Chapter II. Goals and methodology

Goals of the dialogue and the evaluation

Over the next twenty years, the Master Plan will have an impact on all Californians. The dialogue was seen as a way to let significantly more people know about and comment on the Plan before it was finalized, share perspectives, discuss ideas and better understand the range of viewpoints involved. The aim was to recruit actively, seeking a demographically broad audience that would include the direct education stakeholder groups as well as many other Californians.

This aim of broad public participation has become a fairly well-accepted ideal. However, "participation" often means simply an opportunity for the public to hear the plans of decision makers and give input, which may or may not be incorporated in decisions. Many reasons have been given for encouraging this or deeper public involvement in decision-making. Beierle and Cayford summarize five "social goals"[13] that are frequently cited in explaining what participation is expected to add to a policy process. The dialogue on the Master Plan, because it involved legislators and invited the participation of a very broad group of stakeholders, differs somewhat from the environmental agency cases discussed by Beierle and Cayford, but their categorization is generally applicable. The five goals, seen through the lens of the CAMP dialogue, are:

- *Incorporating public values.* A goal that is fundamental to democracy:[14] although members of the public may or may not agree among themselves, they often approach issues from the perspective of different and sometimes more complex views of risks and values than experts. The question is the extent to which public values influence decisions; the challenge is to ascertain what these public values are, given diverse views and less than representative participation.

- *Improving decision quality.* The public often knows more – for example, about local circumstances and policy effects – than do officials, and may suggest alternative solutions. Increasing information flow from the public to officials is expected to lead to better decisions.

- *Educating and informing the public.* Making information available can help to "level the playing field between people and government"[15] and to make informed discussion possible. Integrating this information with participants' own experience and knowledge can lead to a shared understanding of the situation.

- *Mitigating conflict.* When stakeholders can hear each other's views in a non-adversarial atmosphere, rather than simply directing their statements to the officials involved, they can more easily understand the necessity for compromise. However, unresolved conflicts can hamper implementation.

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[13] Beierle, T.C. and Cayford, J. (2002). *Democracy in practice: Public participation in environmental decisions.* Resources for the Future Press, Washington, DC. The social goals (Chapter 3) are a useful summary of widely cited, field-independent reasons for participation.
[14] Ibid., p. 14.
[15] Ibid., p. 15.

- *Building trust in institutions.* Trust in government has declined greatly.[16] One of the few ways trust can be rebuilt may be by "allowing greater public involvement and influence in decision-making."[17] Understandable explanations may also counter distrust, lack of interest and animosity.

The implementation of policy recommendations that come out of a participatory process is not included in this list by Beierle and Cayford, since this typically depends on far more than participation; the decrease in potential for funding California education since the online dialogue is a good example. Further, as in California, implementation often takes place over a number of years. We would, however, like to highlight stakeholder support for implementation, which overlaps several of the goals.

When stakeholders value a participatory process – typically meaning they feel that they have been listened to and that the process has been fair, and that they understand others' viewpoints as well as their own – they are more apt to buy into and support the resulting decisions. Further, decisions that take account of the diversity of needs and perspectives of stakeholders are more likely to be accepted as legitimate. Decisions that earn the support of participants should be easier to put into practice. For CAMP, it is also to be hoped that individuals who have contributed their views will be more likely to pay attention to discussions on the legislation that puts the Plan into effect, and to support state and local initiatives that are consistent with the goals of the Plan.

The aspirations reflected by the five social goals are incorporated in the discussion of issues and conclusions in Chapter VI, and the evaluation questions below cover several factors that are essential to their achievement. In particular, given the statistics on declining interest in government and politics,[18] achieving the broad social goals will require new ways to increase public participation in policy decisions. Finding mechanisms for involvement that are valued by participants is an essential prerequisite. By the same token, whether participants value online dialogue as an interesting new mechanism is a good test of its potential for civic engagement. In other respects, this evaluation will offer only tantalizing glimpses of the extent to which the social goals were realized. For example, Joint Committee staff report that public input led to changes in the Master Plan, but there were many types of public input. An attempt to separate out the impact of the dialogue would have required a far more detailed study than could be supported by this project, and might not have given a firm answer even with a more complex research design.

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[16] Jedediah Purdy, writing in the Atlantic Monthly ("Suspicious Minds," January/February 2003) says "Trust in the government has fallen by about half since its peak, in 1966." A discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, but an online resource with much related polling data is available from PollingReport.com (http://www.pollingreport.com/institut.htm). Also see "Whose government is this?" Washington Post (13 July 1999) on the results of a Hart-Teeter poll. To the question "One goal that Americans have traditionally considered important is to have a government that is 'of, by, and for the people,' meaning that it involves the people and represents them. In your opinion, do we have a government today that is 'of, by, and for the people?'" 54% said "no."

[17] Beierle, T.C. and Cayford, J. (2002), op. cit., p. 15.

[18] Voting is one indicator: Census Bureau estimates at http://www.census.gov/population/pop-profile/ 2000/chap11.pdf show voting in Congressional elections at 55.4% in 1966, with a low of 41.9% in 1998. Except for two years (1974, at 44.7%, and 1982, at 48.5), there has been a slow but steady downward trend. Also see "In 20 years, seniors may outvote young 4 to 1." Washington Post. (20 October 2002; based on a survey conducted by the Post, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University.) Graphics show that in 1974, 18% of voters were younger than 30 and 17% were 65 or older, while in 2002 10% were younger than 30 and 23% were 65 or older. A projection suggests that in 2022 only 8% of voters will be younger than 30 and 33% will be 65 or older.

The focus of this evaluation will be a much more specific study of the online dialogue and its use as a mechanism for civic engagement. We will consider:

- How satisfied were participants with the process?
- Were new voices brought into policy discussions?
- How did participants see the "public space" created by the dialogue for interaction?
- What did participants get from the process, including potential impact on policy?
- What did policy makers get from the process, including the possibility of changes in public attitudes?

The CAMP dialogue raises a number of issues that must be addressed if the social goals are to be realized in today's environment. There are questions related to attempting to identify and bring highly diverse and largely uninformed stakeholders into the process of policy formation, particularly given the complexity of the issues under discussion. For example, the Master Plan discussion centered on a large policy document covering many aspects of early childhood through university education, including elements of governance, accountability, finance, personnel and student learning. General issues of public involvement and how they play out in online events, as well as issues related to dialogue organization, were also evident in the CAMP dialogue. All of these issues will be discussed in Chapter VI.

Origin of the online dialogue

In her endorsement of the online dialogue, Joint Committee Chair Dede Alpert said "We are intent on finding ways to move beyond the usual education stakeholders to engage a much broader segment of the California population in becoming familiar with the importance of an effective education system that is cohesive and focused foremost on learners." As shown in Table 1, several mechanisms were established for public input. In addition to public hearings and committee hearings with opportunities for formal testimony, the Joint Committee Web site made it possible to send in statements as "e-testimony."[19] The most extensive mechanism was the seven Working Groups, covering finance and facilities; governance; professional personnel development; school readiness; student learning; workforce preparation and business linkages; and emerging modes of delivery, certification, and planning.

Information Renaissance – a non-profit corporation based in Pittsburgh, PA and Washington, DC that uses Internet technology to promote broad, informed civic engagement – proposed to support the Joint Committee's work to promote public awareness of and participation in the development of the draft Master Plan by developing and designing an online Internet dialogue for California. The Joint Committee enthusiastically supported this idea.

Sponsorship and funding

The online dialogue on the California Master Plan for Education was endorsed but not financed by the Joint Legislative Committee. Preliminary discussions had suggested that support might be incorporated in Joint Committee fundraising, but this did not happen, nor was there a formal agreement defining the mutual responsibilities of Info Ren and the Joint Committee. However, Joint Committee staff were interested in the dialogue and extremely helpful, spending time to help ensure its success. Further, the online dialogue was incorporated to some extent in press

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[19] The e-testimony site was developed earlier, by a contractor to the Joint Committee. Info Ren sought to construct a dialogue site that would more interactive, more "democratic" (in terms of potential for interchanges between policy makers and the public), and oriented toward discussion among the participants rather than testimony to the Committee. Simplicity of use was also a goal.

releases, and the dialogue was announced and hyperlinked from the Joint Committee Web site. Info Ren had begun from an assumption that there would be no dialogue without Joint Committee sponsorship, including help in obtaining financing. Since this initially appeared possible, Info Ren began to approach foundations and businesses to secure support. A fixed timeline for the Master Plan was already in place, with release of the draft Plan scheduled for May, and input to be requested during the summer. It was felt that a dialogue would have to take place at least three to four weeks after this release, but before the end of the school year.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation was prepared to fund the basic costs of the dialogue, and small additional grants were made available by IBM Corporation and Intel California. However, despite approaches to several other businesses and foundations, no additional funding was secured. (It should perhaps be noted that there had been a great deal of private support to the Working Groups, and that by this time the economic downturn was seriously affecting California businesses and foundations.) As time passed, Info Ren had to make a decision. Info Ren staff were personally committed to increasing public involvement in the draft Plan, and the endorsements from not only Senator Alpert but also a number of California organizations, including the California PTA, the California League of Women Voters, the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and County Offices of Education, were enthusiastic.

A further important and willing resource was EdSource,[20] an impartial, independent not-for-profit California organization whose mission is "to clarify complex education issues and to promote thoughtful decisions about public school improvement." EdSource Online makes publications, analysis and links to other education materials available on the Internet. Decisions about inclusion in the dialogue Briefing Book were made by Information Renaissance, but the willingness of EdSource to discuss the topics and allow use of their materials was extremely helpful.

Given this community support, a decision was made to proceed with a limited dialogue. In the absence of a financial agreement, it would have been preferable to reach at least a semi-formal agreement on several other aspects, as discussed under *Roles…* (p. 75). The absence of such an agreement can be seen as somewhat risky on both sides. For Info Ren, it increased organizational responsibility. It also could have given the participants less assurance that their input would be taken into consideration by decision makers, though the endorsement by Senator Alpert, the participation of many legislators, the press releases and link on the Joint Committee Web site lessened this concern. This support may also have led many participants to assume that the dialogue was sponsored by the Joint Committee. This, together with the influence a dialogue can have on attitudes, suggests some risk on the side of the Committee as well. There were, however, relatively few problems in this area, and in some ways Info Ren came to feel that in such a highly political situation, this arm's-length relationship might have been an asset. (See *Roles …*, p. 75.) In practice, the relationship with the Joint Committee and Info Ren staff worked well because of the commitment, time and energy put in by both sides, and good working relationships were established.

Among the elements left unfunded, broader outreach – including more use of media (particularly public television)[21] and additional approaches to groups not typically involved in the political process – is probably the most important. There had also been discussion of combining face-to-face and online discussions; this and the availability of Spanish translations might also have

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[20] http://www.edsource.org/index.cfm
[21] A studio-based discussion program with Joint Committee members, subject experts and others, rebroadcast by cable and satellite systems, had been envisioned.

increased public participation. Online surveys during the dialogue and easy-to-read summaries of background information also could not be included, and evaluation and follow-up information to participants had to be limited. Another interesting possibility that was discussed was to involve school classes, but this was impossible in any case, since the dialogue did not take place until the end of the school year.

The scheduling of the event was an important constraint not only for students, but also for parents and educators. While it seemed evident that such an event had to take place before the school year ended, no discussion could be held before the draft Master Plan had been available long enough for people to become familiar with it. The need to search for funding and the need for lead time to prepare for the dialogue were also important factors. To accommodate the schedule of the Joint Committee, Info Ren set the dates for the dialogue at the very end of the school year (June 3-14), knowing this might limit participation. The section on *New Voices* (p. 46) includes participant comments on this timing.

Context

State organizational structure for education. Public education in California has a complex organizational structure. For K-12 instruction, major political players include the Governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Legislature and the teachers' unions. Postsecondary

- Present Situation. The draft Master Plan stated that California's state-level K-12 governance "has no clear lines of accountability due to multiple entities having overlapping responsibilities. Key players include: (1) the Governor, who appoints all members of the State Board of Education, promulgates an annual budget that sets forth priorities and nearly always is the final arbiter of differences of opinion about education policy due to his line-item veto authority; (2) the State Board of Education, which is by law the policy setting body for public schools but which has very little staff of its own; (3) the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who is an elected constitutional officer and manages the Department of Education (CDE) staff, but has little policy-setting authority; and (4) the Secretary for Education, with a small complement of staff whose duties are largely duplicative of those in the Department of Education." Recommendations 31* and 32 addressed this situation.

- The Governor. In brief, recommendation 31 made the Governor accountable for P-12 education, stating that "Authority over the operations of California's K-12 public education system at large, and ultimate responsibility for the delivery of education to California's K-12 public education students in particular, should both reside within the Office of the Governor" and detailing the functions involved. A cabinet-level Chief Education Officer appointed by the Governor would be the Director of the Department of Education. The Governor would continue to appoint the State Board of Education, whose members would represent geographical regions; their functions would be limited to state governance and policy matters. The separate executive director and staff of the State Board within the Department of Education would be eliminated.

- The Superintendent of Public Instruction. Recommendation 32 covered the position of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. It suggested maintaining the elected position, but assigning new functions to the position. The Superintendent would act as an Inspector General for public education, to hold the Governor and the system accountable for student achievement, including monitoring governance/policy instruments intended to ensure adequate and equitable provision of education, and implementation of state and federal programs.

* Numbered recommendations refer to the draft Master Plan discussed in the online dialogue.

Box 1. K-12 Governance.

education governance includes the state university system, the state college system and the community college system; the draft Master Plan comment that state-level K-12 governance "has no clear lines of accountability due to multiple entities having overlapping responsibilities" can also be applied here. Since the Master Plan was written by a Joint Committee of the Legislature, it was this group that Information Renaissance approached in proposing the online dialogue on the Plan.

Box 1 outlines K-12 governance structures and related Master Plan recommendations, and serves as an example of the sort of background material presented in the dialogue.[22] In the dialogue, each reference to a recommendation was hot linked to the draft Master Plan. (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/pa/gov/gov.shtml shows panelists and questions for the discussion on governance; the material in Box 1 appears under *Background for the Discussion: Question 1*.)

The Master Plan. The Master Plan was intended as a guide to a major change effort, not as a set of specific instructions. The Framework document (footnote 11) produced by the Joint Committee to guide preparation suggested tackling extremely difficult issues. The Working Groups' detailed considerations and attempts to incorporate "best practices" and research results led to far-reaching recommendations, many of which were bound to be contentious, as summed up by Peter Schrag in a Sacramento Bee editorial on May 29, 2002 (Box 2).[23]

Working Groups and staff. Each of the seven Working Groups convened by the Joint Committee was made up of 25 to 65 members. They included research professionals, invited experts, graduate student interns, education professionals, and representatives of business, local government, and civic organizations. They held monthly meetings, examined research and best practices, compiled detailed reports and formulated more than 100 policy recommendations for the Joint Committee's consideration. A staff member was attached to each group, and the work of some groups and staff members were funded by foundation grants. The draft Master Plan integrated the results of the Working Groups with feedback from Joint Committee members and public hearings.[24]

The Working Group model brought about 300 citizens into the policymaking process. Committee members and staff worked hard for over a year, producing volumes of information that were summarized for each group in detailed reports containing specific recommendations.[25] Many group members who were not already experts acquired a great deal of expertise, and many were or became advocates for particular points of view. Also, there was some overlap: some topics were dealt with by more than one group, and different groups did not always come to the same conclusion. Thus, although this was not a traditional process, the Joint Committee and its staff remained in the traditional position of receiving input from a variety of interest groups, which they used to prepare the draft Plan.

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[22] Material in Box 1 was drawn from the draft Master Plan section on *Accountability for Learner Outcomes and Institutional Performance* (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/plan/accountability.shtml); the description of Master Plan materials regarding the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction summarizes recommendations 31 and 32.

[23] Excerpted from the editorial "Thinking big thoughts about California education" (full text at http://www.sacbee.com/content/opinion/story/2971254p-3838392c.html).

[24] Information in this paragraph is based on "California leads the trend in crafting a master plan for education" (Joint Committee Press Packet) and "Up for Public Review: A Master Plan for California's K–16 Schools." EdSource Online "EdFact." (April 2002, op. cit.)

[25] Reports and staff analyses for each group are available as Briefing Book links in the dialogue archive (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/bb.shtml).

The Working Groups were relevant to the online dialogue in several ways. The topics assigned to the groups were used as a framework for the agenda, group members served as panelists, group reports were featured on the Web site, and staff to the Working Groups served as resources both in the development of questions for the dialogue and in the dialogue itself. On the other hand, because of the timing of publication, the relationship between Working Group reports and the draft Plan may have been confusing to participants. This is discussed further in the section on the *Nature and complexity of issues* (p. 69).

Nobody expected much when the Legislature (in 1999) created a joint committee to develop a master plan for education. The phrase itself is a snoozer, and chances are still high that not much will come of it.

But in the committee's draft report, which will be subject to widespread public comment beginning Monday, there's a set of ideas that may be as far-reaching and significant as anything that's been proposed in California in a long time.

Inevitably, there'll be controversy. The breadth of the list alone assures it. Among the major proposals:

- Changes in the K-12 governance system putting the Department of Education in the governor's Cabinet, thereby streamlining the system, and making the elected superintendent an inspector general to measure educational performance.
- Latitude for local districts to raise property taxes for schools with a 55 percent vote -- in effect a major change in Proposition 13.
- Accountability measures not only for schools and students, but also annual reports measuring how well the Legislature and governor provide the resources to enable schools and kids to meet the standards the state sets.
- A shift to an adequacy model of school funding based on the calculations of a commission. It would estimate how much it would cost to provide the teachers, books and facilities necessary to bring the majority of students up to state learning standards. The state would guarantee "suitable learning environments" in every school.
- Mandatory full-day kindergarten in all districts with low academic performance scores, and wide access to preschool programs aligned with kindergarten. Also, increased academic support and intervention for students in grades three, eight, 11, 12 and the first year of college, transition periods when there's the greatest risk of failure.
- More staff help and higher pay for principals in schools serving high numbers of low-income and other at-risk students.
- State level negotiation and funding of school employee benefits.
- A universal internship program to replace the hiring of all teachers on waivers or emergency credentials with pre-interns who'd get strong state support in obtaining their credentials.
- Development of "classroom-based instruments" to diagnose individual students' learning problems and to quickly provide appropriate intervention. "Measurement matters," the report declares.
- Imposition of accountability standards in higher education, with required annual reports on how well colleges and universities are meeting them.
- Greater emphasis on joint planning and use of higher education facilities; use of subjective as well as objective criteria in admissions to the University of California and the California State University; and stabilizing student fees to eliminate the boom-and-bust cycles in which fees drop in good times and then rise sharply in bad.

It's a long list -- more a wish list of the committee's task forces, staff and legislative leaders than a consensus of the full committee, which has yet to act on it. Committee staff director Stephan Blake says "it reflects pretty well" the feedback from members, but he acknowledges that in its scope, it's an attempt to shoot the moon.

There's a good chance, therefore, that a lot of these proposals won't make it into the final report, let alone into law, even in the multiyear time span that this plan is supposed to cover. A state guarantee of things such as adequate facilities and teachers almost necessarily implies greater state control -- and a lot more money.

Nor is the Legislature likely to ask voters to tinker with Proposition 13, even for schools. It's also likely to be reluctant to give the governor greater authority over schools, no matter how much sense it makes, or to mess overtly with university admission criteria. (Political pressure under the table, which happens frequently, is something else.) Conservatives will bristle at the report's call for "authentic assessment" -- supplementing if not replacing standardized tests with student portfolios, projects and other "fuzzy" measures.

And yet most of the report's ideas are hardly radical. Most states have far more rational and manageable state-level governance systems. In most, local districts can ask voters for tax overrides.

A number, moreover, are moving toward adequacy-based funding systems in which, to quote the draft, "essential components (personnel, materials, equipment and facilities) necessary for an exemplary education are identified and provided." It's precisely what the American Civil Liberties Union, suing the state on behalf of a group of poor California students stuck in rotten schools, is now demanding….

Box 2. A summary of draft Master Plan proposals, from the Sacramento Bee.

Lobbying efforts. In addition to the contentious issues listed in Box 2, one item elicited particular interest: draft Master Plan recommendation 38 advocated consolidating administrative oversight for adult education within the community college system. Master Plan staff saw the goal of this recommendation as a reduction in redundant administrative structures, freeing up resources for other uses. Many staff in adult education programs had another view. They felt that the draft Master Plan showed a lack of understanding of adult education programs and their students, and thought that the community college system could not adequately provide oversight. This group, which had had experience in political activity due to earlier campaigns, organized themselves and their students to object strongly to recommendation 38. They sent in a great many e-testimony forms, and enthusiastically incorporated the online dialogue into their campaign.

Methodology

The dialogue produced a variety of information. Data gathered prior to the dialogue, during registration, covers participants' attitudes and experiences, as well as basic demographic information; ZIP codes allowed the construction of a map showing their geographical distribution (Figure 1, p. 30). Web site statistics (logs of activity on the site, both before and during the dialogue) show number, destination and length of visits to the site, and so forth. Archives contain messages posted to the dialogue but also are a source of information on the number of messages posted, the number of posters and message threads. Responses to open-ended questions on the registration and evaluation forms, as well as interviews and printed materials, contain some information that can be aggregated and quotations that will be used as illustrations.

The post-dialogue evaluation questionnaire is particularly interesting, since participants were requested to report on their experiences in the dialogue, how they felt about it, and how it had changed their attitudes. The evaluation, which consisted of 32 questions (Appendix A, p. 93) – seven of which included an invitation to type in open-ended comments – was voluntary. When they registered, participants were asked if they would be willing to complete the evaluation. On the last day of the dialogue, the evaluation form was available on the Web site, and reminders were sent out in the following weeks. During registration, 770 people said they would be willing to take part in the evaluation; a total of 206 forms (27%) were submitted. The timing of the dialogue may have been a factor in the evaluation response rate.

While the registration form (Appendix A, p. 88) asked participants to give their names and e-mail addresses, the evaluation was anonymous. Therefore the data on the two forms cannot be combined. However, some of the same demographic questions were included on both forms; as shown in Chapter IV, although evaluation responders were on average somewhat older, the two groups were roughly similar in proportion of women and men, education, ethnicity, city-suburb vs. rural-small town location, and responses to "In what capacity are you participating in the dialogue?"

Chapter IV describes the participants; in Chapter V, this information is combined with participants' comments and other sources and used to examine the online dialogue as a mechanism for civic engagement, addressing the five evaluation questions listed beginning on page 17:

- *Satisfaction:* people were asked to rate their experience with the dialogue, and state whether they thought there should be more dialogues of this sort in the future; they could explain either or both responses in text boxes. They were also asked to rate specific elements of the dialogue and the extent to which stated factors had been a motivation to post messages.

- *Introduction of new voices into the policy process:* to what extent did the dialogue attract participants who had not previously been involved? Demographic characteristics and responses to a number of questions (e.g. prior knowledge of the Master Plan, prior political activity and Internet use) will be used in this discussion.

- *Views of the "public space" for interaction:* questions used in this discussion relate to participants' perception of the dialogue, including the quality of communication, the atmosphere of the dialogue, its civility, how informed participants were and so forth.

- *What participants got out of the dialogue:* this will be considered on the basis of open ended responses about engagement and expectations of impact, plus structured questions about areas in which knowledge was gained.

- *What the Joint Committee got out of the dialogue:* participants' responses provide some indication with respect to good will and changes in public attitudes, including interest in government and politics and opinions on education policy. Interviews with the Joint Committee staff before and after the dialogue and a page on the dialogue and its impact are the main information sources regarding the perception of the dialogue on the part of state personnel.

Consideration of these topics raises several issues that will be discussed in Chapter VI, and conclusions and recommendations will be drawn for dialogues of this type in Chapter VII.