

ACTION RESEARCH:  
A CATALYST FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**ACTION RESEARCH:  
A CATALYST FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is concerned with the potential of schoolwide action research to act as a catalyst for school improvement. Members of the faculty at School X were interviewed in order to determine their knowledge and understanding of the process of schoolwide action research, and to determine the consistency of their views relative to the strengths and weaknesses of schoolwide action research as a means to school improvement.

The data for this study were collected through three primary sources: interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. Thirty-minute interviews were conducted with ten teachers and two administrators at School X. The findings indicate that the staff at School X supports the philosophy and process of schoolwide action research. This process, however, needs refinement in order to ensure that all staff members have a clear understanding of what is entailed. The findings also indicate that school improvement efforts are not necessarily guided by a needs assessment based on sound methods of data gathering.

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## **DEDICATION**

For the patience and support of my husband, Terrance MacDonald,

and my four children

Jonathan

Joanne

Justin

and

Jessica

and my parents,

Susie and David Feltham

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Change in education begins with people who are dissatisfied with the way things are and who start to explore alternatives. Goodlad (1975) contends that "the optimal unit for educational change is the single school with its pupils, teachers, principal--those who live there every day--as primary participants" (p. 175). Similarly, Schlechty (1990) states that "a pattern of participatory leadership is essential to the creation of a shared vision directed toward a clear purpose, especially when that purpose has to do with working on knowledge and with knowledge workers" (p. 52).

Inquiry, another capacity of change, is related to collaboration. "Inquiry means internalizing norms, habits, and techniques for continuous learning" (Fullan, 1993, p. 13). Fullan further suggests that teachers, as change agents, must possess the capacity to be life-long learners who, in turn, can stimulate students to be continuous learners.

There is growing support for the notion that research by teachers has the capacity to effect change within their schools. "Teachers, as professionals, want their experience and expertise to be valued and used, and they are in a position to make informed decisions and to provide crucial insights into the teaching/learning process" (Midgley and Woods, 1993, p. 245). Communities of teacher researchers have the potential to play an active role in shaping the agenda and the implementation of school reform. This participation, however, must be seen as authentic. Law (1993) suggests that "progress in educational reform will be achieved only when teachers are recognized as equal partners in the educational enterprise" (p. 41).

Schoolwide action research has potential as a catalyst for school improvement. Schoolwide action research takes those involved on a journey of inquiry. "As we experiment with and implement action research, we build our learning community" (Calhoun, 1994, p.100). Calhoun further notes that in conducting schoolwide action research, it is necessary to structure routines for continuous confrontation with data on the health of the school community. This collective inquiry is a cyclic process and can become a formative evaluation of school improvement initiatives.

### Purpose

Fullan (1991) states, "in theory, the purpose of educational change presumably is to help schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs, and/or practices with better ones" (p. 15).

This study is concerned with determining whether schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether or not the teachers at School X clearly understand and support the principles of the school improvement process. The critical source of this inquiry will be the teachers and administrators on staff at School X. The study includes a representative sample of the teachers on the staff who are members and non-members of the school Leadership Team. Consideration was given to having a fair representation of teachers in grade divisions from Kindergarten to Grade 6; and in areas of specialization such as, special education, guidance, and library resources.

## Background

The school under study is located in urban Newfoundland. School X has a student population of approximately 450 in grades K–3, and a staff of 24 who, for the most part, are either at mid-point or beyond in their careers. The school services children from both the city and the outlying communities.

School X launched its school improvement initiative at a two-day retreat in October, 1991. With the help of a facilitator, the staff examined the school's strengths and weaknesses and developed a mission statement. The weaknesses that were identified became the focus for school initiatives over a two year period from 1991–1993, although efforts to address certain identified weaknesses continue to the present.

In the school year 1994–1995, the School District produced a document entitled The District Framework for Program Growth and Improvement (Appendix A). This document has become the guide for educational initiatives within the district. Included in the District Framework is an action plan for school-initiated change. The plan is predicated on the beliefs that schools must be student-centered and that the implementation of change must be school-based. Proposed changes are coordinated by an implementation team consisting of the principal, a facilitator, and teachers. It is the team's responsibility to develop a plan consistent with the District Program Framework and for bringing about change in a particular area of the school's operation. The District Framework for Program Growth and Improvement has become the road map for school-based initiatives at School X.

During August 21–25, 1995, a team of teachers from School X attended a week-long leadership institute. This institute was a collaborative effort between the School District and the Faculty of Education, Memorial University. One of its goals was to aid in the establishment of leadership teams that would introduce school improvement initiatives within their particular schools.

This study examines the efforts towards school improvement that have been made at School X throughout the 1995–96 school year. It examines the process of schoolwide action research and how well this process is understood and supported by participants.

#### Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the terms below are defined as follows:

Schoolwide Action Research: “schoolwide action research is primarily a process of collecting data about an ongoing system (our school) with the purpose of improving practice teaching and learning.” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 13).

School Improvement: a focus on sustaining and extending the school’s strengths, addressing priority areas identified as needing change, attending to the needs of each learner, and providing opportunities for the greatest involvement of all, the school’s partners.

Leadership: behaviours which stimulate increased effectiveness within school communities.

### Research Questions

The following questions were formulated from previous research to guide the present inquiry. They are reported in the **Results** section of the thesis:

1. Does schoolwide action research hold promise in enabling schools to improve?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses associated with the implementation of schoolwide action research?

### Design of the Study

“Qualitative research occurs in the participant’s natural setting and collecting data in the participants’ own language. The view of reality is multiple, and socially constructed” (Doyle, C., Kennedy, M., and Spain, W., 1995, pp. 1-2). Because of the descriptive nature of this study, qualitative methods of data collection were used. The data collected is the result of a case study. “Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied” (Stake as cited in Denzens and Lincoln, 1994). In this paper, the case under study is School X.

In studying the potential that schoolwide action research has for creating school improvement, data were collected from three sources: interviews, document analysis, and participant observation.

Interviews of approximately a half-hour in length were conducted with 10 teachers and 2 administrators. Four of the 10 teachers are members of the school Leadership Team of School X. All teachers have been on staff since the beginning of the 1995 school year.

Audio tapes of teachers were reviewed and coded as to the type of information contained. Categories of responses were derived and used to tabulate data.

#### Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

- ◆Owing to the localized nature of this case study, it may prohibit generalizing to other schools.
- ◆It can only be assumed that respondents gave honest answers to the interview questions.

#### Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1 gives a brief description of the study including its purpose, design, background information, and the research questions proposed; states its limitations; and outlines the organization of the thesis. Chapter 2 reviews the research literature related to this study; delineates the philosophies and principles associated with school improvement; and describes the model of schoolwide action research. Chapter 3 describes the research design utilized in the study. It includes information on the interview questions and the coding and analysis of data. Chapter 4 presents the results of the interviews. These data are discussed within the context of the research questions. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study, its conclusions, and the implications of the findings for students, parents, teachers, and administrators. It also contains recommendations for future research.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This study is concerned with the use of schoolwide action research as a model to bring about school improvement. To provide a theoretical foundation for the study, the literature on educational change and learning organizations is reviewed in the section 'World Views'. Section One examines how differing world views can either support or obstruct change. Section Two examines 'Change' in the context of educational change. Section Three, 'Themes in the Implementation Process', examines some of the main themes in successful change at the school level. The final section, 'Schoolwide Action Research', deals with schoolwide action research as a process for improving schools.

#### **World Views**

Change will pull us into the future - the pace of change has accelerated to a level where it is no longer an option, but a necessity for us as educators to understand the intricate forces at play during this process and somehow learn how to increase our capacity to manage its complexities (Ryan, Kilcher & Haynes, 1993, p. 18).

Educators no longer can wear the blinders that block the reality of the changes needed in our educational system. Predominantly, schools are organized from a functionalist world view. The functionalist generally sees schools as serving to socialize

students to adapt to the economic, political, and social institutions of that society (Feinberg and Soltis, 1992, p. 6). Functionalism has accounted for many of the unsuccessful reforms that have been attempted in education. Changes that have been mandated from the top-down, with little or no consideration given to implementation, conflict with a world view that encompasses the philosophy of a people-centred and life-long learning approach to education.

Most change means learning, which involves altering our mindsets and our behaviour, and requires commitment, know-how, and new ways of thinking (Ryan, Kilcher, & Hynes, 1993, p. 19). What matters cannot be mandated. Educators must embrace change as an opportunity.

The future of school based restructuring and accountability may rest on four conditions: a vision of success for all students, plans shaped by school partners, a work culture that nurtures and expects development and success, and staff empowerment and commitment to provide the energy system for success. Today's leaders must be able to enhance the school's problem-solving capacity and empower groups of teachers and others to address pressing educational needs (Snyder, Anderson, & Johnson, 1992, pp. 79-80).

According to Senge et al. (1994) a shared vision entails building a sense of commitment in a group through creating shared images of a desired future, and by

developing the principles and guiding practices that will enable the group's goals to be met.

An interpretist's world view enables educational institutions to be studied from a different vantage point. Interpretivism has a local rather than a global orientation. Feinberg and Soltis (1992) note that interpretists are more concerned with the culture-bound frameworks of particular schools and with the ways individuals understand and act in specific social contexts than with finding general laws or all-encompassing explanations. An interpretist's view, which allows educational problems to be studied at the grass roots level, appears to make sense when attempting change at the school level. The stakeholders at the local level must be empowered to bring about the necessary changes.

If educators, both individually and collectively, do not take on the challenge to make the necessary reforms, there are others who will. The newly emerging beliefs support the sustainable development of full human potential (Harrison, 1992). Change should concern itself not only with changes in values and behaviours of educators, but also with those of students. Harrison notes that major educational authors and leaders advise a careful examination of the constraints which affect learners, teachers, schools, and school systems. Educators must reflect upon their philosophy about education and work towards restructuring. It is necessary to develop a positive and courageous attitude towards change (Harrison, 1992).

## School Improvement

### Change

Fullan (1991) states that “in theory, the purpose of educational change presumably is to help schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs and/or practices with better ones” (p. 15). Furthermore, Fullan is hopeful about the prospects for school reform, saying that because there is now a bank of literature on the change process from which to draw, and because more people in leadership positions utilize this knowledge, educators are in an excellent position to effect change.

If restructuring requires that all parts of the educational system must change, then it may be necessary to view organizations differently. In restructuring, all the pieces must be dealt with at the same time.

From a very early age, we are taught to break apart problems to fragment the world. This apparently makes complex tasks and subjects more manageable. But we pay a hidden, enormous price. We can no longer see the consequences of our actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a large whole. When we then try to “see the big picture”, we try to reassemble the fragments in our minds, to list and organize all the pieces (Senge, 1990, p.3).

The old paradigms of viewing change and organizations as individual pieces are unacceptable. Understanding comes about through looking at the whole picture. Senge

promises that when a holistic view is taken “learning organizations” can be built. Learning organizations, according to Senge are ones in which people continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire. In such an organization, new patterns of thinking are nurtured, and collective aspiration is set free. People are encouraged to learn how to learn together.

Lieberman and Miller (as cited in Lieberman, 1986) also advocate a holistic stance. “New research has focused on what makes “effective schools”; characteristics such as a sense of order, high expectations, strong leadership, schoolwide control of instructional decisions, and clear and agreed-upon goals are identified as leading to improved instruction and raised student achievement” (p. 97).

Furthermore, Lieberman and Miller are optimistic about school reform. Their recommendation is to link the process and products of school improvement with what we know about schools, teachers, and how they change. Furthermore, the challenge for those concerned about the education of our youth is to apply the results of research on the school improvement process and to build on the climate for reform generated by provincial and federal reports.

Fullan (1991) contends:

The failure of educational change may be related just as much to the fact that many innovations and reforms were never implemented in practice (i.e. real change was never accomplished) as to the fact that societal, political, and economic forces inhibit change within the educational system.

Fullan (1991) suggests that the implementation of any new program or policy involves at least three components, or dimensions:

(1) the possible use of new or revised *materials* (direct instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies), (2) the possible use of new *teaching approaches* (i.e. new teaching strategies or activities), and (3) the possible alteration of *beliefs* (e.g. pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular new policies or programs). (p. 37)

The first component is perhaps the easiest to initiate. The second component, a change in teaching style to suit new materials, is more difficult and will require new skills. Changes in beliefs are the most difficult to effect. The development of a clear belief system is imperative in bringing about true restructuring.

There is now some consensus amongst researchers on the three broad phases to the change process. Phase I--variously labelled initiation, mobilization, or adoption - consists of the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change. Phase II-- implementation or initial use (usually the first two or three years of use)-- involves the first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice. Phase III - called continuation, incorporation, routinization, or institutionalization - refers to whether the change gets built in as an

ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition. Finally there is the outcome. (Fullan, 1991, p. 49)

Change is not a simple linear process. Within organizations, patterns of recurring events tend to be reasonably stable over time. When there is a shift in the pattern, change is said to have occurred. In other words, bringing about change in the school means modifying the events in the cycles. "Change is reflected only when a new pattern of events is repeated systematically" (Hanson, 1991, p. 130). Hanson, like Senge, envisions a more expansive approach to planned change in which the organization establishes built-in problem-solving capabilities that provide for creative experimentation in educational organizations.

Initiation is the stage leading up to, and including, the decision to proceed with implementation. Fullan lists eight factors that affect initiation decisions:

1. existence and quality of innovations
2. access to innovations
3. advocacy from central administration
4. teacher advocacy
5. external change agents
6. community pressure/support/apathy
7. new policy - funds from government
8. problem-solving and bureaucratic orientation. (Fullan, 1991, p. 50)

The need for change can result from any one of several factors. The most effective beginnings are those that have relevance, readiness, and resources. Readiness involves the practicality of the school to develop the innovation. Resources concern the provision of support. Innovations that are site-based and evolve from a need at the school level result in a more successful implementation.

Goodlad (1975) argues that if the school is itself an agent of change, then schools must have the momentum to change and to continue to change. The school must have a disposition toward making and remaking a change.

Without such momentum, layer upon layer of so-called reform will be laid upon the school, weighing it down and more and more encumbering its very ability to change. Teachers may be good, obedient automatons, learning all the right words and even exhibiting a little spirit of the intended reform, but they will go right on doing what they have always done.

Nothing changes but the appearance of change. (p. 61)

In the same text, Goodlad (1975) explores the thesis that an effective change strategy is one through which those within a given institution become responsive to the requirements that ensure institutional renewal and to the outside resources most likely to expedite that renewal. The concept of the single school whose students, teachers, and principal are primary participants has to be the primary unit for change.

The change process is uncontrollably complex and profound. The solutions, according to Fullan, lie in better ways of thinking about, and dealing with, the



unpredictable processes. Success can be found only through the discovery of patterns that emerge through the actions taken in the change process. Fullan, like Senge, suggests “systems thinking” as a new language for thinking about change.

To harness the forces of change, Fullan (1993) suggests eight basic lessons. Each one is somewhat paradoxical and all are interdependent:

1. You cannot mandate what matters (The more complex the change, the less you can force it).
2. Change is a journey not a blueprint (Change is non-linear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement and sometimes perverse).
3. Problems are Our Friends (Problems are inevitable and you can't learn without them).
4. Vision and Strategic Planning Come Later (Premature vision and planning blind).
5. Individualism and collectivism must have equal power (There are no one-sided solutions to isolation and group thinking).
6. Neither Centralization nor Decentralization Works (Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary).
7. Connection with the wider environment is critical for success (The best organizations learn externally as well as internally).
8. Every person is a change agent (Change is too important to leave to the experts, personal mind-set and mastery are the ultimate protection). (p. 21)

Dealing with these polar opposites demonstrates why change is such a complex process. Change begins with individuals becoming learners who then work actively to create a learning organization. Continuation, or institutionalization, is the process of adoption of a specified change. This is the goal of implementation, and it must be embedded in the structure and have committed followers.

In planning for educational change, it is necessary to be aware of the factors affecting implementation. As outlined in Table 1 (Fullan 1991), existing evidence emphasizes twelve factors critical to the change process. These factors are part of an interacting system which, over time, operates as a dynamic process. If any one of these factors is working against implementation, the process will be less effective. The more factors supporting implementation, the more effective it will be.

The first three factors are related to the nature of the change itself. The need for change, a clear picture of what is proposed, and the development of quality materials constitute the major barriers to implementation. This dictates the need to set up a process whereby the necessity for change, and its implications for action, can be developed with those involved over a period of time.

The effects of the next five factors depend on the quality of the plan guiding the implementation process. School systems without carefully devised plans for change will be the least successful. Fullan (1991) recommends five factors that enhance the chance for effective change in school systems:

Table 1

Factors Affecting Implementation

Characteristics / Factors	Description
A. Characteristics of the Innovation or Revision	1. Need for the change 2. Clarity, complexity of the change 3. Quality and availability of materials
B. Characteristics at the School System Level	4. History of innovative attempts 5. Expectations and training for principals 6. Teacher input and professional development (in-service, technical assistance) 7. Board and community support 8. Time line and monitoring 9. Overload
C. Characteristics at the School Level	10. Principals' actions 11. Teacher/teacher relations and actions
D. Factors External to the School System	12. Role of the Ministry of Education and other educational agencies (Fullan, 1991, p. 68).

1. have clear expectations and provide training and follow-up that encourages principals to take responsibility for facilitating implementation in their schools.
2. have set up a system for obtaining teacher input about the need for a given change and have provided opportunities for professional development on a continuous basis during implementation. Teacher input means teachers are giving and receiving help and helping to define the change in practice.
3. have obtained parent and board support for the direction of change.
4. recognize implementation as a process which takes some time, and which requires monitoring an information system during the implementation period.
5. take some steps to address the overload problem which occurs when teachers are attempting to implement several curricula simultaneously.

It takes considerable planning to ensure that all five steps are carefully interwoven into the plan.

The effectiveness of implementation is dependent on occurrences at the school level. A principal who takes on an active role as a leader in the change will influence the extent of implementation. The school environment must be such that there is collaboration, as opposed to isolation, amongst teachers. When teachers have an opportunity to help each other to deal with the difficulties in the implementation stage, its

success will be more likely. It is important, therefore, that teachers be given the time for interaction with their peers.

Monitoring and evaluation should continue throughout the implementation process. It includes information systems, resources, and action on the results through problem-coping and solving (Fullan, 1991, p. 86). In becoming change agents, educators should be backtracking constantly to re-evaluate goals and purposes in order to evaluate the direction in which to proceed. According to Peters (1987), the best "systems" to ensure correct choices are:

1. a clear vision,
2. sharing stories that illustrate how others, at all levels, have reacted to novel situations consistent with the vision, and
3. recognition for jobs well done (p. 486).

Monitoring serves two important functions (Fullan, 1991). First, it facilitates access to good ideas through making information on innovative practices available. This helps in dealing with the problem of isolation among teachers, schools, and districts. Second, monitoring exposes innovations to scrutiny which enables mistakes to be weeded out and good practices to be developed further. At the school level, monitoring both the results and the process of change is imperative. Research on effective schools shows that paying constant attention to students' academic, personal, and social development is essential for success (Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., and Ecob, R., 1988; Odden & March, 1988),

### Themes in the Implementation Process

#### Site-Based

Sarason (1971) suggests that things remain unchanged because our ways of observing and thinking have not changed. "This should not be surprising when one recognizes that the agents of change from outside the school culture are too frequently ignorant of the culture in which the change is to be embedded, or if they are part of the culture, they are themselves victims of that very fact" (Sarason, 1971, p. 236).

Restructuring has to begin at the grass roots level and involve all stakeholders within the system. Senge states that "a learning organization is an organization in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create" (O'Neil, 1995, p. 20).

Goodlad (1975) suggests that, under certain conditions, a school can become an effective agent of change. In his view, staff dialogue, because it is a critical factor in initiating and sustaining change efforts within the school, is an essential component of any change strategy. "Getting that dialogue going and working toward its greater salience, comprehensiveness, and relevance to significant regularities of schools is critical" (Goodlad, 1975, pp. 176 & 177). For meaningful dialogue and, subsequently, effective change to occur, then time must be provided for all members of the organization to work and study together. School improvement has been inherently frustrating because time to study collectively as a faculty has not been available (Joyce & Calhoun, 1995, p. 51).

If dialogue and study are important tenets of effective school change, personnel must be given the opportunities for teacher interaction and professional development. Hargreaves (1995) proposes that restructuring is one of the principles for school renewal. The structure of teacher isolation within schools is the result of the egg-crate pattern of organization found in most schools. Because teachers are captives of their own schedules, the problem of isolation is perpetuated. Within such an organizational structure, collaboration becomes another time-consuming addition. Hargreaves (1995) recommends that administrative ingenuity can help solve some of these structural problems.

Routinely coordinated planning times can bring together teachers who teach the same grade or subject. Placing 1st and 6th grade teachers in adjacent classrooms can begin to break down stereotypes and the boundaries between the upper and lower ends of elementary school. Peer tutoring can have the same effect, bringing together not only students of different ages, but also the teachers who supervise them. (p. 12)

Bennis' and Nanus' (1985) notion of organizing for innovative learning supports the idea that organizations need to be redesigned to become more receptive to learning. In such open organizations people share a set of norms, values, and priorities that contribute to learning. These values include being alert to change, searching for new challenges, and showing respect for innovation and risk-taking. "What the leader hopes to do is to unite the people in the organization into a "responsible community", a group of interdependent individuals who take responsibility for the success of the organization and

its long term survival” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 211). In creating such an organization, leaders contribute to developing the competence of individuals and groups as effective problem-solvers.

Similarly, Leithwood and Fullan (1984) argue for the need to provide continuous effective professional development:

The required approach involves a variety of formats (workshops, one-to-one, sharing among users, meetings, visits) and a variety of partners (peers, administrators, local consultants, external resource personnel) interacting on a continuous basis and focusing on specific problems. Long-term effectiveness depends on changing the norms and organizational arrangements in schools, so that they stimulate (and even make inevitable) the kinds of interactions we have described. (p. 8)

Further support for school change has to come from district office. Fullan (1991) recommends that district office must ensure that direct implementation support is provided in the form of available quality materials, in-service training, one-to-one technical help, and opportunity for peer interaction. “Becoming entrenched in the belief that significant improvements in the quality of education can be accomplished without providing teachers with adequate resources impedes the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization of changes” (Ryan, Kilcher & Hynes, 1992, p. 19). Time for teacher collaboration, relevant materials and ongoing professional development are key ingredients to successful change.



### Vision Building

Vision-building is another crucial building block of the change process. Goodlad (1966) suggests that “the task of improving education is a shuttling process, a weaving back and forth between envisioning and doing. Without action, this vision cannot take form; without vision, this action can never lead to new paths” (p. 85). A vision is the shared values and beliefs that a school possesses. “Vision helps schools to define their own direction and to develop an attitude that says ‘we’re in charge of change’ ” (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 51).

Similarly, Barth (1990) contends,

Nothing so professionalizes work in schools as educators who create within the schoolhouse visions of good education. Everyone who works in a school is not only entitled to a unique and personal vision of the way he or she would like the school to become, but has an obligation to uncover, discover, and rediscover what the vision is and contribute to the betterment of the school community. (p. 159)

Bennis and Nanus (1985) maintain that a vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible, and attractive future for the organization. In important ways, it creates conditions that are better than those that currently exist. Bennis and Nanus take the stance that an organization’s vision helps to empower those who work in the organization:

When the organization has a clear sense of its purpose, direction, and desired future state and when this image is widely shared, individuals are

able to find their own roles both in the organization and in the larger society of which they are a part. This empowers individuals and confers status upon them because they can see themselves as part of a worthwhile enterprise. (pp. 90 and 91)

Under such conditions, the human resources of the organization are working towards a common end. These authors contend this is a major precondition for success.

Fullan (1993) maintains that both teachers and administrators need to develop personal vision. The process requires an examination of the reasons for entering the teaching profession. Although personal vision begins independently of the organization, it can become the route to organizational change. Without a willingness to take the risk of expressing this vision, however, a unity of kindred spirits is unlikely to be achieved. Without personal vision, the most common results are “group think” and superficial attempts at change. Schlechty (1990) maintains that “indeed, group think is a dangerous commodity if an organization is to be creative and responsive, for group think is inherently conservative. What is needed are group structures that encourage individuals to think creatively and reward individuals for such thought” (p. 50).

Building a shared vision requires designing and evolving processes so that all members of an organization can speak frankly about matters of personal concern and be heard (Senge, 1994). Furthermore, Senge suggests, “the content of a true shared vision cannot be dictated, it can only emerge from a coherent process of reflection and conversation (p. 299).

Schlechty (1990) adheres to the premise that creating an articulated vision for an organization is an act of participatory leadership. Equally important is the development, refinement, and moulding of a vision that is widely understood and embraced within the organization. A clearly articulated purpose, and a well-thought-out vision that is consistent with that purpose, enable all those who work within the school to serve that purpose effectively. A shared vision that is directed towards a clear purpose is imperative in creating more effective schools.

### Organizational Learning

“Organizational learning is the process by which an organization obtains and uses new knowledge, tools, behaviours, and values” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 191). Learning occurs at all levels of the organization, and involves both groups and individuals. New knowledge is translated into new goals and new ways of doing things.

Berman and McLaughlin (1979), in their discussion of maintenance systems and development systems, see true development systems as having the capacity to adapt to the uncertain and constantly changing environment in ways that enhance its delivery function. The system can continually adapt because of its ability to be reflective and to effect change. Re-examination and replacement become standard operating procedures.

Cultural norms - e.g. risk-taking, and professionalism support an expectation and atmosphere for change at all levels; organizational structures and incentives - e.g. specialized change agents and regularized

participation of staff in proposal generation establish an infrastructure that makes the initiation and implementation of change a standard operating procedure for problem solving (p. 63).

In order to manage change effectively, schools must become proactive in searching out, facing, and attempting to solve their problems. "Problems and conflicts are natural dynamics that permeate change, and change means coming face to face both with anticipated and unanticipated ones. It means learning to resolve and manage conflict" (Ryan, Kilcher, & Hynes, 1993, p. 20). Solving problems is one means by which one learns.

Senge (1994) advocates dialogue and skillful discussion as the most effective practice for team learning.

During the dialogue process, people learn how to think together - not just in the sense of analysing a shared problem or creating new pieces of shared knowledge, but in the sense of occupying a collective sensibility, in which the thoughts, emotions, and resulting actions belong not to one individual but to all of them together. (p. 358)

Dialogue is a reflective learning process which enables the organization to value all its members.

Senge contends that traditional discussion is oriented toward advocacy. People discuss in competition with others in order to have their ideas accepted above others. This competitive atmosphere undermines learning, and problems rarely get solved as ideas and

solutions often do not get the consideration they deserve. “Most teams need new tools and skills to both broaden and focus the scale and scope of their conversations—to make them both more divergent and more convergent—when appropriate” (Senge. 1994, p. 385). Senge advocates ‘skillful discussion’ in which the team intends to achieve some form of closure such as arriving at a decision on an issue, reaching agreement, or identifying priorities.

Dialogue enables the team to explore shared meaning and skillful discussion allows it to come to a conclusion. Together, dialogue and skillful discussion can improve the quality of a team’s collective thinking and interaction.

By learning as much as possible about its changing environment and where it seems to be going, the organization can develop a sense of its purpose, direction, and desired future state. When this sense is widely shared in the organization, the energies of all the members of the organization are aligned in a common direction and each individual knows how his or her own efforts contribute to the overall thrust. (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 213)

### Team Building/Collaborative Decision Making

“History has brought us to a moment where teams are recognized as a critical component of every enterprise - the predominant unit for decision making and getting

things done" (Senge, 1994, p. 354). Teams are defined as groups of people who need each other to accomplish their goals.

Within the context of schools, Rallis (1988, p. 643) argues that two conditions must exist simultaneously in order to have effective leadership teams:

1. policy makers and administrators must provide the structures and the resources to enable teacher leadership to grow, and
2. teachers must become more professional.

Furthermore, in schools with effective teams, principals have provided time, an essential resource. Time allows team members to meet during regularly scheduled periods for dialogue and collaboration. Rallis' study also points out the value of training for team members. This provides teachers with a sense of empowerment which helps develop a culture that encourages professional growth and sharing.

It is not enough just to establish teams if these teams are not given legitimate power in improvement efforts within the schools. Leaders must have a genuine belief that their staff members as a group are more effective at developing solutions to problems than they can by themselves.

Rallis (1988) suggests that effective schools require strong leaders, but any school has the need for a variety of leadership. In schools where teams are working effectively, administrative support is visible and strong. Principals can give support by scheduling time for team activities, gathering the required information, and facilitating the completion

of paperwork. They do not run or control the meetings, however, since teachers are viewed as experts in the field of instruction.

In Garmston's and Wellman's (1995) discussion of adaptive schools, the concept of shared leadership is supported. All members of the organization must have the knowledge and skill to manage themselves, students, or other adults. "Leadership is a shared function in meetings, in staff development, in action research, and in the classroom" (p. 11).

Similarly, Joyce and Calhoun (1995), support the idea of a leadership team. Such a team enables decision-making and leadership roles to be expanded. Its responsibility would be to lead all members of the community in studying the school, its students, and ways to make the school better. This ought to be the essence of school improvement.

As an educational leader, the principal must be aware of the factors conducive to the success of team building. Williams (1983) suggests the following factors as prerequisites to the successful accomplishment of the purposes of the group:

1. exchange of worthwhile ideas
2. availability of necessary factual knowledge
3. cordiality among members
4. willingness to work
5. involvement in decisions
6. recognition of individual contributions to the group effort (p. 29).

“The principal needs to be aware of the excellent potential for instructional improvement through action research and cooperative field experimentation. The skillful administrator will develop those skills necessary to conduct effective group sessions and to assist others in becoming strong group leaders or members” (p. 30).

Senge (1994) contends that the leadership team must master the management of organizational change, including its design, structure, and implementation. This must be accomplished through methods that engage the entire organization and secure its commitment to a shared vision and a search for truth.

#### Schoolwide Action Research

A critical question for those involved in school improvement is, “Where do we begin?” Goodlad (1975) argues for the individual school as the unit for improvement and for those associated with it as the persons to effect the necessary changes.

Silberman (1970) argues that schools suffer from “mindlessness”. According to Silberman, mindlessness is the failure to think seriously about educational purpose and the reluctance to question established practice. He suggests that educational institutions must establish strong purposes and adopt a process of continual self-examination if they are to understand “the what” and “the why” of what they are doing.

Furthermore, Silberman states that when the emphasis is shifted from teaching to learning, when schools become “centres for inquiry” rather than buildings for the one-way



transmission of information, teachers become learners along with their students; in Dewey's phrase, they become 'students of teaching' (Silberman, 1970, p. 522).

Although written over two decades ago, this wisdom still holds true. Schools must become centres of inquiry and learning if they are to actualize the goal of school improvement.

Whitford, Schlechty and Shelor (1987) suggest that action research holds much promise for those interested in educational reform. From their perspective, action research has the potential to make a major contribution to professionalizing teaching. When teachers engage in action research they begin to value research as a process. When teachers have opportunities to use a research process to explore questions arising from their practice and experience, they develop ownership in the decisions that are made (Kyle, D., Hovda, R., & Whitford, B., 1987). Carr and Kemmis (1983) state that "action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry that can be utilized by teachers in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own practices, (b) their understandings of these practices, and (c) the situations in which these practices are carried out" (p. 152). Action research is a form of inquiry that can effect changes and improvement in learning and teaching at a particular site.

If school improvement must begin with the individual school and the teachers within that school, then action research should hold promise as a catalyst to effect change. Educational action research requires the development of self-reflective communities of teacher researchers who are committed to educational reform through the critical

examination of their own practices. Oja and Smulyan (1989) describe all collaborative action research in terms of the following characteristics:

- ◆provides a methodology which involves teachers in every aspect of the research process
- ◆combines goals of improved practice, a better theoretical understanding, and professional development
- ◆focuses on the process of individual professional development through involvement in collaborative study groups

Furthermore, Oja and Smulyan (1989) describe four basic elements of the action research method:

1. Action research is collaborative.
2. Action research is practical. It concerns itself with changing and improving a situation on the basis of teacher problems and concerns (Ebbcutt, 1985).
3. Action research entails professional development. Sagor (1992) acknowledges the importance of the continuous asking and probing of questions that go to the heart of the teaching/learning process as an important element of action research. Such questioning can lead to continuous professional development.
4. Action research entails creating conditions for project structure (time and support). Time must be available for following through the cycle of

problem formation, data collection, data analysis, reporting of results, and the action planning (Sagor, 1992).

Calhoun (1994) defines schoolwide action research this way:

Schoolwide action research is a fancy way of saying, “Let’s study what’s happening at our school, decide if we can make it a better place by changing what and how we teach and how we relate to students and the community; study the effects; and then begin again.” It is a “rolling” rather than “lock” step model for changing the workplace. (Huberman, 1992, p. 1)

Schoolwide action research can be used to study what is happening to students and educators in the learning community with the intent of bringing about improvement.

Action research is a viable means of effecting change within schools.

In the quest for school improvement, action research:

- ◆ is a route to immediate student outcomes
- ◆ can help develop the school as a learning community
- ◆ can build organizational capacity to solve problems
- ◆ is a staff development program through the study of literature and on-site data and determining optimum actions for implementation
- ◆ can be personal professional development. (p. 100)

Through experimentation with, and implementation of, action research, educators are able to build learning communities. “Part of the promise inherent in action research is

its use as a model to support the current movement toward “site-based” decision making” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 100).

According to Fullan (1991), educational change depends on what teachers do and think; and teachers should be at the center of this change. Fullan uses the term ‘interactive professionalism’ because he sees teachers interacting in small groups, planning, testing new ideas, attempting to solve problems, and assessing effectiveness. Within this paradigm teachers would be continuous learners and problem solvers. Similarly, Murphy (1991) notes “the goal is to move away from a position in which teachers are treated as hired hands (Sizer, 1984), or property (Bease, 1989), or assembly line workers (Purpel, 1989), to one in which change is teacher-driven, not authority-driven” (Soltis, 1998; Wise, 1989, p. 40). Sagor (1992) suggests that ... “fostering student growth and development is the primary objective of our public school systems” (p. 1). Student growth and development are the direct result of instructional interactions between student and teacher. Therefore, Sagor (1992) argues, it should be clear that ... “school reform should focus on nurturing and developing the teaching profession” (p. 1). Calhoun (1994), lends further support:

In applications to education, action research addresses the problem of organizational effectiveness in service of the client (the school improvement application) while simultaneously addressing the need to create a more collegial and satisfying workplace and to reduce the isolation

that has separated teachers from teachers and teachers from administrators and community members. (p. 15)

Today, action research is being revitalized. Glickman (cited in Calhoun, 1994)

..describes a framework of democratic governance, educational focus, and action research as integral dimensions of renewing education. Within this framework, the principles that guide shared decision-making within the organization are expressed in a school "charter", the focus on teaching and learning is expressed in a school "covenant", and the school faculty uses the "critical study process" of action research to assess the results of its current programs on commonly valued goals. (p. 19)

A process such as this allows the school to become a center of inquiry and reflection, thereby enabling the school to become perpetually self-renewing.

Calhoun (1993) describes three kinds of action research:

1. Research carried out by a single teacher is individual teacher research.
2. Research conducted by a group of teachers in consultation with professionals outside the school is collaborative action research.
3. Research conducted by the entire faculty is school wide action research.

In school wide action research, a school faculty selects an area or problem of collective interest, then collects, organizes and interprets on-site data. Data from other schools, districts, or the professional literature are

funnelled into the collective decision-making process of the faculty, who then determines the actions to be taken. The process is cyclic and can serve as a formative evaluation of the effects of the actions taken. (p. 64)

According to Calhoun (1993), schoolwide action research focuses on three aspects of school improvement.

1. It seeks to improve the problem-solving ability of the organization through repeated cycles.
2. The intent is that all students benefit thus making schools more equitable.
3. Schoolwide action research attempts to increase the breadth and content of the study. All stakeholders (students, parents, and the general community) may be involved in the data collection, interpretation, and the action plan.

Schoolwide action research can benefit schools in several ways:

1. "For teachers, principals, and district office personnel, action research promises progress in professionalization" (Calhoun, 1993, p. 62). This process enables educators to develop their problem-solving capabilities thus improving what is happening at the school level.
2. A major benefit of action research, experts say, is that it helps educators use data--rather than preferences or hunches--to guide improvement efforts (Willis, 1995, p. 5). Serious change means knowing why changes are being initiated and what they mean for the students. Change efforts must be connected to the local goals and needs of the school.

3. Action research addresses the quality of students' education (its primary goal) as well as the professional growth of teachers. It has the potential to lead directly to actions that change the environment.
4. "Action research also helps teachers think much more critically about change" (Willis, 1995, p. 5). Teachers are not as inclined to 'jump on band wagons' when the research process becomes second nature. Teachers, as action researchers, are more apt to investigate before implementing something new.

The literature claims that schoolwide action research can be the catalyst to bring about necessary reform within our schools. It allows those at the front line to initiate change based upon prompt investigations. Through the development of schoolwide action research, schools can start to develop into learning communities.

Sagor (1995) suggests that self-renewing schools are ones in which professionals have a shared vision, value professional inquiry as a vital aspect of school life, and have student learning at the heart of all decision making. In dynamic schools, decisions are based on data rather than on biased or majority-rule decision making. The objective is improvement in student learning. In such an environment, true professionals engage in disciplined inquiry. Theories are tested and results shared, and teachers learn from each other.

Joyce and Calhoun (1995) suggest that many faculties have attempted to improve their schools without examining the existing knowledge base that may be relevant to their

needs. The use of such knowledge has the potential to aid collective inquiry and increase the possibilities for success. The continuous goal of action research is to initiate and test specific improvements in education. "Classrooms, schools, and districts are social entities that, like the human spirit require the challenge of growth to maintain themselves in optimum health, but even more importantly, to soar" (p. 55).

### Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine if schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether or not the teachers and administrators at School X clearly understand and support the principles of the process. The literature review was undertaken to identify and discuss principles associated with school improvement and, more specifically, with schoolwide action research.

The literature on school improvement is extensive. This paper deals with four of the core principles behind school improvement:

- (1) site-based decision making,
- (2) vision building,
- (3) organizational learning,
- (4) team building/collaborative decision making.



Schoolwide action research can become the process by which schools can develop these four principles. This study examines the implementation process of schoolwide action research within the context of this literature review.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Within the realm of qualitative research there are various approaches and orientations which have implications for the nature of the research questions. This study is phenomenological in its approach which requires the intimate involvement of the researcher. Van Manen (1990) explains:

Phenomenological human science is not external and top-down, expert or contract research. It is done by rather than for the people as critical theorists would say. Phenomenological engagement is always personal engagement: it is an appeal to each one of us, as to how we understand things, how we stand in life, how we understand ourselves... (p. 156)

More specifically, this research is a case study of School X. "It has the goal of trying to describe whatever is important in a situation, without limiting the focus in advance to a small number of well-defined variables, which is what distinguishes case-study descriptive research from other types" (Simon & Burstein, 1985, p. 38).

Furthermore, Stake (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) contends:

The bulk of case study work, however, is done by people who have *intrinsic* interests in the cases. Their intrinsic case study designs draw the researcher toward an understanding of what is important about that case within its own

world, not so much the world of researchers and theorists, but developing its issues, contexts, and interpretation.

In this light, it is imperative to describe the case in a sufficiently descriptive narrative so as to enable the reader to draw his/her own conclusions. This researcher aims to uncover the shared experiences or commonalities that exist amongst the interviewees in this study.

Qualitative methods were used to collect data on the first year of School X's effort at school improvement using the process of schoolwide action research. The information collected by using this methodology can be of various types. It involves more than administering a questionnaire to describe a phenomenon.

In conjunction with the interview, data were collected through participant observation and document analysis. Direct personal contact with, and observation of, the setting of a study allows for better understanding of the context of the study, providing a holistic perspective (Doyle et al., 1995). Document analysis is used to offer historical understanding and provide descriptive information to the research.

Qualitative researchers use interviewing as a data collection method or technique more than any other method (Doyle et al., 1995). The interview enables the researcher to find out that which cannot be observed directly. It allows the researcher to enter into the other person's perspective. The interview was used in this study as a means of providing a clear picture of the interviewee's knowledge and understanding of the school improvement process at School X.

The interview process was open-ended to allow for follow-up questions, thereby permitting the researcher to clarify the data. A list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

### Selection of Subjects

“Qualitative research typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples that are purposefully selected. Small samples enable the qualitative researcher to strive for cases that are rich in information. Samples, even single cases at times, selected purposefully” (Doyle et al., 1995, p. 3-1). Maximum variation sampling as described by Doyle et al. (1995) is, “a sample that cuts across all interest groups or groups of participants in a research area” (p. 3-3). Maximum variation sampling was used in sample selection for this study. The sample selection took into consideration teacher’s gender, experience, involvement/non-involvement on the leadership team, grade level, and/or speciality.

In summary, 10 teachers and 2 administrators working within School X were selected for the study. All were willing participants. Four of the 10 teachers were members of the school leadership team as were the 2 administrators.

### Data Collection Procedure

Observational data gathering and document analysis continued throughout the year. The researcher maintained files of minutes of meetings and notes taken as a participant-observer. Document analysis consisted of information on the historical

background of the school improvement processes, school improvement initiatives, minutes of meetings, parental survey instrument, and the school assessment handbook.

Approximately one year into the school improvement process, half-hour interviews were held with teachers and administrators. These teacher /administrator interviews, which formed the core of the data collection, were private, tape-recorded sessions consisting of two parts.

In the first part, the researcher asked for information about the respondent's professional background: years of teaching experience, grade level taught, and nature of professional development in school improvement and action research. In addition, this part of the interview also allowed the respondents to ease into the interview process by beginning with a comfortable subject.

The first part of the interview also focused on open-ended questioning designed to elicit interviewees' definitions of school improvement and the change process. The interviewer's understanding of these concepts was not permitted to influence the interviewee's descriptions; therefore, the interviewer enabled interviewees to describe the concepts related to school improvement in their own "language".

The second part of the interview required the interviewer to ask questions which would enable teachers to demonstrate their understanding of the process of schoolwide action research and the strengths and weaknesses of this process.

### Coding and Analysis of Data

Audio tapes of the respondents' interviews were reviewed to gain an initial understanding of their contents. The audio tapes were then transcribed and analysed as to the type of information they contained. Common themes were identified from the respondents interviews. An analysis of school documents, as well as observations by this participant-researcher, provided additional support. This method of analysis allowed the researcher to examine the process of schoolwide action research as a means of bringing about school improvement at School X.

### Pilot Study

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted in August 1996 in order to field test the interview procedures and to determine the potential of teachers to understand and respond to the questions selected for the interview. The teacher used in the pilot study has been involved as a critical friend throughout this process.

### Summary

Teachers, administrators, and leadership team members were selected on the basis of availability and willingness to participate. Data were collected through interviews which used open-ended questions to elicit each respondent's understanding of the school improvement process.

The interview data were transcribed, analysed, and categorized. Participant observational data and document analysis data provided essential support to this study. Such data enabled this researcher to gain a better insight into the findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study is holistic in nature. It is concerned with the whole picture and begins with a search for understanding through examining the parts in terms of the whole. It involves a search for patterns through analysis of the collected data. Babbie (1992) comments that "by going directly to the social phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible, you can develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it" (p. 285). The purpose of this case study is to gain insight into the question, "Does schoolwide action research hold promise in enabling schools to improve as learning organizations?" This question will be examined in light of responses given by the staff at School X during the interviews as well as document analysis and observations.

As well, the strengths and weaknesses associated with the implementation of schoolwide action research are discussed. This researcher aims to uncover the shared experiences or anomalies that exist amongst the interviewees in this study. The interview protocols were designed so that responses would help demonstrate how well members of a school staff understand the process of schoolwide action research.

The report of the results is organized under two sections. Section One addresses the question, "Does schoolwide action research hold promise in enabling schools to improve as learning organizations?" It contains a discussion of five themes that emerge from data analysis. Each theme examines related questions from the interview questionnaire. Section Two addresses the question, "What are the strengths and



weaknesses associated with the implementation of schoolwide action research?", and contains a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of action research. Again, questions from the interview questionnaire guide the examination, analysis, and discussion of data collected from interviews, documents, and observations.

### Section One:

#### Does Schoolwide Action Research Hold Promise in Enabling Schools to Improve as Organizations?

The following analysis of the data examines the process of school improvement and the potential that schoolwide action research has as a catalyst for implementing schoolwide improvement. The model for schoolwide action research is discussed in Chapter 2. The following five themes are discussed in relation to the data provided through the interviews:

1. Site-based problem solving is viewed as a new process that teachers find useful to their school improvement efforts.
2. Teachers recognize that data collection is a required method of assessing needs.
3. Teachers support collaborative decision-making and shared leadership as more meaningful processes for making decisions.
4. Teachers are beginning to understand the cyclic nature of schoolwide action research in that they recognize the relevance of formative evaluation of school improvement initiatives.

5. Teachers are beginning to develop a shared purpose for school improvement.

Theme 1: Site-Based Problem Solving is Viewed as a New Process that Teachers Find Useful to their School Improvement Process

Decentralization of authority provides schools with more control over their organization. This control enables those involved to make decisions that are pertinent to their individual schools. Within the context of schoolwide action research, teachers, administrators, parents, and students should be active participants in the process of determining the needs of the school and seeking solutions to effect positive change.

This theme was developed through the responses teachers gave to the following questions in addition to document analysis and observations:

1. I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the Leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.
2. When decisions are made to initiate a project of improvement, how is it decided that the project is necessary?
3. Are schoolwide change initiatives based on input from all stakeholders?

### Question 1

I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the Leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.

Rather than relating specifically to site-based problem solving, this question is open-ended so that respondents may deal with the issue through their descriptions of the school improvement process. References to site-based problem solving are implicit in the responses. Respondents noted that staff, in a collaborative fashion, examined the issues that were problematic at the school level and set about to initiate changes that might help solve the problems. They also agreed with, and were positive about, the direction taken towards shared decision-making. The following responses are indicative of the importance of school-based needs assessment. The school principal summarizes the process in this way:

First, by initiating the institute and getting a team together who were interested in going to the institute. When we returned, we met with the staff and extended an invitation to other staff members who would be interested in sharing that leadership role with us. Two people came forward. We networked with staff and went through the process which we have been going through since 1991, where we've been and where we are going. We tried to share expectations and collaboratively got together and decided what the needs were for the school year, who wanted to work on what, who had certain strengths, and where that would fit and trying to meet the needs of the coming school year.

This was further supported by a seasoned teacher who responds:

Everything that has been happening comes from us. I like the fact that we brainstorm to come up with needs within the school, which committees you think need to be formed on as opposed to a list of committees being given to you to select which one you will serve on. I really liked this approach. Consensus

leadership is different from just democracy rules. Not so many things coming from the top but things coming from a team approach. I felt School X always had very good committees but now they are doing the consensus decision-making more by the book.

In the following summary, the respondent acknowledges a change in how committees are formed:

They are now formed by all staff after a needs assessment has been done. There has been a move away from top-down leadership to consensual decision making where all staff are involved.

Further explanation of the process is given by this teacher who is on the leadership team but did not attend the leadership institute.

From my perception, not having been at the institute, when we returned last fall, the word went out concerning how we were going to proceed with the core leadership team. I requested to be on the committee as it was open to all. One of the things I noticed is the committee met on a regular basis and it did not deviate from the schedule of meetings per month. We were trying to get a handle on school improvement and the way we wanted to proceed. In the beginning, there was a lot of tentativeness in determining if we were indeed proceeding as was presented to us. In time, that was adjusted to our school culture. We adapted the model presented at the institute to suit our working environment and personalities involved. I think that we never did get to all our agenda items as time was always a problem. We tended to explore things in excruciating detail. Superficial analysis is just not a part of the game. We made a major step forward in terms of getting things done when leadership team members started to sit on all the other on-going committees that exist in the school. The committee structure/culture in this school did two things; 1) kept the leadership well informed about what was going on in the other committees, and 2) seemed to start to give some of those committees direction and impetus to get on with the task at hand. We continued to tackle various curriculum issues on matters that came up. Sometimes difficult to get an agenda on the table without the ear of the principal. Goal setting went on for 1996–1997. Opportunities at every meeting for people to have their say. Excellent notes. Fixed chair. Rotated recorder.

The model presented to schools at the Leadership Institute was adjusted by this staff to fit the needs of their school. This researcher noted that the first staff meeting of the school year began with a synopsis of the Leadership Institute. Following this, the staff was given an opportunity to discuss the school's needs for the school year 1995–96. From there a list of eight committees was established to address these concerns. Minutes of this meeting indicate the following committees were established:

1. *Enrichment* - global Education / Day 7 / Science / General Enrichment Issues
2. *Learning Resources* - Technology / Themes / Computer Lab / TGIF
3. *Social* - Sunshine / Staff Morale
4. *Extra-Curricular* - Assemblies / Story time for children / Dances / Award System/ Principal's Honor Roll / Chess / School Spirit / Song/ Anthem / O Canada / Ode / Math Club / Public Speaking / Sports / Music / Drama Club / Extra-Curricular / Assemblies / Dances
5. *Professional Growth* - NTA Rep / Standardised Test / School Performance / Math / Student and Teacher Evaluation / Reading Strategies / Professional Growth
6. *Public Relations / Yearbook* - Media / Community Advocate / Parent Teacher Association
7. *School Improvement* - Leadership / Personnel
8. *Fundraising*

Finally, the staff was given an opportunity to indicate two preferences for committee work. This process of committee development is based on the need to establish working committees that deal with the issues and needs of the school with the ultimate goal being to bring about school improvement.

### Question 2

When decisions are made to initiate a project of improvement, how is it decided that the project is necessary?

Decisions or initiatives for school improvement should be taken only when a needs assessment has been done at the school level. These needs should reflect the underlying goal of improved student learning within an action research model. The relevance of needs as a prerequisite for implementing an improvement initiative is entrenched in the responses

One member of the leadership team summarizes her thoughts:

There has to be a perceived need which has to be brought to the attention of the administration, i.e. the math problem. Everyone got together to try to sort out the best possible means of correcting the problem. Most things that come up are handled this way.

One of the younger teachers on staff sums it up succinctly:

Will it benefit the children? Children are the focus.

The following response of one member of the leadership team supports the move toward staff involvement in decisions related to school improvement:

Based upon observation of need and also comes from staff raising issues of need.

This researcher observed that part of the process of determining the needs at School X involved all staff members in specifying strengths and needs. All concerns were listed but not prioritized (Appendix C). Through further discussions and collaboration with the staff, a plan was initiated for the school year 1995–1996 (Appendix D). It was observed

that the staff of School X wished to ensure that all initiatives were directed at improved student learning. These initiatives were categorized as follows:

1. Beginning
2. On-going
3. District initiated
4. School initiated

All initiatives were directed toward the development of a student-centred school according to the five categories established in the District Framework for School Growth and Improvement.

### Question 3

Are schoolwide change initiatives based on input from all stakeholders?

The consistent response to this question clearly indicates that there was a lack of involvement of all stakeholders. In a process such as schoolwide action research, it is imperative that all stakeholders contribute to decision-making.

Toward the end of the school year, the leadership team realized that this was a weakness in their school improvement efforts. A teacher of twenty-six years states:

I think there are some of those groups who have more input than others. For instance, teachers and board personnel when they perceive a problem. I don't think parents have a whole lot of input at this point.

Another veteran teacher says:

No, I don't think all stakeholders are involved, especially students do not have very much to do with decisions that are made here and probably not parents to a great extent. Parents get involved in a lot of things at the school but I don't know about making decisions.

A younger teacher on staff states her feelings simply and shows concern about the lack of student and parent involvement as follows:

No. There should be more input from students and parents.

Because there is consensus about this issue, the staff is now attempting to involve all stakeholders.

This research demonstrates that this staff has been proactive in assessing the needs of the students in order to improve teaching and learning. Furthermore, the responses show a positive attitude towards site-based problem solving as a part of the process of bringing about school improvement. In this school, needs assessment is the foundation on which decisions are based in this school. The teachers interviewed felt that being a part of the decision-making team was important to them as professionals.

### Theme 2: Teachers Recognize that Data Collection is a Required Method of Assessing Need

Teachers are now recognizing the need for data collection as a basis of needs assessment. Within the framework of schoolwide action research, it is necessary to develop an on-going process of data collection to determine school effectiveness. The



school needs to become a centre of inquiry in order for it to be perpetually self-renewing. Once the school has selected a focus, then data gathering must begin. Regular and frequent data collection must be continuous. This theme was developed through the responses teachers gave to the following questions as well as document analysis and observations.

1. I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the Leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.
2. What significance does data gathering have for school improvement in this school? Give an example.

#### Question 1

I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the Leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.

On examination, the research data related to question number 1 does not provide much support for the use of data collection as the basis for needs assessment and the implementation of subsequent improvement initiatives. Most respondents indicate that decisions are based on brainstorming and discussions as opposed to data collection. The following teacher, a member of the leadership team, indicates the following:

I think we have fine tuned an awful lot since our seminar particularly in terms of data gathering, an area we identified as being a weak spot.

This respondent had attended the Leadership Institute and, therefore, had been exposed to training in action research. It is possible that she realizes the significance of continuous data collection in the action research process.

### Question 2

What significance does data gathering have for school improvement in this school? Give an example.

The data indicate that there is support for data gathering as a means of determining needs and a movement in that direction. Respondents, however, did not cite many examples of its occurrence. The concept that data gathering is a continuous process in school renewal has not been internalized by the staff. The existing need for data collection, however, has been internalized by the majority of the staff. This appears to be a crucial first step in understanding the action research process. Both the purpose for data collection and its relation to school improvement efforts need further development.

One of the younger teachers on staff, who also is a member of the leadership team, appears to have made the connection between data collection and school improvement:

A lot, I think. Especially this year, we are really in the process of looking at data and trying to make a scientific type of analysis instead of going on just gut feeling like we had before.

Furthermore, another team member reiterates the significance of data collection:

It has a growing importance. We have embraced the idea that we have to proceed in some kind of a "quasi-scientific" fashion. It is no longer sufficient to say what we believe or think as accurate. Information has to be gathered to ascertain what this is telling us. We recognize there are perceptions and realities. We data gather to determine the realities.

The principal, a member of the leadership team, supports the concept:

Not something I'm good at. I want data there to support what I'm doing. It is good to show you that a need may exist that you might not even have picked up on or causes you to sit up and notice figures as indicators.

This respondent was also able to relate an example of its use:

For instance, one of the things the personnel committee came up with was the fact that we had too many children who were not reading at grade level in primary grades. We can track back to why we made the decision, how we went about getting that changed and then in June of 1996, except for one child, and I don't know, that may be a special needs child, every child was at instructional level at the end of Grade 3.

Records indicate that on November 6, 1995 an entire staff meeting was devoted to discussions centered around the results of Math Criterion Referenced Tests that had been administered to Grade XI students in June of 1995 as these results indicated weaknesses in certain areas of the Mathematics program. In consultation with district personnel, staff devised a plan of action to deal with this problem. The minutes state:

A discussion followed and several suggestions were made as to how we, as a school, can help solve this problem.

1. Form a committee (Grades 4, 5, 6,) to look at the issues
2. Have a teaching mechanism
3. Have an item bank
4. Follow time-lines
5. Set aim at 65%

6. Need to show students how to take a test
7. Students have knowledge of technology
8. Make up any time missed in Math, due to other activities out of classroom
9. Share ideas with other schools

This researcher observed that as the year progressed, this newly formed Mathematics committee became a guiding force within the school in determining the needs of, and seeking out the solutions to, problems in Mathematics teaching and learning. The committee became a strong source of support for all teachers involved in the Mathematics program.

An examination of minutes of a leadership team meeting as well as observation of staff meetings indicates that this staff appears to be moving toward making decisions based on data gathering. This concept needs to be embraced by all staff members if the school wants to be successful in its school improvement initiative. None of the respondents noted the significance of data collection as a cyclic process. Collective inquiry is a process of “noticing” and “acting” to create more effective learning organizations.

Minutes from a leadership team meeting dated October 25, 1995 indicate that there was discussion of student achievement on provincial criterion referenced testing in mathematics. There was obvious concern about students’ results in School X. The same concern was noted when the issue was raised at a staff meeting dated November 6, 1995. A recommendation was made to have a subsequent leadership team meeting deal with developing an action plan to address the concern. As stated in the minutes:

- Next meeting - November 8, 1995; - Main Issue - Math Achievement

A staff meeting on November 28, 1995 was almost entirely devoted to dealing with this issue and developing a plan of action. A team of elementary teachers was established to determine the reason for the weaknesses in mathematics and to carry through on a plan to improve mathematics teaching and learning. Evaluation of the initiative was continuous. It was noted by this researcher that during the school year 1995 to 1996 School X focused on improving student achievement in mathematics.

**Theme 3: Teachers Support Collaborative Decision-Making and Shared Leadership  
as More Meaningful Processes for Making Decisions**

A third theme emerging in the interview material is the idea that teachers support collaborative and shared decision-making. A few respondents indicated their belief that decision making in School X is neither collaborative nor shared. This theme was developed through the responses teachers gave to the following questions:

1. I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.
2. Has your role as teacher/principal changed in the past year since we looked at school improvement?
3. Are you a leader in your school? Explain.

4. Do you feel ownership of decisions made in your school? Explain.
5. Are decisions made in your school reached in a collaborative manner; that is, do all staff members share in making decisions? Give an example of how this happens in your school.

### Question 1

I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.

In describing the school improvement process at School X, the following three respondents all note the move towards consensual agreement. The first respondent is a leadership team member and one who attended the Leadership Institute who states:

This school always allowed staff to have a voice. Administration did not tell us what to do but included us in the decision making. I think we have gone about it in a little different way this time in terms of brainstorming, what people can live with, trying to make everybody feel like they can live with the decision instead of going along simply because of the majority. I feel the leadership team has made a big difference. Being on the team made me feel that I was truly a part of hashing out what we were going to do and deciding if it was worthwhile to take back to everybody.

In her discussion of the school improvement initiative, another respondent, a member of the leadership team, discusses collaborative decision making:

We've collaborated more as a staff even with regard to having facilitators, recorders, chairperson, etc. This has ensured that everybody has gotten their say and gotten us away from majority rules. Looking for compromise and making sure everybody feels comfortable with whatever decisions are made. At the beginning of the year, deciding what committees we were all comfortable with and coming up

with alternatives, more give and take. I think different people within the school have had more opportunity to develop leadership skills and show what leadership they possessed. They have had more opportunities to use these skills by taking leadership roles in committees, etc.

The following comments from this seasoned teacher added further support:

I think the biggest change was the approach used by us and administration to bring about a consensus agreement among staff rather than top-down decrees. That appears to be working out fairly well as people feel they are being consulted and their opinion is being taken into consideration.

The following teacher has an opposing view of the decision-making process at this school. This is an experienced teacher of eighteen years:

Improvement process involves an attempt by administration to make the teachers feel that they have either initiated or agreed with the change. However, in actual fact, some may not agree but may feel coerced into agreeing or saying that they do.

Throughout the interview there were many negative responses from this particular individual regarding the leadership. This teacher is not a member of the leadership team and the negative responses may be either a personal reaction to the administration or the result of not feeling a part of the school decision making.

If collaborative decision-making is to be successful in the school, then all teachers must be active participants. The leadership team needs to be cognizant of the need to ensure that all teachers feel they have a part to play. A lack of effort to include all staff members may be a weakness with the team.

Discussions with both the principal and leadership team members indicated that they supported collaborative decision making but felt that the process had become too

time-consuming. Furthermore, there was concern with the process of discussing everything with the leadership team before discussing it with the full staff.

The minutes of a leadership team meeting held on December 13, 1995 show that the roles of members of the leadership team had been discussed. The following recommendation was made:

That each member of leadership team be on another committee, observe procedure, and extend help if required.

This researcher observed that, following from this recommendation, team members began to assume leadership roles and became facilitators of committees within the school. Committees worked on issues, and made recommendations to the staff, the goal being to reach consensus on the issues raised. It was noted that this process relieved pressure on her and allowed others to emerge as leaders. Future meetings of the leadership team allocated time for team members to report on the status of their committees. The following was noted in the minutes of a leadership team meeting held on February 14, 1995:

-Liaison with other committees seems beneficial.

This process appeared to be a satisfactory means of ensuring effective communication amongst the various committees within the school.

## Question 2

Has your role as teacher/principal changed in the past year since we looked at school improvement?



All respondents noted positive changes in their roles as teachers. Overall, teachers felt that their voices were being heard and that they were included more in the decision making. As well, they felt the school was running more cohesively and more purposefully.

A veteran teacher, who is a member of the leadership team, had this comment:

It has changed in the sense that I feel more involved in what is going on in the school and we have more of a chance to sit down and discuss with the administration your feelings. I really think they are taken into account.

Another team member adds further support and suggests that collaborative decision-making holds her more accountable:

I think so. I think I look at things a lot differently now and I feel more a part of making decisions and because of that I feel good about those decisions. I think anyone who feels that way is going to do more for their school. Not just going along because everybody said that's what we should. Being included has made a big difference. It sort of sets the responsibility on you as a person.

The following teacher of twenty-four years felt that the school has a clearer sense of direction and purpose:

Teaching runs more smoothly, has more purpose. You seem to know where you're going with the direction the school improvement committee and administration has laid out. It's a feeling you have more than something tangible.

Another leadership team member feels she is more empowered as a teacher:

Definitely. I think the principal has given more empowerment to the teachers. More teachers are allowed to make decisions and stick to their decisions and left at that rather than the administration taking it and going through it and saying that's nice but I think we'll do it this way. Example: Assemblies and things like that. It seems like it just evolved where we are in on the decision making. Maybe it's because I'm on the leadership committee, we discuss all of it.

It was noted by this researcher that staff meetings provided the opportunity for the total staff to become involved in major decisions affecting the learning and teaching within School X. These meetings focused on the discussion of a specific problem and the subsequent strategy for dealing with the problem. Minutes from a staff meeting dated November 6, 1995 indicate the main issue being dealt with was Mathematics. Similarly, on December 4, 1995 the issue before the staff was enrichment. Again, minutes from a staff meeting dated March 5, 1995 indicate the concern was reading at the elementary level. All three meetings also involved resource people from district office. Through such a collaborative decision-making process, the decision made appeared to be more meaningful for all staff members.

### Question 3

Are you a leader in your school? Explain.

Only one of the twelve respondents stated she was not a leader. This teacher of eighteen years stated:

No.

No further explanation was given as to why she felt this way. All other respondents felt they were leaders within the school. These leadership roles encompassed many areas such as mentor to students, mentor to other teachers, grade level expert in a particular curricular area, and advisor to parents.

A seasoned teacher sees her leadership role in this light:

I try to be in that if new teachers come in, I go to them and help them locate things and I'm sure other teachers do the same. I try to backtrack to see if there was anything I did that helped them, and if not, why. Even students, when you chat with them and ask about different things if you follow-up with them, if you know they were having a hard day, to follow-up with them the next day, they come back and show that they are grateful. Even some of the teachers here, if you stop and chat with their students and just ask what kind of a day they are having, students that you have had over the years, they go along and tell their teachers about it. A couple of teachers mentioned to me that it was nice of me to do that sort of thing. It helped them get through another day. I don't know if you call that leadership role or not.

Although the following teacher has been on staff at this school for only a few years, she still sees herself as a leader.

I think I am. In terms of even in my grade level and I want to be involved in things that are going on. I'm not just willing to sit back so I think I'm a leader in that way.

A third teacher, a member of the leadership team, gives an insightful response:

That depends on the definition of "leader". But I certainly feel that I am participating in decision-making, contributing ideas, am listened to, have opportunities to be involved. I think I affect the decisions that are made. If that's being a leader, then I'm a leader. But I don't ever pretend to be so on the scale of the Principal or VP or other very competent teachers who are breaking new ground. I don't see myself as a leader in that way.

All three respondents see themselves in different leadership roles within the school. This would appear to be one area where the leadership team has worked diligently in providing the autonomy for all teachers to adopt the leadership role from personal perspectives. The research indicates that leadership of this school is not conducted by

administration alone, but is shared by all who want to share that role. Likewise, leadership manifests itself in many forms rather than having a narrow focus.

#### Question 4

Do you feel ownership of decisions made in your school? Explain.

Collaborative decision-making should engender a sense of ownership for decisions made at the school level. Again, the majority of responses indicate that teachers feel ownership of decisions made. The following teachers, however, indicate they do not feel a sense of ownership. The following three responses are from teachers who are not on the leadership team.

One teacher acknowledges partial ownership:

Ownership to the extent that we have something to say but they (administration) don't always go by what we did have to say.

Similarly, a second teacher has concerns:

Not as much as I would like. Always final decisions made by someone else, mainly by the principal, i.e. placement decisions, in-class work.

Finally, no explanation was offered by the following staff member who responded:

No.

The responses from all other staff members indicate a feeling of ownership for decisions made at the school level. This teacher, who is a leadership team member, states:

Definitely and I think that's what I think the main thing that has come out of this leadership institute and the leadership team is letting people see. We're taking

more responsibility because we feel that we've been in on this decision making so we're going to carry it through.

The following explanation is provided by a veteran teacher on staff:

Yes I feel ownership and always have. I find this consensus decision-making drags a lot of stuff out. I always felt the majority rule was a fine way to go because if a decision was undertaken by the staff that was not the way I wanted it to be, made no difference to me. I could follow through and have ownership unless it was something I felt adversely affected the children. I would just as soon have someone tell me to do something, I'll do it. However, I'm sure that for many others who are not as open minded to things, consensus decision making is very good. Because by the time all of the issues are discussed, they have to feel that they have a part in this. After you talk about something so much, you basically compromise and people have got to feel part of it. It is a very good thing although it is time consuming.

It is further supported by this teacher of twenty-four years:

We are given the opportunity to speak out. I have that decision-making power. If you don't take the opportunities here, it is no one's fault but their own.

Another leadership team member who discusses his sense of ownership for school-based decisions also indicates a sense of frustration with those decisions from outside the school over which teachers have no control.

I certainly don't feel comfortable blaming it on the principal if something goes wrong. We have a great deal of say over those matters which our school controls. We still have very little influence on matters controlled by district office. The irony here is that lots of responsibility is being thrust upon us but I don't see the decision-making power, especially in any thing that has any kind of fiscal implication. No power or say in this area; all comes from district office.

The responses indicate that some teachers still feel a sense of frustration with regard to the power they have. The teachers who appear to have the greater sense of

ownership are those who have been directly involved in the leadership team. It is also possible that one year is insufficient time to enable a change in leadership style to become fully integrated into the system.

#### Question 5

Are decisions made in your school reached in a collaborative manner: that is, do all staff members share in making decisions? Give an example of how this happens in this school.

All but two of the respondents indicated that most decisions were reached in a collaborative manner. The following younger teacher on staff feels there is some collaboration; however, she indicates an area that she perceives as a weakness:

In some areas. All teachers are given a chance to voice their opinion. Other areas not. It seems that administrators decide what gets opened up for discussion.

This mid-career teacher gives the following response, but does not offer an example:

No, top down.

The remaining responses were positive and most respondents offered explanations. The school principal's response suggests there has been a concerted effort to move toward greater collaboration; however, she still sees room for growth.

Yes. I think we do and you can see the thread throughout my responses so far. I don't know that it is the truest collaborative sense because in the truest collaborative sense, everybody wins. Everybody feels they have come up with the final decision that everybody can live with. At times I think we have made the approach where majority rules. On the whole we have gotten into more of a collaborative approach and not majority rules. What can be done to make this more palatable for you if you are not in total agreement?

A leadership team member gives further explanation by way of an example:

Yes. If they don't, it is not because they don't have the opportunity. The opportunity is there for everybody to become a decision maker if they want to. Example: At the end of this year there is an hour on deciding professional development that we want or having the professional development that we did at the end of the year on looking at all the data we had collected about school improvement from parents. We were involved in deciding on when and how we wanted to proceed.

Another team member suggests that most people are comfortable with this method of decision-making:

To a large extent. There is a great deal of consensus seeking, involvement of various people. Most, if not all people, feel comfortable voicing opinions. Staff meetings, for instance, are not a threatening forum and not rigid.

The minutes of a leadership team meeting on October 25, 1995 show that evaluation and reporting were items on the agenda. Specifically, this meeting dealt with utilizing professional development or administrative days to conduct parent conferences. This researcher observed that the principal of School X was pressured by other principals to take this route. The leadership team recommended putting the issue to the whole staff rather than making a decision itself. As a participant in the staff meeting, this researcher observed that there was much debate over the issue before a decision was reached.

Theme 4: Teachers are Beginning to Understand the Cyclic Nature of  
Schoolwide Action Research in that they Recognize the  
Relevance of Formative Evaluation of School Improvement Initiatives

Formative evaluation must be used as a means of ensuring that all members are regularly informed about the health of the learning organization. A collective inquiry into teaching and its effects on students is a cyclic process. It has the capacity to serve as formative evaluation of school improvement initiatives. This theme was developed through the responses teachers gave to the following questions as well as document analysis and observations:

1. I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the Leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.
2. Is there on-going evaluation of school improvement initiatives?

Question 1

I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the leadership Institute in 1995. Please describe the process that your school has been taking to bring about improvement within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator.

In analysing the responses to this question, only the vice-principal referred to the relevance of evaluation and subsequent follow-up:



Computer and technology have been developing a fairly fine tuned action plan. Developing this up-front allows you to follow through and check to see if you have followed through with your plan.

As this was an open-ended question, respondents may have focused on other areas of the school improvement process as opposed to the necessity of formative evaluation.

### Question 2

Is there on-going evaluation of school improvement projects?

The results indicate that there is on-going evaluation of school improvement initiatives and that staff members are aware of the progress. Most evaluation appears to be handled by the committees in charge of particular projects and then reported to teachers at staff meetings.

A seasoned teacher relates how results are reported and offers a suggestion for improvement:

Yes. Through committee meetings and staff meetings, evaluations. Frequency and standard of evaluation may want to be decided on.

A leadership team member gives a specific example of where she sees this process occurring:

I think so. If you look at our computer initiative, we are always re-evaluating that and deciding if we think this is going right or what we need to make changes.

Another leadership team member suggests that evaluation is continuous and informal. He indicates that teachers are continually evaluating the progress of a particular initiative and its value to students.

Yes. This is continuous informally; what we are doing and if it is beneficial, i.e. the enrichment initiative. Everybody had opportunity whether or not it was exercised.

The results indicate that, to some degree, evaluation is continuous and staff is involved in this process. There does not appear to be any standard process yet established for formative evaluation. A review of minutes from both leadership team meetings and staff meetings indicate that while there is follow-up discussion of committee work, there does not appear to be any formal evaluation of the effect on student growth. While staff may realize the importance of formative evaluation, there is a need to establish formal methodologies of evaluation.

#### Theme 5: Teachers are Beginning to Develop a Shared Purpose for School Improvement.

The fifth and final theme indicated by the data is that teachers are beginning to develop a shared purpose for school improvement. This theme was developed through the responses teachers gave to the following questions as well as document analysis and observations:

1. What is/are the primary reason(s) that the school has initiated a school improvement process?
2. What have been the major focuses for school improvement this year?

Question 1

What is/are the primary reason(s) that the school has initiated a school improvement process?

All staff members have not internalized the concept that school improvement is intended to promote better learning and teaching for our students. Those involved with the leadership team have a much clearer understanding of the purpose for school improvement. This may be owing to the kind of discussion that occurs at team meetings. As a comparison of results indicates, this has not been shared and communicated well with other staff members. The first three respondents are members of the leadership team and two of them also attended the Leadership Institute.

This teacher has obviously placed students at the center of improvement initiatives:

We want to always to keep uppermost in our minds to do what is best for the children in our care. As a staff, because we work so hard at it, we also want to be as efficient as we can in doing this. Not always floundering.

The principal discusses the importance of a continual quest for improvement:

I felt that what school improvement does for you is to give you where you are and where you are going, what is it that we want to improve on, and gives you a focus on how to make the school a better place for all.

The teacher quoted below sees the necessity of providing a positive environment both for the students and for the teachers.

I think we wanted to make it so the everybody would feel that School X was a good place to teach. A good place to be in terms of teachers and in terms of children. We have succeeded a lot with that.

The next respondent is not a member of the leadership team, but she indicates in the interview that she likes to know what was going on everywhere.

To do a better job for the children. Everything is child focused and everything is done for them, not for our convenience. To give them the maximum for the dollars that we are being paid.

The following respondents are not members of the leadership team. Their responses indicate they have not encompassed the purpose for school improvement. This first respondent is a veteran of the school:

Not quite sure; continuation of initial school improvement (1991).

The second teacher also is unclear about the purpose for school improvement:

They want to keep up with the times, the new facilities being used, new ideas, new textbooks.

The third respondent simply states:

A need was recognized.

## Question 2

What have been the major focuses for school improvement this year?

The results indicate that all teachers have a shared understanding of the initiatives undertaken as a means of improving teaching and learning. Two of the main focuses were global education and the development of a shared leadership.

This veteran teacher discusses the process of attempting to involve all teachers in helping develop a shared purpose.

Teachers working together more, getting more involved in what's going on in the school. Teachers were asked for their opinions a lot more and their opinions were acted on, which was good to see. Before, there were certain committees and some of us never knew what happened in the committees or what they were doing but this past year we had a lot more open discussion about that and how teachers felt about certain things and some of the teachers who were never on stream before came on stream and started thinking about the whole notion of school improvement.

The following response from a leadership team member focuses on the importance of staff involvement in the development of improvement initiatives. Again, this is a cornerstone of schoolwide action research. He indicates that there has been a continuous, concerted effort to get all teachers involved.

The continuation and refinement of on-going initiatives. For instance, the global education initiative, evaluation, technology focus with computers, learning resource centre automation, professional development, especially when thinking about how to proceed and what we were to focus on. We also dealt with personnel issues, budget issues, school bus re-scheduling. Wide variety. Fully cognizant and attention paid to the notion of involvement of staff in decision-making, etc. Very deliberate attempt to never forget about the entirety of the staff. Core leadership team became a sounding board for staff through discussion. It worked.

A relatively new teacher on staff indicates the following as the main focus for school improvement initiatives:

Global education, discipline, enrichment, general academic improvements.

The staff at School X is beginning to develop a team vision. The major initiatives document for the school year 1995–1996 lends support to the interview responses. All initiatives relate to the District model for school improvement. It was noted by this researcher that as the year progressed, more teachers had become involved in the “talk” of school improvement. It had begun to expand beyond the leadership team. These findings indicate there is support for improving student learning and a desire to provide the best environment possible for these children.

There is positive indication that this school has encompassed the tenets of schoolwide action research. Further refinement and purposeful planning are now required in the schoolwide action research process.

#### Section Two:

#### What are the Strengths and Weaknesses Associated with the Implementation of Schoolwide Action Research?

##### Strengths

An examination of the data indicates the following areas of strength in the implementation of schoolwide action research at School X:

1. a staff that seeks a better education for all students
2. a school leadership team
3. collective decision-making

Each of these strengths next will be examined in turn.

### 1. A Staff that Seeks a Better Education for all Students

Throughout the interviews there are references to the necessity of improved teaching and learning. The staff has been concerned with evaluation of students' needs to help determine a direction. The school improvement initiatives that have been implemented have been designed specifically to positively affect the teaching and learning environment. Some initiatives cited are:

1. global education
2. discipline policy
3. curriculum improvement
4. more parental involvement
5. technology
6. enrichment

While not all staff members were clear about why a school improvement initiative was implemented, the results indicate there is a general consensus about a need to improve the learning environment for children.

The following veteran teacher indicates his support for continual improvement. He suggests that teachers must be seeking ways for self-improvement to better enable them to educate their students. This process of continual renewal is a corner stone of schoolwide action research.

You have to always be looking for ways to improve yourself and be ready for any new programs, technologies, ideas. This process readies the school by looking for new ideas, getting parent and student input to provide the best school environment.

In the following discussion of the changing role of the student, this leadership team member expresses concern for the total well-being of the child.

The biggest change would have to be in behaviour in a sense, because there was such an outward focus on our peace initiative last year that some of them really took some of that to heart and really tried harder. They wanted to be part of the school because they knew it was a relatively secure environment and they knew what was expected of them. And the good feelings that go with meeting many of those expectations in terms of academics. I think with the great focus on objective teaching rather than book teaching, children know. It is not going to change all of a sudden and they are all going to see that it is all of a sudden going to fit together but overall there was some change and I think we can look forward to a greater focus on achievement in terms of social skills, academic skills, etc. as more of this is done and explained.

## 2. A School Leadership Team

A facilitation team, or school leadership team, must be in place in order to support schoolwide action research. The school under study has developed a leadership team consisting of administrators and teaching staff. The team is comprised of teachers who were interested in sharing the leadership role with the administration. In discussing the role of the leadership team, the principal states the following:

We always had a very professional staff and I think that even without having done this institute, we were in a position where everybody felt they have a part to play and that they would be listened to. I've just seen that strengthen and continue. I don't think there's been a change; we've just grown more. I think they feel it's not just me, not just the team that has a say in the school. We go to a staff meeting and we discuss issues and we try to come to some means of a decision that can sit well with us all. Not all of us always agree with everything but at least we are comfortable enough with it that we can live with what is finally decided on. I don't think we've changed a lot, I think that we've just gotten better at it.



Further explanation of the role of the leadership team is given by this team member as she discusses the benefits that have occurred as a result of the shared leadership within the school.

I found that when we attended the leadership seminar as a team, we were already well progressed into a lot of the ideas and concepts they talked about. We had already made significant improvements over the last 4 or 5 years prior to that. I think we have fine tuned an awful lot since our seminar particularly in terms of data gathering, an area we identified as being a weak spot. More specific policy development in writing down what it was we wanted. More goal oriented. Surveying parents, asking them and teachers for feedback and comparing the two lots to see where we could better improve those kinds of things. Computer and technology have been developing a fairly fine tuned action plan. Developing this up front allows you to see if you have followed through your plan. Collaborated more as a staff even with regard to having facilitators, recorders, chairperson, etc. This has ensured that everybody has gotten their say and gotten us away from majority rules. Looking for compromise and making sure everybody feels comfortable with whatever decisions are made. At the beginning of the year, deciding what committees we were all comfortable with and coming up with alternatives, more give and take. I think different people within the school have had more opportunity to develop leadership skills and show what leadership they possessed. They have had more opportunities to use these skills by taking leadership roles in committees, etc.

Throughout all of the interview data, support for the role the leadership team is consistent.

At a leadership team meeting dated April 17, 1996, the results of an internal assessment that was conducted by a research team from Memorial University of Newfoundland were reported. The minutes of the leadership team meeting state that the results of the assessment demonstrate that School X has a positive attitude toward its leadership team. The minutes of the meeting state:

- much success to celebrate
- main areas of concern were with Board's role - weakest part of leadership team
- many constructs 100%

- leadership team good - continue what you are doing
- team is trustworthy and cares about staff as individuals
- need statistics on base-line data (measurable)

This researcher-observer noted that discussion at this meeting centered on the development of an instrument to formally survey parents and students. Development would begin with the parents' survey. There was consensus that this would be completed by June, 1996.

The recommendations of the leadership team to develop a survey were presented at a staff meeting on May 13, 1996. The staff was informed that a parent survey was to be constructed and administered to all parents. The survey would help provide the foundation for work for the school year 1996-1997.

Many of the staff have been actively involved in the leadership of the school and view shared leadership as a positive direction by the administration. Members of the school Leadership Team have become leaders of the various committees throughout the school. Other teachers have taken on leadership and mentor roles within grade levels. Teachers who have not taken on this role have done so of their own accord and not because the opportunity is unavailable to them. Shared leadership is developmental and it happens only within an environment where teachers feel secure in taking the risks necessary to becoming decision makers in the school.

### 3. Collective Decision Making

One of the main tasks of the leadership team is to help the staff develop routines for working together, for making collective decisions, and taking collective action. Possibly one of the strongest points coming out of this research is the positive feedback regarding collective decision making. This is apparent throughout the interviews.

The following mid-career teacher, in discussing the changing role of the principal, sees a dramatic change in decision-making at the school.

I've seen it evolve. Our principal brought personal experiences to her role but over the year this position, I think, has changed dramatically. Now there is less authoritarianism and less decision-making centered in the office, not due to unwillingness to do so. Very solid direction. Great deal more consultation on openness; a notion of principal as leader. Notion of collaboration and co-workers but this does not diminish the recognition that this person is the chief manager in the school.

A leadership team member, in answering the question "Have staff meetings changed?", gives this response:

I think that they have for the better. We are all involved in many decisions and the brainstorming takes up more time, but in the long run it's better. You get to see the pros and cons of an issue and everyone gets more involved.

Responding to the same question, this veteran teacher notes the more collaborative approach to decision making.

Yes, for the better. There is not as much one-sided information sharing. It has been more collaborative and getting concerns from the staff.

In summary, this staff appears to have encompassed three fundamental tenants of the action research process. There is a keen desire amongst all staff interviewed to provide the best learning environment for all students in the school. The school has a well established leadership team who sees its role as facilitators within the school. Analysis of documents indicate that team members are involved with the various committees in the school. It has been noted that these members provide a two-way communication system between the team and the committees. Individual committees work on issues relevant to their specific areas and make recommendations to the team. Discussions at the leadership team level determine how these recommendations fit into the total school picture. Recommendations are then brought to the total staff for further discussion and subsequent decisions are made at this level. The research indicates that this staff has been making a concerted effort at collective decision making.

#### Weaknesses

An examination of the data identifies the following areas as weaknesses in the implementation of schoolwide action research at this site.

1. lack of professional development in the area of school improvement
2. lack of collective goals and vision
3. no established process for data gathering

Each of these weaknesses next will be discussed in turn.

### 1. Lack of Professional Development in the Area of School Improvement

Of the respondents interviewed, none had an educational background in educational leadership. Three of the respondents had attended a week-long institute on leadership. One respondent had attended the institute for one day.

One potential form of professional development for staffs is the reading and sharing of literature and research on educational issues. In this survey, respondents were asked the following question: "Is there a book, article or event related to school improvement that has had a significant influence on you this year?" Four of the respondents stated that the articles from the leadership institute proved valuable. All but one of these four staff members had attended the institute. One other respondent stated that his Masters program courses provided some insight into school improvement. No other respondents reported any readings, books, or events specific to school improvement.

This researcher observed that the leadership team of School X engaged in very little sharing of professional literature on school improvement and school leadership with other members of the staff. Those team members who had attended the five day Leadership Institute in August, 1995 were privy to a wide range of literature related to school improvement. No reference has been made in the minutes of the leadership team meetings to any of the journal articles or other professional readings. Whatever the reasons, it appears that School X does not devote time to using the professional literature as a means of providing professional development for its staff.

The following question was asked to determine what professional development had taken place during this initial year of implementation of the school improvement process:

“Do you feel that you have had adequate professional development in the area of school improvement?”

The following teacher had attended the Leadership Institute and responded:

We have had some and what we had has been good. That’s not to say we couldn’t benefit from more.

A teacher who had not attended the institute states:

The only training I have received has been through the school on staff. I believe it needs to be a part of an educational program of young teachers coming on stream today. The district needs to get at all teachers rather than to make it a point to attend an institute. It has to be an inservice throughout the district for all staff because, if not, a lot of people get missed and do not fully understand the value of it to their school.

A leadership team member, who had not attended the institute, adds further support for more training:

No, I had virtually none as I was not part of the institute and I would certainly like to know more about the school improvement process, especially as I am now a member of the leadership team.

In a discussion of the training process, the principal hints at the lack of communication that exists in the system:

No, I can’t really say that I’ve seen anything wrong with the Board. They gave us the time when we asked for it. They gave personnel to help us. Probably, the thing I would fault, and it could be because I was vice principal and not because I was the principal at the time, is that I knew nothing of the fact that it was really initiated from the Department of Education and there was a wealth of people and knowledge in there that could have guided us better. It wasn’t until this year that I went to the

Department's school improvement institute to present what we were doing that I realized that they had a very systematic approach to it and that one area that was bothering me personally, the lack of parental involvement, was very much a part of the original plan of how to go about getting different parties involved. If we had followed that right at the beginning, we would never have missed that very important arm of the school improvement team.

Through both individual and collective self-renewal, teachers have to accept the premise that education is never finished. In the search for school improvement, staffs must avail of the information and research that can help them move forward. This information, along with teachers' collective expertise and on-site data, can be used to move schools forward. The data indicate there is a weakness in the area of professional development especially as it relates to school improvement. There has not been sufficient sharing of related literature amongst the teachers on staff.

## 2. Collective Goals and Vision

A purpose represents the fundamental reason for an organization's existence. The goals of an organization represent the commitments people make. With respect to purposes, teachers were asked the following question, "Does your school have a clearly stated purpose?" Respondents were asked to state the organization's purpose.

The following mid-career teacher attempts to answer the question by asking:

We have a mission statement. Is that what you mean?

Similarly, a leadership team member states:

I think they do, yes.

Another leadership team member acknowledges the lack of clearly stated purposes:

It has a mission statement but I wouldn't say necessarily clearly stated. Not necessarily understood or that the understandings that exist are shared.

In determining how goals are defined, the following question was asked: "Do all staff members assist in defining the goals for the school?"

With the exception of one person, all respondents felt that everyone had an opportunity to assist in defining goals for the school. The following mid-career teacher responds negatively:

No, not really; goals usually are defined by administration.

While no reasons are given, this teacher feels that she has little influence on decision-making in the school. It is possible that she has not been on staff long enough to have established a sense of belonging within the organization. It is also possible that she feels that she is powerless in her situation and that her voice is not heard. For schoolwide action research to be a viable means to school improvement, all staff must feel involved and be involved.

This same problem is reiterated in the response from a leadership team member:

All have an opportunity to have a say, whether they choose to or not. Some people have more influence than others but I don't think it is because anybody is locked out. Just comes down to personalities and the desire, or the part of the individual, about how much they want to be involved in this kind of goal setting.



This statement indicates that not all staff members are at the same level of involvement and commitment as others. It then becomes the responsibility of all to encourage those who feel less committed to become more comfortable with a collaborative, shared leadership.

### 3. No Established Process for Data-Gathering

The results indicate that one of the weaknesses in the school improvement effort at School X is the use of on-site data. There is strong support for initiatives based on a needs assessment and for data gathering. The weakness lies in developing a process for data gathering and analysis. A needs assessment is an important first step in the action research process. The minutes of a leadership team meeting dated March 20, 1996 state that:

Principal of School X has been asked to share our school improvement policies on March 25th with other principals.

Further records of a leadership meeting held on April 17, 1996 indicate that the process of school improvement at School X had failed to establish base data through parent and/or student surveys. In the minutes of the leadership team meeting of May 8, 1996, a recommendation was made to develop and administer a parent survey. This recommendation was approved by the staff during a staff meeting dated March 25, 1996.

The development of the survey was undertaken by the principal, two leadership team members, and a coordinator from district office. On May 8, 1996, a letter was sent to a random selection of parents inviting them to participate in a focus group whose mandate was to develop an instrument for surveying parents (Appendix E). The survey instrument

(Appendix F) was first field-tested on the focus group. Further revisions were made and the final instrument was administered to all parents before year end. Analysis of the data was to be completed during the summer. The data indicate that School X now is trying to refine the process of data gathering.

The following interview question helped provide some insight into this problem: "When decisions are made to initiate a project of improvement, how is it decided the project is necessary?"

It is evident from the following comments that teachers generally are at the needs assessment stage.

The following response came from a teacher who is a member of the leadership team:

Usually based on observations by particular groups or if something has come up through the board office, but always if there is to be a change made, it is brought up at a staff meeting and discussed openly with the whole staff.

A seasoned teacher responds in this way:

There has to be a perceived need which has to be brought to the attention of the administration, i.e. the math problem. Everyone got together to sort out the best possible means of correcting the problem. Most things that come up get handled, are handled, this way.

The following comment by a teacher who is a member of the leadership team supports the relevance of needs assessment:

Based upon observation of need and also comes from staff raising issues of need.

In reviewing the question, "What significance does data gathering have for school improvement in this school?", a weakness was evident. Although there is strong support for its use, it has not become routine as respondents did not cite many examples of its use.

The following veteran teacher states:

Until the survey on school improvement, we never gathered any data before that.

A relatively new teacher to this staff shows her support for data gathering:

It is a good way to analyse what we are actually doing. It is also a good way of analysing what other schools are doing as well, compared to this one.

The following comment from a leadership team member indicates support for data gathering:

It has a fair bit of significance especially as it relates directly to curriculum. Test scores have significance. Sometimes they have been viewed as unnecessary or not valid but when they are used as a measuring stick against the rest of the province, country, you have to take notice of the results. Yes, data gathering is worthwhile. I am a little nervous about some of the testing that is supposed to be done later on, criterion based testing for science. I wouldn't want to see testing brought in and made the be all and end all before everything is well established.

Support exists for data gathering. Development of the action research process is now needed to ensure that data gathering becomes an integral part of the process.

### Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been the presentation of the findings of interviews conducted with twelve staff members, an analysis of documents, and observations. It is an

attempt to understand the significance of schoolwide action research as a catalyst to help bring about school improvement.

Although School X had been involved in school improvement efforts in the past, this study was conducted during the school year 1995–1996. At that time, the school was attempting to implement a district framework model for school improvement. This study concerns itself with determining whether or not schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. It also is concerned with determining if the staff at School X understand and support the principles of the process.

School X is an organization that is focusing on renewal and improvement. The literature suggests that the best place for renewal to occur is at the individual school. The staff at School X realize the importance of school improvement occurring at the local level. The staff is actively involved in dealing with the problems that exist in the school and proactive in determining both the needs of the school as well as the solutions that are needed in providing for these needs. Staff are now aware of the necessity to base school improvement initiatives on data as opposed to implementing changes that are not supported by research. However, after one year, it is only now that this has become internalized.

The Leadership Team is actively involved in providing a forum for collaborative decision making within the school. Through committees, the Leadership Team is attempting to include all teachers in the decision-making process of School X. Although consensus is not reached on all decisions, it is seen as a more effective approach to making

decisions within the school. A greater number of staff see the importance of having a say in determining what happens at this school. While some frustration does exist regarding the time that this process takes, it is viewed as worthwhile. Teachers at this school feel a strong sense of accountability regarding the decisions that are made in staff and committee meetings.

A weakness exists in the development of a continual process of professional development. More time needs to be allocated for collective study groups. The Mathematics committee that was established to address problems at the elementary level appears to be functioning well as a study group. This kind of professional development needs to expand to other areas of the school.

The data indicate that the staff at School X is moving in the direction of schoolwide action research. Like any change, implementation of that change takes time. The school year 1995–1996 has proven to be one of change for School X. There has been a move away from top-down decision making. A collective attempt to determine both the needs of School X and to seek solutions to the existing problems has been made. Schoolwide action research is becoming the catalyst to bring about improvement in learning and teaching at School X.

The next chapter provides a discussion of the research findings, conclusions based on a synthesis of these findings, and implications for those involved in school improvement. Some suggestions for further research are offered at the end of the chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter contains a brief summary and discussion of the findings of this study. Implications for practice and for further research are offered at the end of the chapter.

This study is concerned with determining whether or not schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether or not the teachers and administration of School X clearly understand and support the principles of the process. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. Does schoolwide action research hold promise in enabling schools to improve as learning organizations?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses with the implementation of schoolwide action research?

Data for analyses were collected from three sources: interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. Interviews were conducted with ten teachers, the vice-principal, and the principal at School X. Audiotapes of interviews were transcribed, coded and assessed.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

Current research literature suggests that school reform is effective when it focuses on individual and organizational renewal. Individuals must begin to take action to create

the positive changes that are needed in the organization. Individual teachers must be willing to take the necessary risks in becoming active participants in the decision-making process. Organizations must provide the pressure and the support for individuals to become proactive in the quest for renewal. Fullan (1991) suggests, "The only solution is that the whole school - all individuals - must get into the change business; if individuals do not do this, they will be left powerless" (p. 353).

Furthermore, he advises that individuals must begin immediately to create a new ethos of innovation which permits and encourages both individual and collective responsibility for continuous initiative. This ethos pre-empts the imposition of change from outside. Schoolwide action research can be the catalyst to stimulating all individuals within the organization to work collectively towards renewal. Only then can action research become a successful process toward school improvement.

Throughout the interview process, no direct reference was made to the terminology of "schoolwide action research". After a year into the school improvement initiative, however, the staff at School X is beginning to encompass the philosophy of action research. The action research cycle has five phases of inquiry:

1. selecting an area of study
2. collecting data
3. organizing data
4. analysing and interpreting data
5. taking action

While School X has not yet refined these five phases of inquiry, most of the respondents value the process. The area perceived as being the weakest is data collection. The staff of School X sees a need to base decision making on clear evidence and to evaluate improvement initiatives continually. The results for School X suggest that organized data collection is just beginning to emerge as a valued aspect of the school improvement process. The decision to conduct a parent survey was viewed as an important step in the school improvement process.

There is wide support in School X for collaborative decision making. School X is attempting to develop and refine its problem solving capabilities. The majority of teachers feel a greater sense of ownership towards decisions that are made at the school level. This decision making has evolved into a collaborative process where all teachers are given the opportunity to participate in all aspects of school life. All respondents but one feel the school principal is viewed as being in support of this process. Decision making is seen not to be "top-down" as has been the case in the past. There are some indications that not all teachers believe in this process of shared leadership. For schoolwide action research to work effectively, all teachers and administrators must share in decision making and leadership. School X needs to provide encouragement, pressure, and support to staff members who still feel powerless in the decision-making process of the school.

Based on the interview results, the school seems to have a climate that is conducive to the action research process. The staff appears to have a genuine concern in providing the best possible learning environment for all its students. Although goals are not clearly stated, there is strong support for placing the child at the center of all decision



making. Initiatives that have been implemented have been chosen in an effort to improve the teaching and learning in School X. The Global School Project was undertaken as a schoolwide enrichment project that would benefit all students.

A facilitation team is essential for the initiation of schoolwide action research. This study reveals clearly that this school has a well-established leadership team. It has been involved in establishing needs, developing some research, and developing guidelines for collective decision making and action. The team has been involved in following up on initiatives undertaken. Further professional development and refinement of the action research process by all staff members is now needed.

Schoolwide action research has the potential to be a continual process of professional development. Collaborative study groups, which act as small learning groups, are required to support the action research process. These groups enable members to focus on current research literature and to expand their conceptual understanding of the effects on classroom instruction. The results of this study indicate that there is a weakness in school-based professional development in School X. Most respondents have not been privy to the professional literature on school improvement. Those members of the leadership team who had attended the Leadership Institute have not adequately shared the relevant literature with other staff members as often as would be desirable. Respondents view professional development as a formal process including, for example, structured workshops or summer institutes. Informal processes, such as conversation about professional matters or the sharing of professional literature, were not mentioned as a form of continual professional development.

### Implications for Practice

1. Teachers must be willing to take the necessary risks in becoming active participants in the decision-making process.
2. All teachers on staff must be involved in schoolwide action research if it is to be a successful process toward school improvement.
3. Teachers and administrators need opportunities for professional development. It is imperative to provide teachers with the opportunity to discuss their practice in a non-threatening environment.
4. Professional development must be encouraged as part of the daily routine of all staff members. Learning must be seen as a continual process of development.
5. All staff members should strive to provide the best education possible for students.
6. Administrators must provide a school climate that encourages a philosophy of shared leadership.
7. All staff members need sufficient professional development in the area of school improvement.

### Implications for Further Research

The following suggestions are offered for further exploration:

1. Many teachers are uncomfortable in taking on a leadership role. A study is needed to ascertain the kind of environment that would help teachers feel less apprehensive about such a role.
2. The efforts of this school to employ action research as a means of school improvement should be further studied in order to determine if any relationship with improved student learning exists.
3. This study did not involve all stakeholders. Additional study with students and parents could furnish leadership teams with information concerning the roles of other stakeholders in this process.

### Concluding Comments

This thesis aimed to examine the effects of schoolwide action research on the process of school improvement. The literature on school improvement and action research provided the framework for discussing the core themes that emerged from a series of interviews with staff members of School X, document analysis, and participant observations. Respondents' awareness of the general orientation of action research provided the data for the study.

The terminology of schoolwide action research was deliberately not used in the interviews. This decision was taken to ensure a focus on practices as evidence of theoretical orientation rather than a focus on use of terminology as evidence of a

theoretical position. The researcher contends that the latter tends to be a less reliable measure of conceptual understanding than the former.

The process of schoolwide action research is enabling School X to become more effective as a learning organization. Although not all staff members see a need to develop their skills, many are taking on this role. The staff at School X is becoming more effective at analysing the needs of its students and designing action plans to solve the problems that exist within the school. There is a move toward collaborative, shared decision making which enables teachers to be more involved in the decisions made at School X. Consequently, there is a greater sense of ownership and accountability amongst all staff members. Schoolwide action research is enabling the barriers of isolation to be broken. Teachers and administrators at School X are talking, sharing and supporting each other, and taking responsibility for what happens at this school.

This study indicates that School X needs to work at refining the process of data collection. Teachers support the need for data collection and now must get into the practice of collecting data as an initial step in the schoolwide action research cycle.

Schoolwide action research holds potential as a process of continual professional development. Staff at School X must recognize collaborative study groups as a powerful form of professional development. The sharing and discussion that have begun to occur has to expand, encompassing all staff members. School X, however, appears to foster a positive climate for renewal and a faculty which has already adopted many of the principles of schoolwide action research.

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**WESTERN INTEGRATED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**FRAMEWORK**

**FOR**

**SCHOOL GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

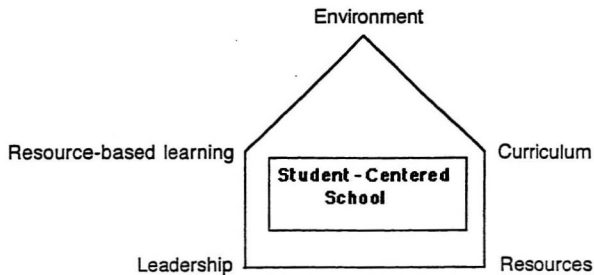
The foundation for school initiated change in the Western Integrated School District will be the District Framework. All schools must plan for improvements based on needs, identified from this Framework. The Process Model of Implementation will be employed to bring about desired change.

This document describes both the Framework and the Model of Implementation and gives directions for their use. Its purpose is to provide guidelines for all professional staff as they lead school improvement and program development in an attempt to enhance the learning environment for all students.

## DISTRICT FRAMEWORK

The District Framework for Program Growth and Improvement has been developed to establish a focus for the Western Integrated District. It identifies the relationships among the various educational initiatives that exist in the District and supports the District Mission Statement. Figure 1 illustrates these relationships. The student is at the centre since all District activities are directed at the development of the student-centred school. The significance of the central position of the student-centred school is to indicate that implementation of change must be school based. All initiatives fit into five categories. These are Environment, Curriculum, Resources, Leadership, and Resource-Based Learning. See Appendix A for category definitions. The categories are interconnected and fluid. They are fluid, as it is expected that new initiatives could be added to each category or that some would be eliminated. They are interconnected, as it is recognized that initiatives may move from one category to another, or overlap several categories depending on the particular emphasis.

In planning for professional development and school growth all school and district professional staff must give consideration to the entire Framework to ensure that all aspects of the organization are considered. This will provide a context for action planning.



## **SETTING PRIORITIES**

To determine a school focus it is essential that a needs assessment be conducted within the context of the District Framework. The principal of each school will establish a school action team to conduct this assessment and provide feedback to the staff. Questionnaires, interviews, and school documentation may be employed for this purpose. Data should be gathered from students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Following the assessment, the staff will collaboratively determine the priority needs of the school. The school action team will investigate possible initiatives to be undertaken to address those needs and will develop a proposal for consideration by the staff. It must be recognized that individuals cannot implement several major initiatives simultaneously; therefore, it is desirable to have only one major initiative at a time that requires entire staff participation. The staff will select the initiative to be pursued and strike an implementation team.

## **THE PROCESS MODEL OF IMPLEMENTATION**

### **The Model**

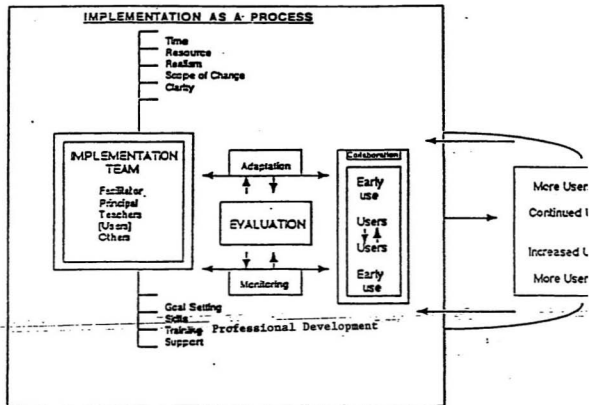
Implementation is the process of initiation, planning, early use, and institutionalization of an innovation. It begins with the process of deliberations and interactions in reference to a specific innovation. It is completed when its use has become routine in the organization or a decision has been made to discontinue the process. The Model as illustrated in Figure 2 shows the considerations, processes, people and organization required in implementing an initiative.

### **The Implementation Team**

The implementation team consists of the principal, facilitator, teachers and others deemed necessary. The principal, as the educational leader of the school, supports and coordinates the work of the team. He or she is knowledgeable about the innovation, understands it and believes in its value. The principal must have a clear vision of the desired change and must work to establish a positive climate, culture and collegial environment to accomplish the goals of the initiative. The facilitator is a person inside or outside the school whose job is to provide assistance and support to people who are initiating and implementing change. The facilitator is a team builder who assists with the planning of meaningful interaction which can lead to task accomplishment. The facilitator should be chosen through consultation between the principal and the appropriate assistant superintendent. Teachers



**FIGURE 2**  
**THE IMPLEMENTATION MODEL**



on the team are partners in the planning process and are essential for providing appropriate reality checks. They should be committed to the early use of the initiative.

The implementation team studies the proposed initiative and prepares a written plan of action (3-5 pages) that includes the consideration of the specified action plan variables outlined in Figure 2. See Appendix B for questions that should be addressed with respect to these variables. The plan of action should be written using the following format:

#### Rationale

- Describe the need
- Show how the initiative will address the stated need
- Relate the proposed initiative to the Framework

#### Design

- State the goals
- Provide a detailed action plan showing consideration of the process variables

#### Evaluation

- Describe the evaluation design

Budget

- Provide a detailed budget outlining the total expenditures and possible sources of revenue
- Outline plans for future funding for the initiative if required

While the team is in the process of developing the proposal they should maintain effective communication with the appropriate Assistant Superintendent to ensure project approval. After approval for the initiative is granted, the team is responsible to direct and coordinate the implementation of the plan and to monitor and evaluate the progress of the initiative.

**DISTRICT OFFICE RESPONSE TO THE SCHOOL PROPOSAL**

By the time that the written proposal is received by the appropriate Assistant Superintendent, it is preferred that this person would have been involved in necessary consultations so that an affirmative response would be expected. Upon receipt of the proposal the Assistant Superintendent would take the following actions:

- Assess the request
- Discuss the request with appropriate personnel
- Determine the resources if any that will be committed to the project
- Communicate to the Principal the decision regarding the proposal. (This should occur within two weeks)

## ORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Part I - Section A

#### Teacher Information (General)

- How long have you been teaching?
- What is your educational background?
- What professional development have you had in the past year?
- How long have you been in this school?
- What committees have you worked on this past year?
- Is there a book, article or event related to school improvement that has had a significant influence on you this year?

### Section B

►I would like you to think about the school improvement initiative that your school has been involved in since the Leadership Institute in August, 1995. Please describe the process that School X has been taking to bring about improvements within the school. Tell me what this has meant to you as a teacher/administrator?

### Part II - Section A

- What have been the major focuses for school improvement in School X this year?
- What is/are the primary reason(s) that the school has initiated a school improvement process?
- Does your school have clearly stated purposes?

- Do all staff members assist in defining the goals for the school?
- Do you feel that you have had adequate professional development in the area of school improvement?

### **Section B**

- How has your role as a teacher/administrator changed since this school has moved towards school improvement?

Should it change? How?

- How has the role of principal changed since this school has moved toward school improvement?

Should it change? How?

- How has the role of vice-principal changed since this school has moved towards school improvement? Should it change? How?

- How has the role of board personnel changed since this school has moved towards school improvement?

Should it change? How?

- How has the role of parent changed since this school has moved towards school improvement?

Should it change? How?

- How has the role of student changed since this school has moved towards school improvement?

Should it change? How?

**Section C**

- ▶ Are you a leader in your school? Explain.
- ▶ Do you feel ownership of decisions made in your school? Explain.
- ▶ Do you feel accountable for decisions made in your school? Explain.
- ▶ Do you feel as though you have a voice on staff?

**Section D**

- ▶ When decisions are made to initiate a project of improvement, how is it decided that the project is necessary?
- ▶ What significance does data-gathering have for school improvement in this school? Give an example.
- ▶ Are schoolwide initiatives based on input from all stakeholders:
  - ☐ students
  - ☐ administrators
  - ☐ parents
  - ☐ school board personnel
  - ☐ teachers
- ▶ Do you feel your school is becoming more effective at problem-solving?
- ▶ Do you feel you have ongoing support from district office for school improvement initiatives? If so, how? How else might they add support?
- ▶ Are decisions made in your school reached in a collaborative manner; that is, do all staff members share in making decisions? Give an example of how this happens in this school.
- ▶ What happens when consensus cannot be reached?
- ▶ Is there ongoing evaluation of school improvement projects?
- ▶ As a staff member, do you feel you are kept updated on these change projects?

**STRENGTHS**

- . School flexible in delivery of programs.
- . Integration of Special Needs Students working well.
- . Good parental involvement.
- . Staff willing to try innovative ideas.
- . Good library, music, physical education programs.
- . Good staff relations.
- . Hard-working, dedicated staff.
- . Friendly, caring environment throughout the school.
- . Individual needs taken into consideration when planning.



**Strengths****Page 2**

- . Good physical structure - bright comfortable classrooms.
- . Hot meals provided for students.
- . Majority of students are well-motivated and want to succeed.
- . Attempts made to modify programs.
- . Diversified curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- . Child centred school.
- . Childrens work displayed.
- . Major effort to bridge gap between home and school at entry level.

**Strengths****Page 3**

- . Staff made aware of professional opportunities.
- . Administration tries to involve staff in decision making.
- . Administration supports staff in pupil evaluation and placement decisions but because of constraints the reality is often not what is intended.
- . Our collection of learning resources.
- . Responsiveness to requests for resources.
- . Acceptance of individual teaching styles.
- . Sharing of resources.
- . Child-centred environment

**Strengths****Page 4**

- . Acceptance of staff as professionals.
- . Commitment to computers in the curriculum.
- . Recognition of environmental concerns.
- . Emphasis on process instead of content.
- . Good prefect system (safety patrol)
- . Good supervision of students.
- . Support for staff in time of need.
- . Good bus system.
- . Good school chaplain - always available (brings Tim-Bits).

**NEEDS**

- . Not enough classroom teachers.
- . Insufficient personnel for dealing with special academic needs.
- . Class Size:
  - a. Should be consistent with implementation of activity-based individualized programs.
  - b. Determines placement decisions.
  - c. Class-size decisions are imposed from the top down (Dept. And special needs policy), but supports are not provided to adequately address all that this entails.
- . More co-operative planning time needed.

**Needs continued****Page 2**

- . Computer programs needed and designated for specific grade level.
- . Lunch Supervision - noisy & chaotic!
- . Too much junk around corridors.
- . Discipline
  - staff inconsistency on implementing policies and procedures.
  - goals are sometimes unclear and not universally accepted.
  - “control” is external; student self-discipline needs to be actively and diligently pursued.
  - children should be disciplined with dignity - in private.

**Needs continued****Page 3**

- . Too many demands on the classroom teacher.  
i.e. "The heart fund".
- . Worn out equipment
- . More personnel and expertise for enrichment.
- . Better staffroom kitchen facilities.
- . Cleaner school - particularly bathrooms (paper towel holders and toilet paper rolls do not work.)
- . Denials for in-service!
- . Need more diversified involvement of staff members in taking responsibility for decision - making within the school.

**Needs continued****Page 4**

- . Teacher workload - especially where programs need to be created and/or extensively modified.
- . More sharing of ideas (primary & elementary)
- . Set priorities re. New initiatives to avoid overload.
- . Recognition of student and staff achievements by whole staff.
- . Special needs personnel spread too thinly - consistent development of special needs students at risk.
- . Look at other options for utilization of staff.
- . Sometimes too child entered.
- . Audio-Visual equipment and software for computers inadequate.

**Needs continued****Page 5**

- . Better access to resource materials that are available for certain themes, etc...
- . Classes too large at some grade levels.
- . Understaffed in Resource area. eg. remedial and library resource personnel.
- . Full-time guidance person needed (teaching drug awareness, study skills programs and parenting skills, etc.)
- . More referrals should be made by classroom teacher to guidance personnel about behavioural problem children in classroom; emotional concerns.
- . Not enough preparation time for grade level teachers and/or resource teacher.



**Needs continued****Page 6**

- . Inadequate staffroom facilities.
- . Inadequate lunchroom facilities (more tables, etc...)
- . More telephones and lines needed.
- . More and bigger staff washrooms.
- . Wheelchair accessibility.
- . School nurse needs own room.
- . More shelving for Resource Centre.
- . Not enough enrichment being provided.
- . Children being promoted on basis of class size rather than their individual needs.

- |                             |             |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1995 - 96 Major Initiatives | - Beginning |
|                             | - Ongoing   |

### District

- |                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| * . Leadership           | - Leadership |
| . Evaluation & Reporting | - RBL        |

### In-School

- |                             |               |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| . Multi-age/Multi-grading   | - RBL         |
| . Discipline                | - Environment |
| . School Improvement        | - Environment |
| . Reading Recovery          | - Curriculum  |
| . Enrichment                | - Curriculum  |
| * . New Program Initiatives | - Curriculum  |
| - Science                   |               |
| - Health                    |               |
| -Art                        |               |
| . Computers                 | -Resources    |
| . Stem Net                  | - Resources   |

8 May, 1996

Dear Parents,

An integral part of any school improvement plan is the collection and analysis of information about the teaching and learning experiences; leadership within the school; the school climate and culture; and the relationship between the school and its community. In order for teachers and school administrators to develop the best possible plan for improvement, data must be collected from parents, students, and the school's staff. This letter concerns one component of the data collection, a parent survey to ascertain what you see as the needs of our school.

To date, we are not aware of a *reliable* instrument for surveying parents. As a staff, we feel it is imperative that the instrument we use should be reliable; therefore, we are proposing that we develop one ourselves. We need your help to accomplish this task. Would you be willing to serve on a focus group?

The focus group will have two meetings to complete the following tasks:

1. A review of potential questions to determine their appropriateness. (*These questions will then be put into survey form.*)
2. Completion of the survey form.
3. Evaluation and revision of the survey form.

Once the survey form is ready for distribution, the entire parent population will be surveyed.

You should know that we see the survey and analysis of data as the first steps in a long-term and continuous process of school improvement. With your help, School X aims to provide the best possible educational services for you children.

Please sign below if you are available and interested in becoming part of the focus group. Our first meeting will be held on \_\_\_\_\_ May. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

**THE LEADERSHIP TEAM**

Yes, I am interested. \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please sign above*

## SCHOOL X

### Parent Survey

Dear Parents:

Teachers and administrators at School X are involved in looking at ways to improve our school to ensure that your children are receiving the best education we can offer. We want everyone connected with the school to contribute to our improvement plans. Therefore, we are asking you to complete a survey that will tell us what you think are the school's strengths and weaknesses.

This survey has been designed by a group of parents, teachers, school administrators, and program co-ordinators from District Office. We are grateful to everyone who helped. Thank you for your invaluable input.

This survey and its analysis will be *one step* in a process of school improvement that will be continuous. To ensure that the information we collect is as reliable as possible, please take the time to answer the questions as accurately as possible. There is space on the survey for you to make comments and we feel that these will be an extremely valuable part of the process.

It isn't necessary for you to sign your name to this survey; however, if you wish to do so, please feel free.

We aim to provide an opportunity for more discussion concerning these issues once the analysis of the survey information is completed. The results of the survey will be made available to you at a later date.

We would appreciate your completing the surveys by *JUNE 1* to enable us to do an analysis before the end of the school year.

*THANK YOU* most sincerely for your co-operation.

The Leadership Team

**Please indicate with a check mark (✓) whether your child/ children is/are in the primary or elementary grades:**

**Primary** ☐

**Elementary** ☐

**Both** ☐

**Instructions:** *Using the rating scale below, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number.*

Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

#### **THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

*This school is helping children develop the skills you think they need in:*

	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Reading	1	2	3	4	5
2. Writing [i.e. writing to communicate, not handwriting]	1	2	3	4	5
3. Listening	1	2	3	4	5
4. Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
5. Mathematics	1	2	3	4	5
6. Using a computer	1	2	3	4	5
7. Music	1	2	3	4	5
8. Art	1	2	3	4	5
9. Thinking critically	1	2	3	4	5
10. Thinking creatively	1	2	3	4	5

**LEARNING AND TEACHING**

		Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>This school provides:</i>						
11.	Relevant programs for students who have academic difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Accessible facilities for all students.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Access to technology to help students learn.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Grade level objectives on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Good communication to parents about student progress through use of a variety of reporting methods.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Clear information about children's learning performance through the five-stage process of evaluation.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	An adequate sports and extra-curricular program.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Sufficient attention to academic subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Quality instruction to students.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	A challenging curriculum with ample enrichment opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	An appropriate amount of homework.	1	2	3	4	5

**HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT***This school is helping children to:*

22.	Recognize and accept conflict as a natural part of their lives.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Learn to co-operate with others	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Recognize and appreciate that people are alike in many ways while respecting that people also have individual differences.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Develop a personal sense of responsibility to society.	1	2	3	4	5

26.	Develop self-confidence.	1	2	3	4	5
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**SCHOOL/PARENT PARTNERSHIP**

		Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>This school:</i>						
27.	Considers parents' opinions when making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Encourages support for its discipline policies and practices.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Encourages parents to become involved in school activities.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	Effectively communicates information about school activities and events with the home.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	Supports and encourages participation in a Parent-Teacher Association.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	Offers parent support sessions on such topics as assisting with homework or behavioural problems.	1	2	3	4	5

**THE SCHOOL AND ITS ATMOSPHERE**

<i>This school:</i>						
33.	Seems well-run and organized.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	Appears to treat children fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	Has a caring and friendly atmosphere.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	Has high expectations of student behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	Has made rules that are appropriate for children of primary-elementary age.	1	2	3	4	5
38.	Appears to handle discipline problems effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	Has adequate facilities.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	Shows evidence of high quality leadership.	1	2	3	4	5

41.	Has a staff that demonstrates a professional attitude.	1	2	3	4	5
-----	--	---	---	---	---	---

**THE SCHOOL AND ITS ATMOSPHERE, continued....**

		Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
42.	Provides adequate support services (e.g. guidance, special education).	1	2	3	4	5
43.	Has a well-supplied Learning Resource Centre. (Library)	1	2	3	4	5

**PERSONAL REACTIONS***I feel that:*

44.	Parents are kept up-to-date about their children's behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	Students are given an appropriate amount of homework in each subject area.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	Students are receiving a high quality of teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	Children are happy and content at school.	1	2	3	4	5
48.	Humber Elementary is a good school for children to attend.	1	2	3	4	5
49.	Care is taken to make sure that children do not lose too much school time owing to outside events (e.g. skiing, music festival)	1	2	3	4	5
50.	Parents are made to feel welcome when I visit the school.	1	2	3	4	5

*Thank you for the careful completion of this questionnaire. We appreciate it very much. If you have additional comments to make, please write them on page 5. If you wish to make a comment on a specific item from the questionnaire please be sure to include the category and number of that item. All your remarks will be very welcome.*



**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**TO THE TEACHER AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANT:**

This document requests your participation in a study related to schoolwide action research and school improvement. It assures you that your participation is completely voluntary and that your responses will be entirely confidential. It seeks your written consent of your involvement in the research project.

**Purpose**

This study is concerned with discovering if schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether staff at this school understand and support the principles of the process. The critical source of this inquiry will be the teachers and administrators on staff at this school.

**Procedure**

Because of the descriptive nature of this study, qualitative methods of data collection will be used. The design of the research will be a case study.

Methodology will include the use of interviews related to schoolwide action research and school improvement. Data collection will take approximately thirty minutes of the respondent's time. With specific permission, interviews will be recorded electronically. These tapes will be transcribed and stored in a locked cabinet. Your right to have recordings erased when your participation is complete will be respected. On completion of this research, all interview data will be disposed of in a secure manner.

**Researcher**

Denise MacDonald, student of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland or Dr. Bruce Shepard, Assistant professor, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

**Risks**

There are no physical or psychological risks, or discomforts inherent in this study.

**Right of Refusal or Withdrawal**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may participate in any or all parts of the interview. You may decline to respond to any questions or opt out at any

time without prejudice. If, during the research, you need to consult a resource person other than this researcher, the Associate Dean of Research, Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, is available. (709-737-8587)

I am available to answer any questions related to the study. I can be reached at telephone number (709) 639-8185.

### **Confidentiality**

Anonymity of individuals is assured, both while the research is in progress and in the final report. The research project and the methodology have been approved by the district administration and the school principal.

Also, please be assured that this study meets the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Education and Memorial University of Newfoundland. You are assured that your anonymity will be protected and that all records of your participation in the research project will be kept confidential unless your written permission for release is obtained.

### **Results**

The results of the research will be available to you, upon request, after the study is completed.

### **Agreement of the Participants**

If you agree to participate in the study as described above, please indicate your consent by signing the attached form. Please return your signed form to the researcher.

Sincerely,

Denise MacDonald

**STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING AND CONSENT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the purpose of the research study outlined above and recognize the request for involvement that is being made of me relative to the described methodology. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can withdraw from the study or any part of the study at any time without prejudice. I understand that the project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Director of this School Board District, and the school principal. I understand that confidentiality of all information relative to participants, the school, and the school district is assured.

Signed,

---

**TO THE PRINCIPAL:**

This document requests your authorization to conduct research in your school and to request the participation of you and your staff in a study related to schoolwide action research and school improvement. It assures both you and your staff that participation is completely voluntary and that all responses will be entirely confidential. It seeks your written approval of your personal involvement and the involvement of the school in the research project.

**Purpose**

This study is concerned with discovering if schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether staff at this school understand and support the principles of the process. The critical source of this inquiry will be the teachers and administrators on staff at this school.

**Procedure**

Because of the descriptive nature of this study, qualitative methods of data collection will be used. The design of the research will be a case study.

Methodology will include the use of interviews related to schoolwide action research and school improvement. Data collection will take approximately thirty minutes of the respondent's time. With specific permission, interviews will be recorded electronically. These tapes will be transcribed and stored in a locked cabinet. Your right to have recordings erased when your participation is complete will be respected. On completion of this research, all interview data will be disposed of in a secure manner.

**Researcher**

Denise MacDonald, student of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland or Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

**Risks**

There are no physical or psychological risks, or discomforts inherent in this study.

**Right of Refusal or Withdrawal**

Your participation and that of individual staff members in this research is entirely voluntary. You may decline to respond to any questions or opt out at any time without prejudice. If during the research you should need to consult a resource person other than the researcher, the Associate Dean of Research, Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, is available at telephone (709) 737-8587.

I am available to answer any questions related to the study. I can be reached at telephone number (709) 639-8185.

**Confidentiality**

Anonymity of individuals and classes is assured, both while the research is in progress and in the final report. Similarly, the school and the district will be identified only if it is desired by all participants. The research project and the methodology have been approved by the district administration. Also, please be assured that this study meets the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Education and Memorial University of Newfoundland. You are assured that your anonymity (personal and organizational) will be protected and that all records of your participation in the research project will be kept confidential unless your written permission for release is obtained.

**Results**

The results of the research will be available to you, upon request, after the study is completed.

**Agreement to Participate**

If you agree to participate in the study as described above, please indicate your consent by signing both the Principal's Authorization and Personal Involvement statements attached. Please return signed forms to the investigator at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Denise MacDonald

**DISCLOSURE AND CONSENT FORM - EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH****TO THE DIRECTOR:**

This document requests your authorization to seek the participation of the staff of School X in a study related to team leadership and educational change. It assures both you and the school staff that participation is completely voluntary and that all responses will be entirely confidential. It seeks your written approval to proceed, through the school principal, to ask for the involvement of the school staff in the research project.

**Purpose**

This study is concerned with discovering if schoolwide action research holds promise for effecting school improvement. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether staff at this school understand and support the principles of the process. The critical source of this inquiry will be the teachers and administrators on staff at this school.

**Procedure**

Because of the descriptive nature of this study, qualitative methods of data collection will be used. The design of the research will be a case study.

Methodology will include the use of interviews related to schoolwide action research and school improvement. Data collection will take approximately thirty minutes of the respondent's time. With specific permission, interviews will be recorded electronically. These tapes will be transcribed and stored in a locked cabinet. Your right to have recordings erased when your participation is complete will be respected. On completion of this research, all interview data will be disposed of in a secure manner.

**Researcher**

Denise MacDonald, student of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland or Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

**Risks**

There are no physical or psychological risks, or discomforts inherent in this study.

**Right of Refusal or Withdrawal**

The School's participation and that of individual staff members in this research is entirely voluntary. Any teacher may decline to respond to any questions or opt out at any time without prejudice. If during the research, you or any of the participants, should need to consult a resource person other than the researcher, the Associate Dean of Research, Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland is available at the phone (709) 737-8587.

### **Confidentiality**

Anonymity of individuals is assured, both while the research is in progress and in the final report. Similarly, the school and the district will be identified only if it is desired by all participants. Please be assured that this study meets the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Education and Memorial University of Newfoundland. You are assured that organizational and personal anonymity will be protected and that all records of participation in the research project will be kept confidential unless release is obtained through your written permission and that of specific individuals concerned.

### **Results**

The results of the research will be available to you, upon request, after the study is completed.

### **Agreement to Participate**

If you agree to authorize this study, subject to our obtaining the support at the school level, please indicate your consent by signing the Authorization statement attached. Please return the signed form to the investigator at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Denise MacDonald



### STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING AND CONSENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the purpose of the research study outlined above and recognize the request for authorization that is being made of me related to the described methodology. I understand that the participation of the school and of individual staff members is entirely voluntary, and that individuals, the school, or the district, can withdraw from the study or any part of the study at any time without prejudice. I understand the project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland. I understand that confidentiality of all information relative to participants, the school, and the school district is assured.

Signed,

\_\_\_\_\_

**Authorization to conduct the study in the school and to seek involvement of teachers.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the purpose of the research study outlined above and recognize the request for authorization that is being made of me relative to the described methodology. I understand that the participation of the school and of individual staff members is entirely voluntary, and that we can withdraw from the study or any part of the study at any time without prejudice. I understand that the project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Director of this School Board District. I understand that confidentiality of all information relative to participants, the school, and the school district is assured.

Signed,

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# Memorial

University of Newfoundland

Faculty of Education

March 10, 1997

Dear Denise,

The Ethics Review Committee has examined your proposal and we find that it meets the guidelines of the University and Faculty for research. However, I need to point out one small detail -- in your interview questions with teachers and administrators, a school is mentioned specifically by name --

It is important that this be replaced by some generic phrase such as 'your school' in order to assure anonymity. In addition, include a statement indicating that the taped material will be either securely locked away or disposed of in some secure manner. We wish you all the best with your research.

Sincerely,

T. Seifert  
Ethics Review Committee

cc: Bruce Sheppard







