educational institution. To twist Shakespeare's writing, in this case a rose called by another name might not smell as sweet.

In an effort to reaffirm their meaning as more functionally plausible, 34 faculty members at UNBSJ put forward the crux of their meaning position in an argumentative statement. They wrote, "They (the Government of New Brunswick) must weigh the long-term social, ethical, and economic benefits of real education against the shorter-term monetary costs of providing education. They must distinguish between a short-term boom-and-bust mentality, and a perspective that will ensure health, vitality, and prosperity over time." (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007, p. A5). Educators appear to enact both internal identity issues as well as external value into their parole of a university. Their social environment appears to be a strong property at play in their ingredient mix of sensemaking.

6.2.3 University Leadership

University leaders typically rise from roles within academia, starting first as educators before entering the ranks of administration. In the prior chapter, it was revealed that meaning expressions aligned quite closely between educators and university leaders. However, the application of language by educators and university leaders, *how* they engaged with both specific sensemaking properties, seemed quite different – educators appeared to demonstrate their parole, or enacted meaning, of university through a very personal lens, drawing on the properties of identity and their social environment. University leaders seemed to focus their expressions outwardly on their institution. Perhaps this is related to their institutional role, but that is merely speculating on intention. Their expressions appear to centre on the property of enacted cues in a way that protects the meaning of their university institution, predominately around cues of status and destruction. Additionally, more than students or educators, they draw upon time, value and history through the properties of retrospection and identity.

Don Desserud, the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies at UNBSJ, wrote a strong statement about the value of time in his published response to the Miner Report. In that piece, he surfaced the importance of retrospection as a component in his own sensemaking. Universities, to him, had a long and distinguished history, centuries old, yet still relevant and responsive to modern techniques, ideas and demands.

> "Universities don't think of education as something that can be parcelled out in small bits, on demand. To use the PSE Report's word, we are not at all "nimble" when asked to respond to the latest fads or fleeting needs, most of which will be forgotten and replaced by yet another fad in a few

> months. Instead, our professors teach in their areas of expertise, and bring the results of many years of research and scholarship into their classrooms. Sometimes, we do this very clumsily. We have complicated things to say, and it can often take us a long time to say them. And it's true that professors can be an eccentric and unruly lot. But we teach with integrity, and not at the beck and call of local industries." (Desserud, 2007, p. A7)

This statement made by a university leader emphasizes the depth of value embedded within the past and how that history is enacted within the meaning of 'university'. The cues of time and tradition, including professors with 'years of research and scholarship', as well as the concept of integrity, all indicate a counter-point position to the meanings proposed by the PSEC that universities were stuck in a "theory-approach" (Dunville, 2007a, p. A1).

Kathryn Hamer, UNBSJ's Vice-President, added to Desserud's use of retrospection by relating the current PSEC proposal to the Deutsch Report of 1962 in which then Premier Louis J. Robichaud recommended equal opportunity for all to quality education. "I tend to think that if we believe that equal opportunity, *chance égale*, was a reality for (Robichaud), was something he worked towards, then taking away access, if that's what's to happen, would be a betrayal of his legacy." (David Shipley, 2007, p. A1). Hamer uses the property of retrospection, enacting the power of Robichaud's legacy upon which to stabilize her meaning. The argument she makes appears to be that if Robichaud's work in the 1960's on opportunity for quality education remains salient and valuable within the province, then the suggestion of change made in the Miner Report is implausible – it does not fit the province's identity.

Desserud also brings to the forefront the role identity plays in acceptable meanings – it is not sufficient to state only who and what you are; it is extremely valuable to express who or what you cannot accept becoming. “The PSE Commission sees education as fast food, picked up in the drive-through… So of course the PSE Commission didn't want UNBSJ to remain a university.” (Desserud, 2007, p. A7). Using food service establishments as a metaphor for various levels of post-secondary education served as a narrative device for Desserud to once again express the value of time and commitment.

For university leaders, the meaning of a university is one that possesses status within post-secondary education on the national stage. This cue of status surfaced frequently in their expressions. David Ganong, a member of the Board of Governors at UNB, stated that it was critical that both campuses of UNB stay together to remain a strong, national calibre university for the sake of the province. “It’s important for New Brunswick that (UNB is) in that league. Once it is not, we would see a diminishment of the quality of teaching, the quantity and quality of research and development as (UNB) kind of wound down to be a ‘regional’ institution.” (D Shipley, 2007a, p. A1). Ganong’s expression does not personally connect him or his identity to the university; rather, it connects the status of various levels or categories of post-secondary education to the identity of the university.

This enacted cue of status for both campuses is reiterated by Kathryn Hamer, UNBSJ’s Vice-President: “It’s critical not only for UNBSJ but for UNB as an institution.

Keeping the two campuses together helps UNB maintain its status as a national-calibre university." (D Shipley, 2007a, p. A1). The choice she invests in her words puts status into the meaning of a university, articulated in her parole. By establishing the importance of the status cue as a core property in her sensemaking ingredient bundle, she then takes the opportunity to leverage the importance of status to question the direction of the PSEC recommendation. In a separate instance, Hamer states, "I think a province that would seriously consider being the only province in the country without a provincial and national university needs to think twice about the value it places on postsecondary education." (Morris, 2007, p. A7).

From their expressions, functionally plausible sense made by university leaders appears to be constructed upon the identity of a larger contextual framework - on a provincial and national stage. Perhaps this is the social environment they wish their institution to continue to be accepted within. What emerges clearly from the data is their reliance on enacted cues and retrospection to build sense, using a different composition of properties than either students or educators.

6.2.4 Government

Similar to students, the expressions made by government officials appear to surface plausible meanings as crafted through the properties of identity and a relationship with their social environment. Unlike the students, the government did not engage in parole around the meaning of a university; instead, they focused more on the cues of

change, economic growth and the new educational structure of a polytechnic. This created less tension to their identity constructions around a 'university', easing the ability for them to suggest changes to the structures of post-secondary education and align more closely to the newer idea of a 'polytechnic'.

The Government of New Brunswick, while under the leadership of Premier Graham, established a goal of self-sufficiency for the province; this goal served as a unique identity marker allowing the party to win the 2006 election. Fresh off their election victory, the government set up the PSEC to pursue this mandate. Government officials and the commission authors had significantly less relational proximity to the university, influencing how they defined themselves in relation to the historical institution. In his State of the Province Address on February 15, 2007, Premier Graham stated,

> "We're talking about transformative change. It's no small task and we don't want to waste a moment. … But if the naysayers are suggesting New Brunswickers can't achieve this, then I beg to differ. We can do it. And we must. If the naysayers are suggesting that collectively we can't change our destiny, then I beg to differ. We can do it. And we must. If the naysayers are saying New Brunswick can't take a leadership role in this country, I beg to differ. We can do it. And we must." (GNB, 2007a, p. 2)

This statement predates the propositions found in the Miner Report, yet it reveals both identity issues and the contextual cues that exist for the government. Using the rhetorical device of repetition, Graham clearly attempts to establish the government's identity as one of change makers, stating three separate times, "We can do it. And we must." These seven words, repeated multiple times, creates a proactive claim on both the ability and necessity of the government to construct new meaning of educational institutions. The

government committed to transformational change and their labels reflect this. To understand how the government enacted parole within the word polytechnic, it is vital to first remember the context they crafted for themselves.

The key document of meaning expressions for the government was Our Action Plan to be Self-Sufficient in New Brunswick (2007a). This formed the core of the government's intra-organizational sensemaking, the structure of meaning that they would use to move forward and take action. Within this document, the government uses the terms 'self-sufficient' and 'self-sufficiency' a total of 55 times, not including the application of these terms in document titles and headings repeated throughout the report. It is important to note that the polytechnic label had not yet been enacted at this point in time (February 15, 2007), although the PSEC commission had been established with a particular mandate for change.

One of the primary challenges identified early in the government report was having an educational system that reflected the vision of self-sufficiency. "A self-sufficient New Brunswick will have a world-class education system that values creativity and inclusion. It will have a culture of lifelong learning with high standards for literacy, numeracy and ongoing workplace training." (GNB, 2007a, p. 12). They rely on the cue of education, adding to it the preface of 'world-class', a system that might value creativity but is primarily focused on practical workplace training skills. Building upon this focus of workplace skills, the government combined the aspirational cue of world-class education with their identity cue of self-sufficiency, laying out their logical argument for

change. “To ensure we have the people with the abilities we need to achieve self-sufficiency, we must make transformative changes in our workplaces, our post-secondary institutions, our schools and our communities.” (GNB, 2007a, p. 22).

By layering these cues in a linear fashion, the foundation for meaning in a supported educational structure begins to occur. I should acknowledge that some might refer to what the government is doing here as sensegiving – that they appear to be crafting “some abstract ‘vision’ of the changed organization” and then sharing it “to stakeholders and constituents” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 434). At this stage, I choose to focus more on how they are creating sense versus constructing an argument differentiating between their making and giving of that sense.

Throughout statements made by representatives of the Government of New Brunswick, they have invoked a particular meaning for a polytechnic, using it as a label grounded in their own identity as change makers as well as the economic position of the province. Minister Doherty expressed quite strongly the government’s meaning within the polytechnic label: “Polytechnics clearly represent a significant evolutionary force occurring across North America.” (Gauthier, 2007a) Suggestions of change were bracketed and contextualized within their political party’s mandate. These enacted meanings aligned strongly with their espoused identity to the electorate. They appeared to situate their parole of polytechnic institutions within the social property of sensemaking, performing in comparison to other provinces as their audience.

Working under the mandate to economically transform their province from a have-not to a have region in Canada, they seem to have enacted meanings in order to recraft post-secondary education institutions in the province and align them better with economic outcomes. As part of the government's identity, they positioned themselves to transform the provincial working class and acted as if they had the authority to make change. As Premier Graham articulated, "We welcome the input that New Brunswickers want to provide. But at the end of the day, our government recognizes the responsibility that we have to make difficult decisions to build a better system for post-secondary education." (Southwick, 2007a, p. A1). This expression by Graham reveals his meaning construction hinged on the properties of identity and the social context they created for themselves during the 2006 election when they positioned the Liberals as the party that would transform New Brunswick into a 'have' province.

6.2.5 PSEC Authors

Unlike the other stakeholder groups who were all somewhat inexperienced with polytechnic institutions, both Miner and L'Écuyer were closely tied to polytechnics in the years preceding their appointment as Chairs of the PSEC. Their history with these institutions constituted part of their identity; as such, it was reasonable to expect that they would favour the property of identity in their sensemaking process. This aligned with who they had become, easing their path to both suggest this new structure in New Brunswick as well as passionately defend it during the turmoil that followed the release

of their report. In the Miner Report, they attempted an act of parole to enact a particular meaning to the word symbol ‘polytechnic’.

> “Polytechnics are multi-field regional institutions focusing on contacts with working life and on regional development. They deliver degree studies which give a higher education qualification and practical professional skills. All degree studies include practical on-the-job learning. They offer programs in various fields including humanities, social sciences, business and administration, natural resources, technology, communications, natural sciences, health, tourism, catering and domestic services.” (Miner & L’Écuyer, 2007a, p. 17)

Although their expression is not directly related back to their personal identities, as was the situation with both students and educators, the property of identity is strongly present here because it is the institutional structure that both authors have strongly supported in the latter parts of their careers. An underlying influence exists. In their expression, they present a vision of commerce and progress that is connected directly to the institutional name and format that they have led for years. Through the freedom available within the tool of language, they were able to take advantage of the space between abstract meaning potential and enacted expressions that force one particular choice of meaning, or parole, to emerge.

Their parole draws on the property of enacted cues as they focus on academic credentials and designations, presenting such a wide range of educational opportunities that the polytechnic institution appears to fit the needs of all students. According to Miner:

> “Polytechnics are seen as a solid middle ground, capable of meeting many of the labour market demands for skilled professionals in today's society.

> As is a characteristic of polytechnics, they will offer a broad variety of credentials (certificates, diplomas, undergraduate degrees, some graduate degrees, and apprenticeship training) including, where appropriate, first and second year arts and science programs for transfer into other institutions." (Gauthier, 2007a)

The tone of expression in their definition plays to the ongoing nature of sensemaking. There is an evolutionary undercurrent in their application of meaning, a naturalness and progression in the shift from university to polytechnic by overlapping the credentials that typically exist at either college or university education, from certificates and diplomas to degrees.

When developing their particular intra-organizational sense, they frequently avoided offering expressions of meaning about universities, much in the same way that students avoided expressions of meaning about polytechnics. This avoidance is, in itself, an expression of meaning, silently inferring a negative or opposite meaning through omission. There are a few rare moments when the PSEC authors overtly enacted 'university' in order to juxtapose against 'polytechnic'. Miner and L'Écuyer stated once that,

> "Unlike universities, which are criticized for being bogged down in the political quicksand that surrounds massive boards of governors and untouchable, tenured faculty, and safe from the slow government gears that now control the community college system, the polytechnic is seen as a way to respond most quickly to industry's needs, according to the commission." (Robichaud, 2007c, p. A1)

Miner expressed his surprise and confusion in the multiple interpretations or flexible expressions of meaning in language. This speaks to the multiple nature of

enacted meaning in language symbols. One week after the release of the report, he stated, “I want to assure you that the name of the institution is not a major issue and leaving the term "university" in the title shouldn't be a stumbling block.” (L’Écuyer & Miner, 2007, p. A9). This declaration revealed that, to him, the sole cause of chaos in the PSE debate was in the interpretation of linguistic signs. The government also initially believed that the problem was just in the name, failing to recognize that the language signs used to identify post-secondary institutions are not innately attached to singular meanings but are enacted by various stakeholder groups in a multitude of ways.

6.2.6 Intra-Organizational Plausibility

Within each of these stakeholder groups, the data appears to reveal that during the sensemaking process within the stakeholder groups, many of the sensemaking properties were engaged; however, certain properties seemed to play a more prominent role than others. For four of the stakeholder groups, identity surfaced quite predominantly as a critical ingredient. Students connected their meaning of university quite intimately as an institution important to who they were at the present or would become in the future; surprisingly, educators linked identity in the meaning of the university to the value the institution provided at a societal level, silently inferring that value was created by and thus intimately attached back to them as the providers of education.

Three Point Framework		
Sensemaking as Process	Constitutive Elements of Sensemaking	Communication via Language
• Organizing flux • Noticing and bracketing	• Identity construction • Retrospective • Enactive of sensible	• Langue • Parole

- Labeling
- Retrospection
- Making presumptions
- Social factors
- Being action oriented
- Organizing through communication

environments
- Social
- Ongoing
- Focus on extracted cues

Conversely, the government leveraged identity as a powerful property that connected them to polytechnics on a more macro-economic level, while the PSEC authors were much more personally connected to the institutional structure of the polytechnic. The social property, encompassing the contextual environment that within which stakeholders were embedded, appeared strongly for students, educators, as well as the government, although uniquely for each group. University leaders appeared as the defenders of their institutions, drawing on a sense seemingly developed from enacted cues of value, status and the destruction of universities.

In their most recent work, Helms Mills and Thurlow stated that "at its most basic, sensemaking is about understanding *how* different meanings are assigned to the same event" (2010, p. 183). The question is process-based, requiring focus on the tools used by sensemakers in the crafting of meaning. Building upon their process-based question, this thesis specifically focuses on plausibility and how functionally plausible meanings are constructed and accepted. The section above focuses directly on the properties of sensemaking that emerge during the process, the ingredients used to make sense. What is fascinating is that there was no evidence that plausibility was being *applied* as an ingredient of sensemaking; that is to say that it appears that only the other six properties, in some combination, were being engaged with as various groups worked at crafting a sense. The effort put forward in the process of making sense was to arrive at a meaning

that was salient, instrumental, and simple enough to take action upon; this seems to show that functional plausibility is a necessary outcome state in the sensemaking process, a sought state to close the act of making sense.

6.3 Failure to Achieve a New Shared Meaning

Throughout this work, I have focused on increasing the understanding around *how* functionally plausible meanings are constructed and accepted as meaningful. Weick referred to these meanings as ones that are pragmatic, useful and serve as a means of moving forward (1995), meanings that are less than optimal but good enough to take action on, or what Simon simply called 'satisficing' (1956). From this case study, it has been shown that meanings that are considered plausible are formed through a process of sensemaking in which various properties surface to influence the enacted meanings expressed within language symbols.

Following the shock of meaning initiated by the Miner Report and the suggestion to transform university campuses into polytechnic institutions, it is apparent that various stakeholder groups constructed distinctly different meanings within their own smaller informal social organizations. While the PSEC authors and agents of the Government of New Brunswick pushed ahead with one set of meanings enacted within the idea of a 'university' and a 'polytechnic institution', other groups, including students, educators and university leaders, enacted different meanings within these same words. However, this ongoing sensemaking process as presented thus far has focused primarily on intra-

organizational sensemaking, exploring how each stakeholder group crafts meanings that are functionally plausible within their own context.

Helms Mills and Weatherbee speak of intra-organizational sensemaking in their study of actions and understandings that happened within and between organizations during a hurricane relief effort (2006). When discussing the reactions of various emergency responder groups, they wrote, "Prior to this point (three full days after the hurricane had made landfall), each responder organization had operated independently of one another, had relied on organizationally based identities, their intra-organizational routines, SOPs, scripts and behaviours" (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006, p. 269). Much like the case study of PSE transformation, various sub-organizations had distinctive scripts and behaviours that they followed, very much similar to Weick's process of bracketing, labeling and communicating sense. A unique difference between the sub-organizations studied by Helms Mills and Weatherbee (2006) and the sub-organizations in the present case of PSE change is proximity. As stated by Helms and Weatherbee, prior to the hurricane relief effort, each responder organization (including the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia Power, and the Canadian Armed Forces) had operated independently of each other. It was the extreme scope of relief efforts required in Halifax that necessitated that these separate organizations work together, highlighting the lack of shared meanings, or convergence, between these groups.

This is not the situation in the present case study of proposed PSE change. In this case, the various stakeholder groups emerge as distinct sub-organizations with particular

brackets, labeling and communication methods within their groups. However, prior to the Miner Report, each of these organizations had operated closely in an ongoing and interdependent relationship. It was only the shock, suggesting that some institutional structures change in both title and substance, that rifts in shared meanings between the groups surfaced. Whereas the hurricane study focused on a novel instance of convergence, the PSE study was unique in that convergence already existed at some level; the shock that created implausible meanings for multiple stakeholder groups initiated a circumstance of divergence when existing overlapping meanings separated and needed to re-converge.

6.3.1 Convergence

Convergence occurs when two or more things share enough similarities that they begin to move closer, appearing to come together and overlap. In his research on organizing, Weick (1976) described educational 'organizations' as loosely coupled systems, in that the subgroups within the larger organization were responsive to each other while remaining distinctive in identity.

> "By loose coupling, the author intends to convey the image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness. Thus, in the case of an educational organization, it may be the case that the counselor's office is loosely coupled to the principal's office. The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond. Each of those connotations would be conveyed if the qualifier loosely were attached to the word coupled." (Weick, 1976, p. 3)

Convergence between the loosely coupled components brings their various meanings and understanding, their 'sense', overlapping in a manner close enough that the components appear to be attached. They share a level of functional plausibility that translates into more simple, less complex meanings that are satisficing, instrumental, and actionable.

6.3.2 Breakdown in Inter-Organizational Sensemaking

The prior sections provided numerous examples of assumed agreement within groups at the intra-organizational level. Stakeholders within their own groups appeared to make similar expressions of meaning, or use similar examples of parole, to demonstrate in-group shared meaning. As pointed out in their study, shared meanings "can only result when there is a convergence of both inter and intra organizational sensemaking" (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006, p. 266). However, the proposed changes within the Miner Report of transforming three university campuses into polytechnical institutions failed to be executed. Convergence between stakeholder groups following the Miner Report at an inter-organizational level failed to manifest in the direction desired by both the Government of New Brunswick and the PSEC.

Months after the release of the Miner Report, the Government of New Brunswick changed their direction, stopped using the term 'polytechnic' (Hazel, 2008) and developed The Working Group to reassess the provincial recommendations to post-secondary education. The original language of change shifted back to the continuity of three university satellite campuses. I propose that the polytechnic change initiative failed

to gain convergence at the inter-organizational level in three distinct areas: a lack of consistent cues for shared identity, a lack of consistent location for shared context, and a lack of consistent parole for shared parole. Naturally, these issues occur concurrently in the case events, creating the messiness that Weick was fond of writing about. I attempt to tease them apart in a discussion of why the proposed change in the Miner Report failed, a final component in this examination of how plausible meanings are constructed.

6.3.2.1 Lack of consistent cues for shared identity.

One of the key characteristics of loosely coupled organizations is that the various sub-groups involved in the organization are responsive to each other while preserving their own identity (Weick, 1976). Prior to the release of the Miner Report, each of the various stakeholder groups were crafting and reaffirming their ongoing sense through the singular linguistic cue of 'university'. The parole expressed by students connected the university intimately to their personal identity, time and again referring to it as home. Educators connect their expressed meaning to an ongoing system of value, value they delivered and that was a core part of their constructed identity. This was revealed in statements by faculty: "University is where students acquire both humanistic and scientific knowledge. Education is what happens to individuals when they are introduced to centuries- old traditions and philosophies as well as to contemporary methodologies and theories." (UNBSJ Faculty, 2007, p. A5).

The shift in post-secondary educational cues initiated in the Miner Report by the PSEC and supported by the Government of New Brunswick shocked ongoing meaning.

Stakeholders who managed to co-exist around the consistent cue of university despite having slightly differing identities and meanings around that cue were forced to choose between competing language – either change and construct sense around the new 'polytechnic' cue or reaffirm the ongoing cue of 'university'. Clearly, the PSEC and Government chose to make the shift to polytechnic; as a cue, it supported many aspects of their intra-organizational sensemaking. This was not the case for the other three stakeholder groups. The cue was continually questioned on its operationalized merit by educators. Over a month after the release of the Miner Report, John Johnson, a professor at UNBSJ wrote "From a polytech point of view, we don't know what it is. It was poorly defined." (McHardie, 2007h, p. A3). The inference from Johnson is that it is extremely difficult to accept and absorb a new concept, such as the polytechnic institution, as plausible if the expressed meaning by those proposing change is itself unclear. Without a clear meaning to assess, a shift to accept this new cue would be neither satisficing nor actionable – it fails to be functionally plausible.

In the same manner, university leaders and students did not accept this new cue, perhaps due to their embedded connection to 'university'. Students reaffirmed their intra-organizational sense of home and identity. Yet, they also reacted angrily about being asked to accept the new polytechnic cue when they, as a group, were not included in the PSEC (Moszynski, 2007). In the week following the Miner Report's release, students reacted against the cue and the inferred changes that the PSEC were making: "Not only are these so-called leaders recommending the dismantling of a university; in the press and to our faces, they continue to insult our intelligence (especially with comments claiming

that if the new institution was not called a "polytechnic," we would not be so angry).” (Starkey, 2007, p. A5).

University leaders responded in defense of the language cue ‘university’, a foundational element of their position. They attacked the parole choices made by the PSEC, stating that: “The PSE Commission sees education as fast food, picked up in the drive through. Universities, real universities, serve up banquets, prepared slowly and with great care.” (Desserud, 2007, p. A7). Through this expression, Desserud sets up the university cue as one worthy of reaffirming while simultaneously questioning the perspective and context in which the PSEC was operating. To the university leadership, the structure of their institution remained instrumental.

6.3.2.2 Lack of consistent location for shared context.

The failure of inter-organizational sensemaking also was influenced by the divergent contexts in which the different stakeholder groups were crafting sense. Following the shock of the Miner Report, each stakeholder group was crafting meaning within their own contextual environment and, by extension, for a distinctly different audience. In this particular case study, the context the Government of New Brunswick set up for themselves was one of transformation and change. Simple, powerful expressions clearly captured the environment they were working within. Minister Doherty said in an interview that "The status quo is simply not acceptable," (Church, 2007, p. A7). The social context of the Government of New Brunswick was an environment built upon their

electoral mandate and was held together by the support of party members. Yet, they also crafted meanings in their expressions with other provinces situated as their audience; Premier Graham and the Liberal party were determined to economically transform New Brunswick from a have-not to a have region in Canada. Within these social environments, they enacted meanings within the labels of post-secondary institutions, seeking to recraft the educational structures to better align with economic outcomes, increasing the attractiveness for industry to invest in a province with a job-ready population.

There is nothing necessarily amiss with this direction and if other stakeholder groups had been working within a similar context, perhaps little in the way of disruption would have occurred. Yet the transformational propositions made in the Miner Report failed to gain plausible traction as different stakeholders were embedded within their own social networks. Even at the governmental level, context was a critical factor between how different political parties constructed meaning from the Miner Report. Margaret-Ann Blaney, a member of the official opposition Progressive Conservative party, stated that "If we were starting from scratch and didn't have a university in our community, perhaps a polytechnic institute would be something we would look at and put in place. But in effect we would dismantle what we have and create a new entity." (McHardie, 2007d, p. A1).

Students made sense within a social environment of peers and other university alumni, many of whom enjoyed a personal connection with their post-secondary

institution. Within this context, they envisioned the potential of their education as a journey to move them beyond their current level, both in status and growth. Alternatively, faculty members were deeply embedded within a strong professional academic community with complex behaviours and barriers to entry (Murray, 2007). Their social environment is geared to be protective against external changes of long-earned academic freedoms, control over content and structure of teaching, and their particular broad view of post-secondary education. Their contextual environment was well-expressed by the Canadian Association of University Teachers in a statement: "At every turn, the commission has focused on narrow goals that seem driven by private-sector management fads rather than a compelling and just vision of what New Brunswick's system of post-secondary education should be for its citizens." (White, 2007b, p. A2). The social dynamic for academics demanded a defense to be mounted to reaffirm their ongoing sense.

6.3.2.3 Lack of consistent parole for shared meaning.

Finally, the parole that served stakeholder groups to form intra-organizational sense at a micro-level created divergence at the more macro inter-organizational level. Put plainly, the expressed meanings that worked within groups served as barriers for shared meanings between groups. The parole of the PSEC and Government failed to be real or have value to students and educators. The majority of expressions made by students throughout the case focused on articulating sense around the university cue. Yet, multiple times throughout the case, students expressed confusion in their understanding

of the polytechnic cue. Brandon Zhan, an international student at UNBSJ, stated that “In the culture where we are from…we call them (a polytechnic institution) fake universities.” He continued by saying that “polytechs are schools that only concentrate on making money and the quality of education is totally different than a university." (D Shipley, 2007b, p. A6).

The language symbol of polytechnic has little value when compared to a university; when Khalad Abel, President of the Faculty Association at Université de Moncton’s Shippagan campus, was asked how students were interpreting and expressing meaning of the polytechnic cue, he simply said that it “doesn’t mean much to them” (White, 2007c, p. A3). Educators reiterated this confusion. In a letter to the editor, Dr. Winnifred Bogaards stated that the lack of acceptance of the polytechnic idea by educators was manifesting itself in career action. “Faculty (at UNBSJ) are already looking for jobs at real universities.” (Bogaards, 2007, p. A6). This same sentiment was echoed by Greg Kealey, the Vice-President of Research at UNB: "I think faculty who have a capacity to move in terms of their strengths and marketability would probably think about whether or not they wish to stay." (Dunville, 2007b, p. A3).

UNBSJ faculty members Michael Clow and Chris Doran captured their impressions of conflicting meanings in quite a simple metaphor, saying that the proposed changes were “like grafting a carrot to an apple; it simply will not work” (2007, p. D9). University leaders pushed the conflict in various paroles being enacted by the government as being much more dangerous, signaling the idea of destruction in many of

their expressions. Yvon Fontaine, President of the Université de Moncton, expressed early in the process that "I don't think we should trash the system, we shouldn't start from scratch" (Robichaud, 2007a, p. A4). His parole of a polytechnic was the necessary destruction of multiple university campuses. Almost mocking the expressed meanings presented by the PSEC and Government officials, Thomas J. Condon, the former Vice-President of UNBSJ, stated emphatically that “In destroying UNBSJ they seem piously to hope that something wonderful will magically arise, Phoenix-like, from its ashes. I do not think this is what the students, the faculty, the alumni or the citizens of Saint John want.” (Condon, 2007, p. A7)

Reflecting on the language choices in their work, the PSEC authors frequently demonstrated confusion about the existence of multiple enacted meanings within their consciously chosen terminology. At one public meeting held just days after the release of their report, Rick Miner defended the nuanced but intentional choices made by the authors. Miner stated, "When you read the report, you’ll see that the terminology was something we laboured over because it's not an easy terminology to describe." (S. Davis, 2007c, p. C2). Yet, Sandra Davis, one of the reporters covering that meeting, provided some commentary on his challenges at that meeting: “Time and time again, Miner attempted to convince the crowd that nothing will be lost as a result of the creation of a polytechnic” (2007c, p. C2) yet continually failed to succeed in his efforts. As it became evident that the government, through the establishment of the Working Group, would move in a different direction in post-secondary educational reform, Miner conceded to the power of language and expressed meaning. "I guess in retrospect we probably should

have rethought what we named this to minimize some of the visceral reaction." (McHardie, 2007f, p. A1).

6.3.3 Shifts in Meaning Construction

Following mass protests and resistance to the concepts within the PSE report, government agents began altering their speech in public forums, skirting the nomenclature of polytechnics. During a public consultation, Minister Doherty was confronted by an angry constituent in Saint John who interjected during his talk, "Use the word 'university'. What you're not saying speaks volumes." (MacKinnon, 2007c, p. C1). Conflicting plausible meanings appeared to hit a tipping point within a larger social context; the meanings implied by the government that in turn were overtly expressed within the Miner Report encountered alternative meaning constructions accepted by other stakeholders, including students, faculty and institutional leaders. By the end of 2007, the language around post-secondary education reform had shifted. This was not announced with any fanfare; it was simply a subtle change in expressions and language use. In the descriptive opinion of journalist Debra Lindsay, "The debate over the proposed polytechnic seems to have subsided, as its supporters have conceded defeat to the renaming of existing post-secondary education institutions in Saint John." (2007, p. A9).

Meanings are negotiated within an ever changing social context, and choices in meaning expressed as parole draw upon valuable sensemaking properties. Sometimes those negotiated meanings remain rooted in the past when those proposing change are

unable to achieve convergence between groups. Premier Graham realized this five weeks after the release of the Miner Report, breaking the government's silence: "I'm really pleased to tell you as a result of this process there will always be a university in Saint John." (Bartlett, 2007, p. 1). In this case, the propositions made by the PSEC in New Brunswick seem to have failed in successfully negotiating their particular meaning. Identities of too many stakeholders failed to bend sufficiently; negotiated environments held firm to established creations. Although Miner was amazed that so many constituents were obsessing about nomenclature (Keenan, 2007), he finally reached the point of admitting that "I guess it is all in the name" (McHardie, 2008b, p. A1).

6.4 Conclusion

The focus throughout this chapter was on two main issues. The first was to examine the particular properties of sensemaking and language used in the construction of functionally plausible meanings. Following the metaphor of the process of sensemaking as a recipe and the properties as ingredients, this chapter provided many examples of properties in use by sensemaking with their own linguistic expressions. Each expression was unpacked to tease out which properties were being invoked over others. This demonstrated two importance advancements in the understanding of sensemaking. First, that although multiple properties of sensemaking have been identified, sensemakers do not necessarily draw on all of them in every instance; on a case-by-case basis, sensemakers appear to take advantage of certain properties that impact them more strongly or facilitate the arrival at a plausible meaning more expediently. Second, there

was no evidence that sensemaking drew upon the property of plausibility as a tool to make sense; rather, reaching a state of plausibility appears to consistently be the goal, or outcome.

The second focus of this chapter was to explore the failure of the PSEC to achieve their desired outcome of four polytechnic institutions replacing university satellite campuses in the province. To understand this failure, meanings that were constructed both within and between groups of an organization were unpacked, exploring how the suggestions outlined in the Miner Report failed to reach an adequate level of convergence to facilitate change. The following chapter will conclude this thesis with a discussion on key outcomes of this study. Final connections back to theory will be made and limitations of this research will be acknowledged. Additionally, future areas for research in the area of language and plausible meaning construction will be presented.

Chapter Seven – Plausibility as Outcome

> "Pity the poor foot soldiers who, lightly armed with government issued letters of intent, combat the status quo in rhetorical trenches where logical paradoxes are as plentiful as land mines on a battlefield." (Bruce, 2007, p. D6)

7.1 Introduction

This case study of the post-secondary educational system in New Brunswick has exposed multiple unique aspects of the sensemaking process and how people construct meanings that are functionally plausible. It has pushed deeply into the language choices people make as they search to settle disrupted understandings, digging into language acts and the meaning investments within those acts. As Moncton-based writer Alec Bruce expressed in the opening quote of this chapter, rhetorical trenches can indeed be filled with dangers. Here, the foot soldiers that Bruce refers to are Miner and L'Écuyer, the PSEC authors who attempted to transform some PSE campuses and found themselves in a battle of language and meaning that they ultimately lost.

This thesis focused on how plausible meanings are constructed, accepted and expressed as functionally plausible within a single case study by blending together and pushing forward various established theories of sensemaking and language. Weick's framework of sensemaking has been pushed forward, surfacing the importance of both process and constitutive properties in the construction and acceptance of meanings. Language has been unpacked as a key vehicle through which meanings are created and expressed, providing sensemakers a way in which to influence and invent meanings

through parole. Most important has been the development of the idea of functional plausibility – meanings that are satisficing, instrumental, and actionable.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

In this thesis, I have made a few theoretical contributions to what we know about sensemaking and meaning construction. The most substantial contribution is the proposition of a more refined and focused understanding of plausibility, that of functional plausibility. Plausibility has frequently been treated as a casual truism, that meanings would not be accepted if they were not, at minimum, 'good enough' or 'satisficing' (Simon, 1956; Weick, 1995).

> "Plausibility essentially refers to a sense that one particular meaning or explanation is more meaningful than others. It feels right within the range of possible explanations available to sensemakers in a given situation. There is no specific definition of what makes a particular explanation plausible, however, Weick suggests that options make most sense when there are no better alternatives, other individuals seem enthusiastic about this alternative, other individuals or organizations have taken this same perspective, and/or this explanation resonates most closely with existing identities and perceptions." (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009, p. 462)

A plausible meaning has been described simply as a feeling, something that fits within your existing meaning set and feels right (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000b). My goal in exploring this case study was to push beyond the acceptance of meanings as simply good enough and to better understand how meanings were crafted by sensemakers that had value and were actionable; it was an examination in process, looking at the techniques used by a sensemaker to reach an outcome that was functional to them.

The concept of plausibility as introduced by Weick focused on the idea the accepted meanings were simple, pragmatic and credible (Weick, 1995, 2001b). This aligned well with Simon's concept of satisficing (1956), wherein an accepted meaning might not be optimal, but sufficient in the moment to keep moving forward. I believe that plausible meanings are more valuable to sensemakers than just a credible feeling; they have value and they are actionable. If meanings only have value yet the sensemaker fails to be committed enough in the meaning to act on it, then the meaning is, at best, appreciated. Plausible meanings also need to be instrumental and put into action, either in expressions or deeds. As such, I have borrowed from Chia, adding the prefix 'functional' to plausibility in order to stress the importance of action. In this thesis, I have operationalized functional plausibility as enacted meanings that are satisficing, instrumental, and actionable.

Beyond the development of functional plausibility, this thesis makes some contributions to the literature of sensemaking and meaning by pushing forward other areas, including an examination of parole – language used in action – drawing together Weick's ideas of sensemaking as both a process and a set of properties, and the social pressures on meaning acceptance at both the intra- and inter-organizational levels. By drawing upon expressed meanings and parole, the vehicle of language surfaces as a powerful building block of meaning. Believing language to be a primary method in which a person is able to represent their particular 'reality' (Searle, 2010), my analysis focused on how language was used by sensemakers to reveal, even create, contexts (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). I explored how sensemakers invest meanings within the language symbols

they used in expressions; textual analysis of these expressions helped to reveal what people meant by providing a window and allowed me to 'see' what they said.

As a larger heuristic, sensemaking was refocused to blend Weickian sensemaking as a process with constitutive properties, a development that combined multiple theoretical ideas (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) into a unique perspective. This was done in order to clarify the differences between the structure of how sense is made and what is included in its construction. The literature on sensemaking frequently presents the ideas of sensemaking in multiple ways, simultaneously existing as a heuristic device, a process, and a set of properties. However, in the same way that some studies have surfaced that certain properties "are more central than other properties to the sensemaking process" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004; Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006; Helms Mills et al., 2010), I worked to distinguish between the process of how sense is made and the properties from which it is constituted, as others have recently been doing as well (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014). In this case study, I have distinguished a difference between the process of making sense (how) and the elements through which that same sense is made (what). The metaphor of a recipe and its composite ingredients was repeatedly invoked as a way of explaining this novel blending of sensemaking ideas.

Linguistic theory was extremely valuable to examine expressions and *how* people use language in action. In sensemaking, a common phrase is 'how do I know what I think 'til I see what I say?' frequently used to describe the retrospective property. However,

this question also highlights the critical nature of language and overt expressions in understanding meanings, an underexplored avenue that has provided new insight into how sense is crafted. I established a relationship between the literatures of sensemaking and linguistic theory, exploring the importance of language as both a tool for meaning expression and a location within which those inferred meanings might be discovered during the process of sensemaking. Saussure introduced the concept of language existing at two levels: langue, the formal rule structures of language where meaning(s) resides in a state of unrealized potential, and parole, the application of language when an individual makes a choice to connect a particular meaning to a specific linguistic symbol. Identifying acts of parole can reveal choices made in meaning. It became evident through textual analysis of expressions that the same linguistic symbol could be infused with multiple differing meanings at the moment of expression.

Additionally, the negotiation between socially constructed groups at both a micro and macro level (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006) revealed points at which meanings can be accepted or rejected. This thesis also provided a unique opportunity to explore how meanings are accepted, or as it happened with the proposals made by the PSEC, not accepted as plausible between groups. One of the unique aspects of this case study was the failure of the PSEC, and by extension the Government of New Brunswick, to successfully implement their proposed changes and achieve a level of plausibility for their initiatives. This provided the opportunity to not only examine how functionally plausible meanings are constructed within groups, or intra-organizationally, but also to interrogate the negotiation of meanings between groups, or inter-organizationally. This

added depth to existing research in negotiated meanings that occur within and between groups (Helms Mills & Weatherbee, 2006) in two ways. First, the PSE case study focused on a failed attempt to change an existing pseudo-organizational system. Second, the study was based in a larger organizational system where the sub-groups had a long history of coexisting in a loosely coupled manner. The examination of the inter-organizational breakdown demonstrated a lack of convergence in shared meanings and highlighted the different ways that the stakeholder groups bracketed, labeled and communicated sense.

Finally, this study addresses Weick's call for more empirical studies (2005) and the application of sensemaking. As an idea, sensemaking appears reasonable; as a heuristic, sensemaking appears to make sense. However, it is an idea that has been in development for well over two decades, grounded at the most fundamental level on people making sense within their lived worlds. This case, exploring sensemaking in a different way, pushes our understandings about meaning creation, communication, and negotiation a little bit farther along. In this case, we have seen that shocks and changes to sense do not always reach their intended conclusions and the process of the meaning creation, acceptance and expression that is functionally plausible can be quite a fluid and dynamic process.

Through the exploration of plausible meaning construction, it became clearer that the property of plausibility was different than the other six properties of sensemaking. Certain properties emerge as influencers of sensemaking, including meanings based on

one's identity construction, the particular cues extracted, as well as the socially-negotiated environment a sensemaker is in; other properties were situated as more process-based, including retrospective sensemaking that has an ongoing nature and is action-based. Unlike these, plausibility appears as an outcome of sensemaking – meaning that was either good enough or not good enough to take action on while the other six properties help to form, defend, and/or justify what was deemed to be plausible.

7.3 Challenges and Limitations

This work has explored the process in which people make sense, the impact of shock on plausibility and the valuable role that language plays in both constructing and expressing meanings. As with any research study, there are limitations in what can be captured and in choices that were required to contain the scope of this effort. Challenges in this study surrounded access to expressions and meanings of stakeholders, with the data only providing insight into what was publicly said and reported. This was limited in part by only drawing from expressions captured in print media, leaving out expressions and meanings made privately, outside the realm of public consumption. Additionally, limitations existed in a number of areas, including the inability to witness interactions between people as they crafted functionally plausible meaning, as well as the constraints in textual analysis to surface issues of power within and between groups. This study is limited in its discussion on the influences of power and political pressures in meanings constructions, a central tenet of critical theory (Helms Mills, 2003). By acknowledging these challenges and limitations, I recognize key areas for further research.

The data used in this study was pulled from print media archives and, as such, limited in nature. The initial pool of data collected over the 19 month period of the case study included 284 news articles, eight government reports, 11 public consultation reports and three documents produced by the PSEC. However, from within this pool, only direct expressions that could be attributed back to a specific speaker were included as sensemaking accounts. To be included in media, data was frequently interpreted and filtered by journalists, if only at the level of sorting of what would be included or excluded as relevant.

As much as possible, direct quotations from stakeholders included in these print articles were used as representations of their expressed meanings of the PSE change event. However, there remains a question of what has not been included in these documents, the private thoughts, ideas and conversations had by stakeholders throughout the case. Many of the people included in this research as the 'voices' of stakeholder groups understand the influential role that the media plays, as a medium, in conveying powerful stories and legitimizing these stories through repetition; it is reasonable to assume that many stakeholders would be quite conscious of the expressions they make in public. The challenge here is digging deeper into the expressions made by people to see if the meanings they are expressing are authentic or engineered in some fashion to control a particular message.

Choosing to explore this event after its completion limited what evidence was available to be seen. The captured accounts and expressions found in documents and print media helped to surface snapshots and moments in time, allowing me to 'hear' the expressions made by particular stakeholders in context. Yet, the surrounding interactions and messy details that built up to the captured accounts were not accessible. No longer could I witness the interactions between individuals as they made sense, as they negotiated meanings and tried out various iterations *in situ*. Looking back at this research, I can see the value of engaging in dynamic research in the middle of change events, observing interactions and discussions, conducting focus groups and in depth interviews while the event unfolded in real time. However, this requires a high level of awareness by a researcher to identify and acknowledge an event as an overt sensemaking activity while the event is actually happening.

The application of textual analysis allowed for the rich examination of language acts made throughout this case, looking as the symbols and meanings enacted by stakeholders. By using textual analysis at the level of micro-meaning construction and unpacking parole, there was little space or effort made to explore the elements of power at play on a larger level, beyond the inclusion of inter-organizational sensemaking and the failure of the suggestions made in the Miner Report. In this study, the texts, as analyzed, did not surface larger socio-political pressures that influenced the expressed meanings of stakeholders, a limitation of textual analysis as applied. Perhaps this could have been brought better into focus by intentionally looking at the text through a lens of power and if there was better access to data displaying interactions and communications

between stakeholders. As previously mentioned, private conversations and expressions were not revealed in the selected data and remain hidden in the background of the case.

This examination focused on a single event in time, serving as a case study. The focus of this work was to understand how plausible meanings were crafted. The case study itself provided a rich event in which to ground the case study approach. Yet the size of the event was extremely large; choices were made as to which stakeholders would be included to assist the purpose of this research and which stakeholder accounts would be left unexplored. For example, there is rich data surrounding the sensemaking accounts of citizens and community members when the Miner Report was released. Although valuable in its discoveries, it will be necessary to explore other change events in a similar manner to see if the role of language consistently appears in both describing contextual frameworks and as a vehicle through which multiple meanings are enacted.

Finally, the application of sensemaking to an event has challenges of its own. The theory of sensemaking has distinct categories, processes, phases and properties. These have been operationalized in the literature (Weick, 1993, 1995, 1979; Weick et al., 2005); yet when applied to real world cases, events and ideas are very challenging to separate into distinct categories and under clean headings. Studying the human process of sensemaking opens up incredible richness in understanding while simultaneously presenting the researcher with messy data and messy outcomes.

7.4 Implications of the Study

For this study, I was fortunate to find a location of disrupted meaning where expressed meanings had been captured during the process of change within both documents and media accounts. Choices were made about how to approach this material to reveal the process of plausible meaning construction through sensemaking techniques and language use. There remain numerous areas ready for additional study and opportunities to increase the depth of theoretical knowledge. The data within this case study is rich for exploration in multiple ways.

First, my focus in this thesis was grounded in the realm of sensemaking as both a process through which plausible meanings are developed and as properties that assist in constituting plausibility. However, it is clear through the case study that there were numerous sensemakers exerting power, primarily the PSEC and the Government of New Brunswick, as well as many examples of conflicts between stakeholders that were reaffirming habitual meanings against others proposing radical change. Further examination could shift this exploration into the realm of Critical Sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010) to unpack pressures on meanings from areas such as organizational rules, formative contexts and power. Second, at the center of this thesis was a focus on language used in action as a device through which expressions of plausible meanings are enacted. Now that the idea of language and multiplicity of meanings enacted in action appear to have some explanatory strength in the process of constructing plausible accounts, there is value in developing a heuristic model for language exposition as revealed during times of shock and disruption. Additional work on the existence of

multiple, simultaneous meanings in language could also be pursued. There is currently some interesting work being explored in the post-modern field around enacted meanings, or enunciations (Ermarth, 2000), and how language is one of the most basic tools of reality construction. The impact of shifting realities through enunciations could provide valuable insight into our understanding of plausible accounts.

Although the analysis in this thesis moves at times into the theoretical, this research is fundamentally grounded in the processes of meaning constructed in the lived world. There are applications from this study to understand human behaviour in the workplace and/or organizational situations. I contend that understanding the nuanced nature of sensemaking during change and how the richness of meaning is constructed during disruptions should help raise awareness of potential challenges during change events. Those initiating change can better understand how individuals make language choices to construct sensible accounts that are, at best, plausible within fluid contexts. By being appreciative of not only what meaning(s) exist but also the process through which people (re)craft sense and accounts, the initiator's approach to enacting change might shift to a more collaborative process.

7.5 Personal Reflections

The origins of this research did not come solely from isolated theoretical curiosity. Instead, it emerged from my own lived experiences embedded within the New Brunswick PSE system. Working at the New Brunswick Community College in 2007, I

witnessed firsthand how people connected to existing PSE institutions, how they reacted to the proposed changes in the Miner Report, and how they struggled to understand how their sense(s) of meaning(s) were disrupted. I watched as students, educators, administration and other stakeholders debated the polytechnic proposal with great passion, using common institutional titles, or language signs, but enacting them in different ways with different meanings. The words 'university' and 'polytechnic' were frequently used and appeared to hold very distinct connotations depending on the speaker, their particular perspective and their contextual boundaries. I remained unsatisfied with claims that these ongoing shocks and language 'confusions' stemmed from simple misunderstands and misuses of language (Desserud, 2007; Keenan, 2007). I sought to specifically explore how plausible meanings are created, accepted and expressed. As the sole researcher engaged in this process, the analysis and exploration of language use that conveyed meaning were mine alone. My own sensemaking process may have contextualized my ability to accept various presented meanings as plausible to others within their contextual environments. As much as I attempted to justify interpretations through actual meaning expressions or connotations made by stakeholders, there remains a limit in the perspectives of a single level of interpretation.

7.6 Closing Thoughts

Exploring how people make sense within their rhetorical trenches can be a messy undertaking (Beech & Johnson, 2005; Weick, 1995). It is a journey without straight lines or systematic processes. During this examination, I have gained insight into those messy

trenches and the tools used by people to make and defend their understandings. People are creative, especially when confronted with confusion, and our ability to define situations based on logic and reason is sometimes easily superseded by our ability for invention grounded in contextual pressures and emotional responses. In the end, we have our stories to share; within them, we will continue to seek and share meaning with each other. Weick believed in studying the world that we live in and actually experience, as messy and complicated as it truly is, with shifts in influences, values and context of the sensemaker. Increasing the appreciation for 'where' sense is made extends our understanding of what we interpret and how. Each context brings forth structures and frames continuously negotiated over time, understood subjectively and enacted linguistically.

The case of institutional change in the New Brunswick post-secondary educational system and the suggested transformation of three university campuses to polytechnic institutions highlights the influence that various sensemaking properties, including identity and context, have on meaning construction and (re)interpretation. Sense that is functionally plausible is influenced by both the sensemaker's identity and within socially negotiated realities. We live in a world experienced and understood through language, signs that contain signification of meaning negotiated between people, in a context, location, and time. Through the surfacing of where and when sense is made, there exists greater precision in further study of how sense is subjectively crafted. This work has increased our understanding of meaning creation, yet there is much left to

explore; if it were simple to comprehend, we would find little excitement in continuously exploring ourselves as subjects of inquiry.

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