

AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF SCHOOL
ASSESSMENT IN THE PROVINCE OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**An Ethnographical Study
of School Assessment
in the province of
Newfoundland and Labrador**

By

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**A thesis submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Master of Education**

**Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
2000**

Abstract

This study examined the School Assessment Model as was piloted in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The intent of the study was to attempt to gather information related to this model of School Reform and to gain an understanding as to why it was an assessment based model that was promoted as opposed to an accreditation based model. Information was gathered through the assistance of a targeted research sample group. A semi structured interview was conducted with each of the participants and questions revolved around ascertaining the level of commitment to reform, the need for reform, the differences between School Assessment and other previous reform initiatives, and the benefits and challenges for the Provincial Department of Education, school districts and schools in supporting school assessment at this time.

The results of the study indicated that a large reason for the promotion of an assessment based model was that the education system in this province with its geographical constraints, history and financial restrictions, would be more conducive to an assessment based model. Assessment based reform is , at this time, a better fit for the education system in the province. The indication was given by several subjects that they felt an accreditation type model would be revisited in the future.

Acknowledgements

The advice, cooperation and encouragement of my thesis supervisor, Dr. George Hickman, is gratefully acknowledged. Without his input and continued support this work could have not come to fruition and for that I extend my gratitude. A word of thanks is also extended to Dr Harold Press who was initially involved with this work but withdrew due to personal reasons. My thanks is also extended here for his input as well.

Thanks is also extended to the Vista School District for their support and cooperation during my work on this endeavor. Thanks is also extended to the ten research participants that took part in the study and freely gave of their time to allow me to conduct the research.

Finally, deepest gratitude is reserved for Cassandra Ingram, my wife, for her help, support and encouragement throughout.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Section 1.1: Background

In March 1992, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the publication entitled, *Our Children Our Future - Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education*. This document, more commonly known as the Williams report, reported upon the status of the education system of the province. Since the release of the report, the issue of accountability for those administering the system has been a focal topic. Indeed, one of the recommendations put forth by the report was that school boards put a system in place, whereby schools could be assessed every five years, and that the results of these assessments be provided to school councils (Williams, 1992, p. 392). Fiscal realities dictate that the people of the Province are demanding that the system for which their tax dollars are paying is delivering results consistent with national, as well as international standards. No longer are schools seen as self-contained and insular. The public are demanding that they be involved and play a key role in the education of their children. The public, through government, is demanding that schools operate in a manner which ensures the best possible instruction for the children of this Province.

As revealed through an interview conducted with Dr. Philip Cull of the Vista School District on December 11, 1997, this reference to accountability is a common theme shared by the provincial Departments of Education across the country. The desire is to improve the level of education offered to students across the country through the enactment of accountability mechanisms. If Canada is going to deliver a high quality of education to its youth, it is paramount that each province must, in turn, work towards improving education systems at a provincial level. One of the mechanisms by which the accountability of schools will be addressed is through school assessment. By examining

the characteristics of the school community, it is assumed that there can be an improvement in the delivery of instruction at the school level. If schools are aware of where they currently are in relation to where they should be, as referenced on accepted measures of educational achievement, steps can be taken to bridge the gap.

School assessment is a process designed to enhance and maintain quality in the education system in the Province. Typically, a school development process has four steps: (1) preparation by the school of an internal report and general documentation based on established criteria, (2) completion of an independent assessment of the documentation, policies, practices and processes employed by the school (usually involving a site visit); (3) assessment of the evidence, and (4) preparation of an independent report.

Throughout all four steps, identification of areas for improvement would generally be emphasized. Participating organizations would usually be expected to prepare an action or improvement plan to address identified deficiencies.

The focus of the school assessment model is that it is not an event; rather it is a process of continuous improvement. Moreover, it is an ongoing process that involves all stakeholders in the educational community. Being cyclical in nature, it involves a continuous monitoring of both strengths and weaknesses of schools. Initially, a school profile is developed that outlines both strengths and weaknesses. From this internal assessment, an external review is conducted that allows an independent body to critique the findings of the internal team. At this point, a school improvement plan is written that addresses both the strengths and weaknesses revealed by the school

profile This plan is implemented and data collected to form the basis of the next cycle of assessment.

In the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a pilot project known as School Assessment was put in place at 13 schools. The Vista School District has committed to have its schools involved in a similar process. This District has taken the step of modifying the pilot model and developed its own form of reform called School Development. This process of reform though is still in its infancy. As the change process is one best judged after it has been implemented over time, to conduct an evaluation of the process at this time would be invalid. This study will focus on the means by which school assessment has been accepted by the provincial Department of Education as a process for improving the Province's educational system.

Section 1.2: Why Assess Schools?

Before one answers the question, "Why assess schools?", one has to examine the concept of evaluation. Sergiovanni (1995) describes evaluation in the following way.

Commonplace in our ordinary lives, evaluation is an inescapable aspect of most of what we do. Whether we are buying a pair of shoes, selecting a recipe for a dinner party, rearranging the living room furniture or enjoying a movie, baseball game, or an art show, evaluation is part of the process. In its ordinary sense, evaluation means to discern, understand, and appreciate, on the one hand, and to value, judge, and decide on the other. These very same natural and ordinary processes are at play in evaluating teaching.

(Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 215)

Because of the complexity of the task, the art of teaching should be constantly involved in an evaluation process. The information that is available is rapidly expanding, and the ways to communicate and share this information also changes. Now, more than ever, schools are being held accountable, as are other public institutions. However, Sergiovanni (1995) pointed out, "the literature is filled with reports and scenarios highlighting the disdain with which teachers regard evaluation"(p. 214). As teachers are resistant to accept evaluation of their own performance, it holds to reason that they would be skeptical of a process by which the very core of their work environment is to be questioned. An effective method of school reform would need to consider the inherent skepticism of those at the very core of the school system - teachers. An effective means by which the total school community can be moved to deep reforms and fundamental shifts would need to be accepted by all stakeholders. Once accepted, the likelihood of success becomes greater

All major professions undergo some form of evaluation. As Sergiovanni (1995) states, "it is by increasing and informing their sensitivities and intuitions that attorneys, architects, and physicians make better practice decisions and improve their performance. Professional practice in teaching, supervision, and the principalship improve similarly" (p. 215). Sergiovanni (1995) points to three purposes of evaluation:

1. **Quality Control** The principal is responsible for monitoring teaching and learning. This, among other things, is done through the principal by visiting classrooms, touring the school, talking with people, and visiting with students. There is consideration of evidence that indicates the level of learning.

- 2 **Professional Development.** The helping of teachers to grow and to develop in their understanding of teaching and classroom life, in improving basic skills, and in expanding their knowledge and use of teaching repertoires is the second purpose of supervision.
- 3 **Teacher Motivation.** Building and nurturing motivation and commitment to teaching, to the school's overall purposes, and to the school's defining educational platform.

Because one of the roles of evaluation is to ensure that quality is maintained, the Province has adopted a school assessment process. The school assessment process is seen as having significant potential to drive the reform process at the local school level.

The process of school assessment provides a vehicle through which schools can assess their level of performance against a set of locally and provincially applied standards. The focus of the program is on ways in which schools can continuously improve.

The Department of Education has delineated the purposes of the assessment process as being

The School Assessment initiative recognizes that schools are complex institutions and examines all the dimensions of school life. The purpose of School Assessment is to :

1. *Ensure that schools meet local and provincial standards with respect to the intellectual, human, social, career development and special needs of students, the school leadership, the school climate, the school administration, and the relationship with the community;*

2. Ensure that parents are informed about, contribute to and are satisfied with the progress of their schools; and

3. Assist with the ongoing school improvement process

(Department of Education, Province of Newfoundland leaflet - "School Assessment, Ensuring Quality in Education". 1996)

1.3: Review of Change Literature

As school assessment revolves around the concept of change, more specifically the instillment of school - based initiatives designed to focus the efforts of the school towards improvement, any discussion of the school assessment initiative requires a review of change literature. The basic tenant of change theory is outlined by Fullan (1985) who states that "change is a process not an event". Reform initiatives cannot be expected to have immediate success. Dramatic improvements will not be seen immediately. Effective and successful change will take time. Problems will need to be worked through on a gradual basis. This review deals with a discussion of what the process entails and how it is "worked through" to permit meaningful and successful change.

According to change literature, the change process has three steps and Fullan (1985) identifies them as initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. Berman and McLaughlin (1976) label the steps as initiation, implementation, and incorporation. These labels differ only in semantics; in actuality, both discuss the same processes. For the purpose of this review, the term institutionalization is used when reference is made to the third step in the process.

Successful change requires a good start to the process; therefore, the Initiation stage is crucial. During this stage, several important events occur which support the change. Unless a solid

foundation for the change is built, success is unlikely. Change is initiated when a new strategy is adopted. This may be a result of a local recognition of the need for change, or it may be imposed by the use of a top-down approach. The process begins with a recognition of a perceived need for change and a commitment to begin.

The most important step in the change process is the development of a plan. According to the literature, a plan at the initiation stage must be based on sound theory, yet remain flexible enough to adapt to the local situation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976). Planning involves setting up a team to guide the innovation. This team should consist of facilitators, those involved in the direct implementation of the change and other concerned persons. The team must be responsible for preparing for the early use of the innovation, including such important areas as establishing goals, identifying the resources needed and available, determining the support mechanisms needed, determining the scope of the change, deciding if the change is realistic, and selecting early users. In his book The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fullan (1991) described these functions as being concentrated in three areas: relevance, readiness, and resources. It is clear that the function of the facilitation team is crucial to the change. Without a structured group to keep the change initiative focused, and on task, momentum will likely dissipate. Hence the initiative will be unlikely to carry forward and be integrated into the normalcy of the institution's operation.

Once the adoption is complete, preliminary plans made, and resources identified, the innovation can then move from the initiation to the implementation stage. At this stage, the early users begin to implement the strategies to make the change. It should be stressed here that training and access to

facilitators is important not only at this stage but throughout the process. In fact, the whole process is non-linear, so shifts from one stage to the next are possible in either direction. Therefore, the training and professional development required to make the change successful occurs here as well as in the other stages. Fullan (1991) defines implementation as "... the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change". At this stage, communication between those who will implement the change and the facilitation team is critical to ensure that information is passed in both directions. This information is important because it could be a communication of some aspect of the plan to help the early users implement it, or it could be a communication of some needed modification discovered in early use. According to Fullan (1985), this communication should be expected because the fact that preimplementation planning is less significant than planning during implementation ensures its necessity. Also, feedback and alteration will occur during implementation and this will only strengthen the momentum of the change.

The final step in the change process is the institutionalization of the change. This occurs when the plan has been successfully used and proven by the early users, and the new improved version is then dispersed to later users who "buy into" the concept until independent use is achieved. Here, planning, action, and reflection are still required and feedback leading to changes in the plan are still possible. With change, there is no defining moment at which end goals are reached so it is important to accept suggestions from later users which, like earlier suggestions, can improve the innovation and increase the chance of successful future use.

The change literature also discusses themes surrounding the concept of change that are necessary to understand when developing innovations. Fullan (1993) breaks down these themes into sections and indicates specific concerns that principals and teachers should bear in mind when establishing their own roles in the change process. Principals are instructional leaders, not just managers. The principal is therefore a crucial member of any facilitation team in his/her school and, according to Fullan (1993), the principal must function in certain areas to ensure that meaningful change occurs. First of all, the principal must understand the culture of the school. Secondly, the principal must value teachers and promote their professional development. Thirdly, the principal must extend and express his/her own values to staff members. Also the principal must promote collaboration between teachers for change and use a menu approach to change instead of mandating the change. Teachers will be more likely to work to meet challenges they were a part of designing and selecting. If they are involved in the process, commitment and thus success are more likely. Meaningful change cannot be dictated.

Fullan's sentiments are echoed by Brown (1993), as her study confirmed the importance of the role of the administrative body in providing leadership for effective change. Brown's study showed that in order for change to be effective it is important that the leadership create a team approach to implementation of the initiative being proposed. It is crucial that the members of the school community be on the same level when approaching significant changes. Unless the community is collaborating and working towards a common goal, it is less likely that the change will occur as intended.

Teachers must also understand their role in making meaningful change. Fullan (1993) identifies several themes surrounding teachers in the change process. These are concerned mainly with flexibility, willingness to accept new ideas, a commitment to change, and a desire to learn themselves. One important point that Fullan (1993) stresses is that teachers must be willing to become learners and deepen pedagogical knowledge through training and professional development. This can be interpreted to suggest that meaningful change is difficult to implement in schools if teachers are unwilling to learn new things. Resistance to new ideas by teachers can be a major obstacle to change.

In summary, meaningful change occurs most effectively when all members of the school community accept the themes and guidelines and commit to work together with central office staff and other parties to achieve real change. What is needed is change that continues beyond initiation and implementation and grows to be an integral means by which the system functions.

The implementation of any initiative is more likely to be successful if the stakeholders affected by the change become committed to it. This will happen only if a shared process is utilized in which a collegial model of the process is developed. When this occurs, the process will involve a considerable commitment of both time and resources from those involved. Without the support of all stakeholders, the desired implementations will fail to continue and real, lasting reforms will not have occurred.

Change is a continuous process. Those involved in any change initiative, be it school improvement, teacher evaluation or any other substantive initiative cannot say that they have completed it. The process of continuous improvement is the goal. Continuous improvement and reflection by the school and community is the surest way to accomplish the desired change

1.4: Purpose of the Study

The improvement of the educational setting is a key concern for all involved in the education of the children of this Province. Parents, teachers, administrators, students and the general public want a system that ensures maximum benefit for all stakeholders. This goal is common across the country. The Province of British Columbia has long been involved in the process of accreditation for its schools. The accreditation process differs from the school assessment model currently in place in this Province. There is a considerable difference in the degree to which the external review phase is emphasised. This study examined both the accreditation model in British Columbia and the school assessment model in Newfoundland and Labrador, from a historical/ethnographic perspective. From this examination, it is hoped that an insight into the assessment process will be gained and an explanation of why the province has opted for this approach to educational change in the manner will be found.

This study utilized qualitative research methods to engage in an interpretive examination of the process by which school assessment was adopted as a means to improve school systems. It involved an extensive immersion by the researcher in the field and thus, in keeping with the principles of ethnographic research proposed by Glesne & Peshkin (1992), the process of participant observation

and interviewing constituted the core data gathering tools. The purpose of this study was to gather data that led to an understanding of how school assessment came to be the method of reform promoted by the provincial Department of Education. The researcher, as stated in Glesne & Peshkin "translated social experiences and construct narratives" (1992, p. 11). The intention was to gain an understanding of the process and attach some meaning to the complexity of the research subject.

Philosophically, this study was conducted from a phenomenological stance in which the attainment of a holistic view of the development of school assessment could be ascertained. Accepting that phenomenology is "the study of experiences and the way we put them together to develop a world view" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 82) gives the researcher a framework under which the study can be grounded. Underneath the many influences that led to the development of school assessment is a common thread that led to the acceptance of this approach to improvement of the provincial education system.

The primary goal of this research was to examine the development of the school assessment model in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. An ethnographic approach has been adopted for the reasons identified by LeCompte & Preissle:

Ethnography and its qualitative design variants provide educational and other social researchers with alternatives for describing, interpreting, and explaining the social world and the operation of educational phenomena within this world. Substantive constructs generated within the various social and applied sciences that influence educational ethnography provide diverse perspectives toward education and contribute to the authentic portrayal of a complex, multifaceted human society.

(1993, p. 28)

More specifically the study addressed the following research questions.

- 1 Why is there a desire to reform schools at this time?
- 2 How committed are key educational administrators to reforming the educational system?
- 3 How is school assessment different from other school reform initiatives such as school improvement?
- 4 What are the reasons the Department of Education opted for an assessment-based model of school reform as opposed to an accreditation-based model?
- 5 What are the benefits and challenges for the Department of Education, school districts and schools in supporting school assessment at this time?

1.5: Limitations of the study

The following limitations were recognized as being inherent within the study

- 1 The results of the study were dependent upon the cooperation of the persons involved in the school assessment process. As the source of data for the study was primarily interview transcripts, cooperation from the key players was essential
- 2 Participants may have been reluctant to respond to questions that were personal or sensitive in nature.

- 3 The study sought to document the historical/ethnographical background of the School assessment process. It did not attempt to further extend or draw conclusions as an evaluatory study was felt to be invalid with the model still very much in its infancy.
- 4 As this was an ethnographic study the views and positions of the researcher may have influenced the interpretations of the data.

1.6: Delimitations of the Study

The following delimitations are recognized as being inherent within the study:

- 1 The study did not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the process. The study examines the means by which the process was arrived at but not its effectiveness as a reform initiative. The school assessment initiative is still very new to this Province. Many of the initial schools are only finishing the first phase of their planning at this point. To evaluate the effectiveness of the process would formulate the basis for additional study to be undertaken at a point when the process is sufficiently established to warrant an evaluatory study.
- 2 The researcher anticipates that the findings may be of benefit to the Province in establishing a basis from which studies on assessing the value of the school assessment process can be drawn.
- 3 This study is descriptive and explorative in nature and summarized the gathered data.

1.7: Sources of Data

In gathering data the researcher utilized:

1. Interview transcripts derived from key players involved in the school assessment initiative
2. Provincial Department of Education documents related to reform through both school assessment in Newfoundland and Labrador and accreditation in British Columbia
These documents included Department of Education publications, school profiles and other sources deemed to be of value in assessment of the process.

1.8: Definition of Terms

Accountability	The responsibility for carrying out an obligation or trust
Accreditation	A status granted to a school that has been assessed and found to meet or exceed stated criteria
Action Plan	A strategy for implementing each priority for school improvement
Annual Report	A yearly school level report, produced by the school, containing indicators of school achievement as well as comparative information related to a range of other significant areas.
Assessment	The systematic process of gathering information about the nature and quality of schools.
Criteria Statement	A clearly defined statement specifying knowledge, skills, and behaviors, the achievement of which moves the school towards the expected outcomes.
Evaluation	The process of determining to what extent educational objectives are actually being realized.
Evidence	The ongoing process of making judgements and decisions based on the interpretation of evidence gathered through assessment.

Goal	A broad educational direction.
Indicator	One measure of the status of the standard. An indicator must have the qualities of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 being reliable and valid 2 being measurable over time 3 having policy implications 4 being understood by a broad audience, and 5 being acceptable to a broad audience.
Leadership	The ability to motivate, lead, empower, influence, and direct others toward some action. Good leadership is facilitated through shared decision making and problem solving.
Mission Statement	A succinct statement of purpose focusing on students
Objective	A desired result that can be expressed in measurable terms
Outcome	A statement of agreed- upon results for students or school performance as evidenced by multiple indicators.
Practice	The actual performance or application of what is advocated in principle
Process	A comparison of the standards achieved by a particular school with standards set by an assessment body
School Assessment Plan	A strategic plan for school initiatives, problem solving, priority setting, and decision making. The focus of the plan is on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ continuous improvement ■ the development of a collaborative culture ■ the development of staff and parent consensus for change ■ the identification of best practices (best practices are used as a standard by which all improvement is measured), and ■ the use of reliable information, data and analysis.
Set of Indicators	A combination of indicators which, together, provide a description of the system
Stakeholder	Those people and forces with a stake in the outcomes of the school
Strengths	Those events, activities, processes, strategies, policies, and leadership qualities that contribute in a positive way to the overall school experience.

Weaknesses Those events, activities, processes, strategies, policies, and leadership qualities that require change

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (1995) School Assessment, Ensuring Quality in Education)

1.9: Organization of the Thesis

This introductory chapter provides the background to the study, which includes a brief overview of the school assessment process in the Province to this point in time. The purpose of the study and the research questions that the study addressed are stated. Included are the limitations and delimitations of the study as well as the terms that need to be defined for clarification. Chapter II provides a review of the literature on school assessment and school accreditation. The third chapter discusses the design of the study, including the methodology used to investigate the research questions. Chapter IV provides an analysis of the data and the findings of the study. Chapter V summarizes these findings and makes recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2 - Review of Related Literature

Section 2.1: Definition of School Assessment

In addressing the desire to change the province's education system to make it more effective and productive, the need for a focused approach to quality improvement is evident. School assessment is an approach to educational reform that has grown from school improvement research to allow for a more focused approach to quality attainment. This thesis will investigate this current reform initiative in schools in Newfoundland and Labrador.

School Assessment focuses on quality assurance and operates within the confines of a quality framework. A memo sent to principals of the Vista School District on December 4, 1997 from Dr P. Cull speaks to this:

School Assessment is a central component of a comprehensive quality assurance and accountability framework for education in this district. The process subsumes the traditional school improvement process and adds a structured, systematic approach whereby assessment of a school's level of performance is measured against a set of applied standards.

(Cull, P. Personal Correspondence. December 4, 1997)

In its simplest form, school assessment is a process of monitoring, evaluating and implementing plans to address perceived weaknesses and strengths of the school (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995, p. 3). It is a process designed to enhance the quality of education within the province. It involves a periodic evaluation of school activities and seeks independent judgement of achievements. The school, through an internal committee consisting of staff, parents and where

appropriate students, are expected to meet a set of provincial standards as outlined by performance on criterion referenced tests (CRT's), The Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), and other indicators, and develop plans to meet or exceed them.

As written in the document published by the Department of Education, "*School Assessment: Ensuring Quality in Education*," the standards that schools are expected to meet are based on what is considered "good practice in schools" (p. 2). The purpose of school assessment is to:

- *ensure that schools meet local and provincial standards with respect to the intellectual, human, social, career development, and special needs of students, the school leadership, the school climate, the school administration, and the relationship with the community*
- *ensure that parents are informed about, contribute to and are satisfied with the progress of their schools, and*
- *assist with the ongoing school improvement process*

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1996, p. 2)

The provincial Department of Education provided a broad description of a process for educational reform to the school districts. Personnel units were allocated to school districts that implemented the reform initiatives. Individual school districts were free to choose whether to proceed with this reform or not, or modify the process to suit the district's own perceived needs.

One of the districts that has taken a lead role in this reform movement is the Vista School District, which has developed a school reform model that it has entitled "School Development" and which

is similar to the process proposed by the provincial government. The School Development Model has drawn partially from school assessment, but also draws from other models currently utilized in other nations. The Comer School Development model from Yale University has marked similarities to the Vista model. Being very similar in philosophy, the Vista School District model operates under three basic premises: 1 Where schools ought to be? 2 Where Schools are? 3 How to bridge the Gap between the two? (District Memo - Vista School District, 1997. "School Assessment and its relationship to School Improvement")

The remainder of this chapter examines the literature related to the rationale behind current reform initiatives and the current approach to school reform in the province.

Section 2.2: Reasons for Reform

Since the publication of the Royal Commission Report on Education (Williams et al , 1992), questions have been raised about the means by which the Department of Education, through the province's schools, is addressing its own mission statement. This statement being

Our Mission is to provide an affordable, high quality education to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so that they are able to acquire, through life long learning, the knowledge, skills, and values necessary fro personal growth and development of society.

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998 p i)

The public expects a great deal from the schools of this province. More is being demanded of them. As stated by Diana Lam, Superintendent of the San Antonio Independent School District, "What

is non - negotiable are higher expectations and increased student achievement” (Richardson, 1997, p. 1)

The need for reform in the school system was delineated in Williams et al (1992).

The Commission believes that children must be challenged to reach ever higher standards. To realize any new vision of education, the education system as it now exists in Newfoundland and Labrador must be changed. But this change cannot simply be mandated, it must come from deep within the education system itself. The change process has already begun. The Commission believes its role to be one of shaping and directing the energy which is already working in the system in order that new structures may be designed for the benefit of all

(Williams et al., 1992, p. 203)

Numerous references speak to the need to reform education in the United States, Britain, Australia, and virtually every Canadian Province. The political demand for reform of school systems is present in most nations, the only major differences being largely limited to that of pace, style and method (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994, p. 21). The need for reform led the United States congress to pass the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* that outlined the purpose of school reform in that country. The opening statement of purpose

To improve learning and teaching by providing a national framework for education reform; to promote the research, consensus building, and systemic changes needed to ensure equitable educational opportunities and high levels of educational achievement for all students; to provide a framework for re authorization of all Federal education programs; to promote the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards and certifications; and for other purposes.

(<http://www.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/intro.html>, May 11, 1998)

Fiscal realities dictate that, in a climate of restraint, reforms must involve much more than simply spending more money. That approach has proven to be economically unsound and ineffective at best. Well-thought out strategies that hold school systems accountable and address concerns within the system are required. Many present reform strategies have borrowed from the world of business and encourage a more sensitive consideration of the clients, in this case the general public's needs. To this end, Dempster et al. wrote

Over the past decade governments in many Western democracies have been faced with concerns over increasing drains on the public purse caused by burgeoning educational expenditure (Hughes, 1992, p. 2). At the same time they have been unconvinced that increased funding has been translated into improvement in student outcomes from the schooling system. As a result, a number of Western governments under the influence of economic rationalists have sought ways to ensure that schools are made more accountable for what they do. To do so, they have taken lessons from private enterprise and adopted corporate managerialist approaches to public sector management (Dempster, 1991; Knight, 1990). These business, commercial and industrial approaches to organizational management demand that authority and responsibility be devolved closer to the work site so that employees are made more responsive to client needs within the framework of corporate strategic plans.

(Dempster et al., 1994, p. 25)

The need and desire to reform schools are evident. The public demands a high quality system that operates on sound principles. The question of reform then shifts to one of how best to serve the children and protect the public interest. The crux of the argument is whether to move toward reform

that develops from within the organization or to legislate reform. As Glickman (1990) writes, "From excessive freedom to excessive control, the pendulum has swung, but it's possible to create a new balanced center of change" (p. 38)

In this Province, the question of how to effectively reform public institutions is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, across the nation, assessment of public institutions has become common place. Public institutions are expected to deliver high quality services. In the early 1990's, the Province underwent a review process in which all public programs were subject to review. The questions of what was desired by the public, what the institutions were delivering to whom, and if programs could be improved, were asked. All of these questions were examined within the fiscal parameters of the Province. A number of programs that were not cost effective were changed or eliminated.

The Province has decided to adopt an approach to reform consistent with the principles of continuous monitoring and evaluation with the intended outcome being the attainment and maintenance of prescribed standards. The accreditation model of British Columbia is similar in intent yet does differ considerably in the application of the process.

Section 2.3: School Accreditation in British Columbia (BC)

2.3.1: Provincial Context

The BC Public School Accreditation Program has been in place since the 1920's, in one form or another (Province of British Columbia 1997). Since 1994, the program required the involvement of all public schools. Previously, only secondary schools were involved.

The program has been reviewed several times. These reviews have allowed the provincial Ministry of Education to gather information that could be used to modify the program. The most recent changes were introduced in the fall of 1998. (Province of British Columbia, 1997)

2.3.2: Goals of Education

The goal of the accreditation program is to ensure that, "all youth have the opportunity to obtain high quality schooling that will assist in their development as educated citizens" (Province of British Columbia 1997). The objective is to have a system that meets the expectations and standards for a high quality education system. Core elements and attributes have been identified by education partners. The accreditation program is setup so that BC's schools are continuously working toward meeting established standards.

The accreditation program steers all schools in the province to operate and work within the confines of the Ministry's mission statement, which reads as follows:

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skill and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic, and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy

(Province of British Columbia 1997 p 1)

The mission statement outlines the context in which all schools in the province are expected to operate. To focus school efforts, goals are outlined in the accreditation policy (Appendix B), and include the areas of intellectual development, human and social development, career development, principles of learning, and attributes of the public school system. (Province of British Columbia 1997, p 2)

2.3.3: The Accreditation Program

2.3.3.1: Purpose of Accreditation

The goal of the accreditation program is to ensure that schools are continually examining their progress. Its purpose is to examine where they are and where they have to be with respect to agreed upon standards of quality schooling. Any discrepancies between the two are addressed through the formation of action plans. These plans will form a bridge to help close the gap. The purpose of the process is to

ensure schools continually examine, improve and report on their growth and achievement in relation to the goals of education, the principles of learning, the attributes of the public school system and select features of quality schools agreed upon by education partners.

(Province of British Columbia, 1997, Pg. 3)

The aim of the accreditation program is to ensure that British Columbia schools are improved through:

- *ensuring that schools examine and evaluate their progress in relation to the Accreditation topics.*
- *ensuring that schools provide an environment whereby students (where appropriate), parents and staff are active participants in examining, evaluating and planning for school improvement and also involved in all aspects of the accreditation process;*
- *providing a framework and guidelines to support the school's assessment process.*
- *ensuring that schools have a strategy for continuous improvement included as part of the school growth plan, and*
- *validating the process, findings and recommendations of the school through an external review*

(Province of British Columbia. 1997 Pg. 3)

2.3.3.2: Accreditation Cycle

The accreditation program involves a continuous development of the school through a six year cycle. Once, during the six year cycle, the school is subjected to evaluation conducted by way of internal and external reviews. While involved in this phase of accreditation, the school is required to prepare an internal report that reflects the school's examination and analysis of the accreditation topics outlined in the policy manual (Appendix C)

When the internal examination is complete, a draft school plan that addresses the issues and concerns arising out of the review is written. The plan includes strategies that will be implemented to improve on areas identified during the review phase. Then, an external team visits the school and reviews and evaluates the school's self assessment process. Following this review, the external team

recommends whether the school should be accredited. The final School Growth Plan will be written after the external report has been completed.

Between external reviews, School Districts are to ensure that schools do not stagnate. Schools are expected to implement, review and report on their progress in addressing the issues and concerns outlined in their school growth plan. In subsequent years, schools are expected to gather data on an ongoing basis to assess their performance and prepare for the next planning cycle. (Appendix D)

Accreditation is a process that involves the cooperation and contribution of many members of the school community (Province of British Columbia 1997 p 4) For the process to be successful, all members of the school community must participate in the process including

- *Ministry*
- *School District*
- *The Superintendent of Schools*
- *Principal*
- *The Staff*
- *Parents and Students*
- *Community*

(Province of British Columbia. 1997, p. 5)

All members of the local school community, including parents, staff, and students (where appropriate), are expected to participate in all aspects of the school accreditation process

2.3.4: The Accreditation Process

2.3.4.1: Overview

The school accreditation process in British Columbia is designed such that there is a series of activities that focuses the school's efforts to improve the quality of education for students. During the six year planning cycle schools are expected to undergo an annual self assessment that includes a review of its goals and objectives (Province of British Columbia. 1997 p. 9)

During the year of the external review, a more extensive examination is completed which results in a school growth plan. The external review follows. Each of the phases is formally reported on. It is the responsibility of the board to ensure that each school meets the requirements of the accreditation program and completes an annual report.

2.3.4.2: The Internal Report

During the external review year, the school is expected to produce an internal report. The production of this report ensures that the school has engaged in thoughtful examination and has made attempts to identify areas of concern for the school. Staff, parents and students are involved in the production of the report. Through continuous data collection, analysis and community involvement in this data gathering/ interpretation exercise, a better picture of the school and its trends is determined. The internal report will include the following:

- *a vision for the school;*
- *a school and community context;*
- *the completed 'Record of Evidence' forms for each accreditation topic;*
- *distributions and trends of student and school performance;*

- *any other topics, evidence or documentation identified by the school,*
- *a school growth plan, and*
- *documentation of regular communication and reporting to partners*

(Province of British Columbia. 1997, pp. 10-11)

Once a draft report is completed, it is forwarded to the district superintendent (District Superintendent is equivalent to the Director in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador) for approval. Once this approval is granted, the draft report is forwarded to the board and external team for their review before their visit to the school.

After the external team has had the opportunity to review and comment on the internal report, a final copy is completed. The final copy takes into account revisions suggested by the external team. The report is then sent, by the superintendent, to the Minister of Education, the school board, the parental advisory council, and the student council (where appropriate). The report will form the blueprint for the school's improvement activities over the following five years. During this period, it will be reviewed and revised as necessary to guide annual school improvement activities.

The external review identifies how effective the school has been in its efforts at maintaining or improving its performance as it pertains to the various accreditation topics. The purpose of the external review is to

- *validate the internal report, including the appropriateness of the evidence chosen,*
- *evaluate the inclusiveness of the school's ongoing self assessment process; and*
- *evaluate the appropriateness of the school growth plan.*

(Province of British Columbia. 1997, p. 18)

The external review is conducted by a team of individuals which comprises the external team. The process of selection begins at the district level which chooses, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, the chair of the external team. The external team chair then selects other members for the team, in consultation with the school and district. The makeup of the team consists of parents, teachers, and administrators or district officers. Students and/or other community members may also be included where appropriate. This team will scrutinize the internal report so as to ensure that the school is working towards improvement in accordance with the provincial policy.

The External Team will:

- *assess and evaluate the school's internal report, accreditation process and documentation resulting from that process (including the school growth plan) using the stated criteria for the external report;*
- *share a draft of its report with the school and the board before finalizing the report;*
- *submit a final report to the district superintendent and the minister, as well as all education partners; and*
- *recommend to the minister and the superintendent that the school is, or is not, to be granted accreditation.*

(Province of British Columbia 1997, p. 18) (Appendix E)

2.3.4.3: Information and Evidence

Each of the accreditation topics are examined by the school with respect to "Opportunities Provided" and "Performance Indicators". (Accreditation Policy, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Province of British Columbia, 1997, p. 11). It is through the examination of these criteria that the school is judged. All of the topics are to be addressed and the evidence collected must demonstrate

that the expectations are fulfilled. The evidence includes information about the opportunities provided by the school for addressing the topics, the effectiveness of the opportunities, and the extent to which student performance demonstrates fulfillment of expectations (Accreditation Policy, Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Province of British Columbia. 1997 p 11)

Under "Opportunities Provided" sections, key programs, strategies and activities used by the school to fulfill expectations of the topics will be outlined. "Performance Indicators" outlines the key indicators that the school uses to judge its effectiveness in meeting expectations

All evidence used to address each accreditation topic must meet certain criteria. Information must.

- *be observable and describable;*
- *be broad based and representative of the school (where applicable) rather than reflecting individual classes or student projects (when student outcomes are used, results for all students must be included);*
- *wherever possible, show trends;*
- *wherever possible, show distributions;*
- *fully represent the school's efforts and progress in providing access and opportunities for all students to learn; and*
- *be displayed using the "Record of Evidence" form.*

(Province of British Columbia 1997, p 12)

The 'Record of Evidence' form allows schools to systematically record the evidence that is gathered (Appendix F)

2.3.4.4: The School Growth Plan

The culmination of the data gathering and documentation is the development of the school growth plan. The plan outlines the means by which the school will address the issues and concerns as they relate to the accreditation topics. This component of the internal report outlines the strategies of the school to improve school performance. Long range strategies address the concerns about the school as evidenced by the analysis of pertinent data. The school growth plan provides a framework for continuous improvement during the accreditation cycle. It is reviewed on an annual basis so that modifications can be made as needed.

The School Plan includes

- *an introduction which provides a rationale for selection of items for inclusion in the School Growth Plan.*
- *goal(s) related to the Accreditation Topics.*
- *specific objectives which the school has identified to address each goal.*
- *identification of staff, parent, student in-service training needs;*
- *strategies the school intends to use to meet the established objectives;*
- *identification of the resources needed to meet the objectives;*
- *an estimate of the total cost to meet the objectives.*
- *identification of the person(s) responsible for the assigned tasks;*
- *target dates for the beginning and completion of the tasks;*
- *a schedule of review dates;*
- *indicators of success to identify that the objectives have been reached;*
- *an evaluation of progress made towards meeting the objectives; and*
- *a communication plan to inform partners on progress towards school improvement*

(Province of British Columbia. 1997, pp. 16-17)

Schools are expected to report on the evidence gathered annually to parents, students and the school board. The purpose of this reporting is to inform those parties on the status of the school with respect to improved performance as it pertains to the accreditation topics, achievement and/or revisions of the school growth plan, and to communicate progress on School Improvement to partners (Province of British Columbia, 1997, p. 17).

Following the completion of the external report, a recommendation about accreditation is made. If the accreditation status is granted, the school begins the next six year cycle. If accreditation is not granted, an additional external review will be conducted the following year. This additional review means that the school is required to draft an additional internal report for review by a second external team.

2.4: Supporting Literature for Accreditation

Accreditation is defined as “the process by which an organization grants approval to an educational institution” (Floden, 1980, p. 35 as cited in Gray, 1989, p. 41). This granting of approval is a core component of the British Columbia Ministry of Education’s plan to hold its province’s schools accountable.

If governments, and those charged with administering the schools, are to ensure that high standards are both maintained and built upon, a system of school improvement that addresses all facets of the school community must be implemented. Goodlad (1984) writes, “.....efforts at [school] improvement must encompass the school as a system of interacting parts, each affecting the others”

(p. 31) The accreditation process in British Columbia seeks to meet Goodlad's directive in that the Accreditation Model encompasses the school Community as a whole.

Goodlad (1984), upon completing his study of the quality of education in North American schools, challenged educators to build systematic mechanisms for improving schools. Of core importance to the school improvement process is the notion that the process must begin with a careful analysis of the whole school with all of its various elements (Gray, 1989, p. 41). This theme is present in the accreditation process as schools are required to examine the school in its entirety to ensure it is meeting the guidelines set out by the Ministry

This gathering of evidence, as outlined, serves to focus efforts on improvement for the school. Such a focus is needed in order to keep the school on track and to ensure that the school's bid to improve is in line with ministry objectives. The need to focus and gather information is delineated by Goodlad (1984) as he writes:

Schools do not routinely gather such information. Until they do, improvement efforts are likely to be unfocussed and at best, only moderately successfulit is difficult to envision a school's staff, students and parents proceeding systematically to create new circumstances in their school without the availability of specific data on its present condition (p. 19)

(Goodlad, 1984, p. 19)

With the necessity for a structured approach to improvement of schools established, it is crucial that the school develop a picture of its goals. The accreditation process is a means by which schools can formulate and design a map to reach the goals of meeting standards set out by Ministry guidelines.

It is very difficult to reach a destination without knowing the route to get there. The accreditation process provides the compass and the map.

The entire accreditation process appears to be centered around the concept of increased accountability in British Columbia schools. Taylor and Hill (1993) claim that there are fundamentally two different approaches to accountability: quality assurance (QA), and Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM is concerned with "customer focused organizational improvement achieved through the activities of groupings of employees at various levels within the structure" (p. 21). These authors make the case that the goal of TQM is improvement whereas for QA it is effectiveness. QA is geared and designed such that external stakeholders are given guarantees about outcomes. Under this system, organizations (schools) are made to account for the resource use and to ensure that it is within the guidelines set by those providing these resources, in this case government. The focus is on the value given for the provision of resources, and on effectiveness and efficiency. The accreditation model adopted by British Columbia adheres more closely to the principle of TQM as it emphasizes school improvement by all those in the organization (Gray and Maxwell, 1995, p. 120).

Reform initiatives are unlikely to succeed without the support of those directly involved in the implementation of the reforms (Lieberman, 1995, p. 8). In British Columbia, funding is provided for purposes of self assessment and implementation of growth plans. Funds that the British Columbia government targets for school accreditation are not to be spent elsewhere. In addition, to ensure the involvement of teachers and, thus to promote ownership of the process by teachers,

external teams are commonly composed of fifty percent teachers. These teachers often see their role within the process as being a colleague who will share perceptions as opposed to being an extension of the inspectorate dispatched by a central administrative office (Gray and Maxwell, 1995, p. 121). As a result of these features of accreditation, it is being perceived as a school improvement as opposed to a school evaluatory exercise (Gray and Maxwell, 1995, p. 121). Yet, there is a degree of external accountability that the school must maintain.

Accreditation, in British Columbia, has progressed from the original Inspectorial Model. The changes in the traditional accreditation paradigm towards a transformational evaluation exercise, in which collaborative negotiation is a key component, have come as a result of the interaction of a number of philosophical standpoints. These are:

- *Emphasis on school improvement and school effectiveness resulting in a more pronounced "action orientation" to the accreditation model*
- *The development of an internal assessment team model for conducting an internal analysis with this team composed of both teachers and administrators.*
- *The increasing efforts by the schools system to involve parents in meaningful decision making*
- *The formulation of the external team as a shared venture with school level input and greater representation of school administrators and teachers on these teams.*
- *The shift in emphasis from summative judgement to formative assistance provided to the school by the external team.*

(Gray, 1992, p. 11)

The current model of school accreditation in British Columbia was developed by a working committee that involved representatives from stakeholders in the education system, including parents, students, school trustees, superintendents, principals, and teachers. The involvement of stakeholders enabled the process to take into account the concerns of members of the school community, thereby improving the likelihood of a more successful program.

The current approach in BC to accreditation addresses concerns about evaluation processes for schools by addressing the following criteria

- 1) Constructivist: Schools are offered the opportunity to adapt an accreditation model to meet their specific needs and the "reality" of their own circumstances. The accreditation must make sense for the participants. In this context, judgement is related to "negotiated" standards of what the school and the community deem important for the students.*
- 2) Values driven: The evaluation takes place within the framework of the provincial values framework but is adaptable to individual school organizational culture.*
- 3) Contextually and culturally framed. Each school is considered a unique entity with the self assessment and the external assessment both making judgements within the context of the school's operational environment. Evaluations about program effectiveness are made in light of shared perceptions of evidence within the cultural values, constraints and opportunities afforded by the local setting.*
- 4) Stakeholder enfranchising: The 1992 accreditation pilot program establishes the central involvement of all stakeholders in the school review, including parents and students as active partners in the process. In addition, the external team's role is one of providing the professional assistance to the school in the development of its school wide growth plan. This is an enabling activity, not one of top-down direction.*

5) Action oriented: The primary goal of the evaluation is the production of a school growth plan which emerges from a categorization and prioritization of the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement. The school growth plan is supported by a \$44 per student grant from the Ministry of Education upon completion of its growth plan. The emphasis has shifted from the assessment phase to the creation of circumstances to ensure involvement, support, and commitment to follow through

6) Respects participant dignity: The evaluation and the production of the school growth plan is a process negotiated between the participants. The program seeks to act as a consensus building process in order to create the shared perception and judgement of the existing school culture and the vision of where the school should be directing its future energies and resources. This de-emphasis on summative evaluation offers the chance for a less threatening and more dignifying professional process

(Gray, 1992, p. 11)

Schools have reported that the accreditation process is a positive means by which to engage in professional development for a school (Gray, 1994, p. 13). Accreditation reports are designed to encompass and provide an action-oriented school growth plan. As a result of this change, the following have been reported

Our accreditation involved the entire staff, plus parents and students in a non-threatening process. It reinforced staff cohesiveness and provided a forum for discussion of issues that may not have otherwise occurred." (Brent Kennedy Elementary - School District 5 (Nelson)

Accreditation helped school team building. It improved our awareness of many issues, including the identification of strengths, and allowed us to focus on the school's future directions." (Salmon Arm West Elementary - School District 89 (Shuswap)

(Gray, 1994, p. 13)

School accreditation in British Columbia has shifted from an emphasis on accountability to an emphasis on the development of school growth plans. Under the current accreditation model, schools are empowered to develop their own plans to address the deficiencies identified in the internal examination process (Gray, 1994).

As the program revolves around a holistic examination of the school, the likelihood of success is increased. Educators “get a sense of how the whole organization is contributing to student learning” (Gray, 1994, p. 14). Having all facets of the school community involved in the examination ensures a thorough and complete examination of the school. All stakeholders are involved and can take ownership of the process. As a secondary benefit, it provides a means by which all stakeholders can be exposed to all parts of the school. As a result, they may grasp a deeper understanding of how the various components of school life contribute to the overall functioning of the school.

School Accreditation demands that the school remain focused in its drive to improve. Quality indicators of performance are gathered by the school in light of Ministry guidelines. This focus enables the school to remain on track during the process. The destination is known, now the school needs to map out the road to get there (Gray, 1994).

School accreditation in British Columbia provides a means by which schools can continue to improve in order to meet Ministry guidelines and standards. The schools can design their plans to address identified needs but the schools are expected to meet the established standards for accreditation. The examination by an external team will determine if the school has or has not met them. The granting of accreditation means that the school has met the level for this round. Yet the

process does not stop there. After Accreditation has been granted the school merely enters the next phase of continuous improvement.

2.5: School Assessment in Newfoundland and Labrador

2.5.1: Introduction

In the public sector, assessment is not new. Arrangements for inspection of numerous public organizations has become commonplace in our society. The general public is demanding that a system of accountability be in place to ensure that the programs being offered by public institutions are done so in an efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible manner.

In Education this tradition of accountability is not a novel idea. Early in the Province's education system, school inspectors would regularly visit schools to ensure that the school was maintaining the standards expected of it. Changing philosophies lead to elimination of the School Inspector program in the fifties and sixties. The system has come somewhat full circle as education systems are facing increased demands for public accountability. The School Assessment Model has been adopted to try and satisfy public demand for a better system of accountability for the province's schools and, at the same time, promote quality of education for students.

A solid argument can be made that the single most important issue in education is quality (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995). Educators in the province are constantly challenged to develop new means of quality assurance. In order for such initiatives to be successful the entire school system that has to grow and improve. Addressing small portions of the school will not work since schools are not collections of departments. Schools are collective systems that

function together. Efforts to reform schools need to address the whole school and not sections of it.

2.5.2: Purpose of School Assessment

“School Assessment is viewed as a central component of a comprehensive quality assurance and accountability framework for education in this province”(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995). The maintenance and improvement of quality in the education system is the implicit goal of the process. It is felt by the provincial Department of Education that the School Assessment Model does have the potential to impact in a positive fashion at the school level.

School assessment provides a framework in which schools can assess their individual level of performance against a set of locally and provincially applied standards (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995). It allows for schools to assess where they are in relation to their intended goal. This determination of the intended goal is a function of the School District’s Strategic Plan. Continuous improvement to bridge the gap between the two is the intended result of the process. This sentiment is clearly outlined by the Department of Education as they state

The purpose of the School Assessment program in this province is to:

- *ensure that schools meet or exceed education standards with respect to:*
 - *the intellectual, human and social, and career development of students;*
 - *the services and needs of students with identified special needs;*
 - *the instructional methods and practices of teachers;*
 - *the leadership within the school;*
 - *the school climate and culture of the school;*
 - *the relationship between the school and its community; and*

- *the administration and management of the school.*
- *ensure that schools are engaged in an ongoing planning process highlighted by:*
 - *goals (directions they want to move)*
 - *objectives (targets they want to attain)*
 - *measures (how they will know if they have attained them)*
 - *strategies (what they plan to do)*
 - *action plans (how they plan to do it)*
- *ensure that schools are guided by a comprehensive, long-term, externally validated school growth plan;*
- *ensure that parents and others concerned about the quality of education are informed about, contribute to and are satisfied with the progress, achievement, and efficiency of their schools;*
- *define good practices and working models for schools*

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995 p. 2)

2.5.3: School Assessment Model

The Newfoundland and Labrador School Assessment Model revolves around the principle of continuous growth and development. It is a cyclical model that is broken into five basic steps, namely 1) mission, 2) needs assessment, 3) strategic objectives, 4) strategies, and 5) implementation feedback. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. 1995. p. 5) The first time a school is involved in the process would require it to undergo a pre-planning stage. (Appendix G)

The Province's School Assessment Model also involves six basic elements. These elements include:

- 1) pre-planning, which includes setting time frames, identifying stakeholders, and building structures, processes, and supports;*
- 2) development of a mission and belief statements, which spell out what is*

important; 3) completion of a comprehensive organizational review, which assembles extensive information about the school and identifies organizational patterns, strengths, and challenges, and external trends; 4) creation of a vision for the school, which includes the establishment of priorities and strategies that spell out what is possible and achievable within the framework and resources of the school and the development of a school growth plan; 5) an external validation of the organizational review and school growth plan, and 6) implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the school growth plan.

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995, p. 5)

In order to ensure that the external assessment was carried out as intended in the 1995 pilot project, the Department ensured that the members of the external team were appropriately trained. The Department does not carry out this role at present. (Cull P., Personnel Correspondence, October 30, 1998)

2.5.4: Organizational Review

In order for a school to move forward and make plans for improvement of the school system, it is crucial that a school determine not only its target but also where it currently sits in relation to the end goal. By establishing what the school's status is at present, effective planning can begin to bridge the gap between what is and what is desired. The School Assessment Model is designed such that it is a focused drive towards educational excellence. It focuses on the needs of the school that are established as a result of the organizational review. This is a marked deviation from the School Improvement initiative that was the precursor to this reform initiative. That process lacked focus and, at times, did tend to concentrate on wants as opposed to needs. (Cull P., Personnel Correspondence, October 30, 1998) The organizational review provides documentation that serves

to give evidence of established needs. The Department of Education has identified the purpose of the organizational review:

The purpose of the organizational review is to examine the processes, practices, and outcomes actually occurring in the school in order to determine the school's strengths and the areas needing change. The focus is on identifying opportunities to enhance student learning. The organizational review is conducted utilizing the information contained in the school and community profiles, in combination with the school's responses to a series of criteria statements designed to demonstrate what is generally expected to occur in school's.

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995, p. 7)

2.5.5: The Self Assessment:

As part of the organizational review, a school based group, known as the Internal Assessment Team, acts as a steering group. The internal team is representative of the collective school body, and include the facilitators and organizers of the process at the school level. This is not to say that it is only the internal team that is involved. All members of the school community including other teachers, parents, community members and students are encouraged to take an active role in the process. Small sub committees with specific mandates serve the process best. The greater the level of participation by all members of the school community, the more likely success will be to achieve.

Once the self assessment has been completed and the school has identified areas of concern, preliminary plans are devised to address them. These plans are subject to the approval of district directors and the external Team who may require revisions may be required before the plans are implemented.

2.5.6: External Review

To ensure that the school assessment process is as objective as possible, a review of the process is conducted by a team external to the school. This external team has an appointed chair and is responsible for validation of the school's assessment process. It is the responsibility of this external team to determine if the assessment process at the school was valid and has produced plans that will address identified needs. The external team reports to the district after reviewing the school's assessment process. The role of external assessment is described as follows:

The external assessment consists of four components: (1) validation of the self-assessment, (2) assessment of the outcomes and standards achieved by the school, (3) assessment of the content, direction and appropriateness of the school improvement plan, and (4) preparation of a final report. The School Assessment Manual for External Teams sets out the specific requirements for ensuring full coverage of all aspects of the school's provision, work, and achievements. Every aspect of the school is to be assessed. Adherence to the School Assessment Manual will ensure comparability between assessments and a standard approach to reporting. There are many factors which will determine how the time and efforts of the External team are directed during the period the team spends in the school and in the community, including:

- *the size of the team;*
- *the time it has available for the visit;*
- *the size, type and organization of the school;*
- *the nature of the school's population; and*
- *the nature of parent and community involvement*

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 1995, p. 16)

2.6: Support for School Assessment

School assessment is a central component of quality assurance in this province. This process picks up where the initial school growth initiative left off and adds to it a mechanism for accountability. The process "subsumes the traditional school improvement process and adds a structured, systematic approach whereby assessment of a school's level of performance is measured against a set of applied standards" (Internal Memo distributed to Schools in Vista School District, December 4, 1997)

2.6.1: Evaluation

In order to ensure that the process remains focused and addresses the attainment and/or maintenance of established standards, an evaluation component is necessary. Evaluation is defined as being, "an act of collecting systematic information regarding the nature and quality of educational objects" (Nevo, 1995 p. 11). There is little disputing the importance of evaluation in education. It is through evaluation that progress can be measured.

School assessment in this province involves evaluation of the entire school so as to ascertain where the school sits in relation to prescribed standards. The process of evaluation is intended to ultimately improve classroom learning. The changing school climate with its emphasis on accountability dictates that evaluation is a key component in the functioning of the province's schools. The challenge is to evaluate the school in such a manner that classroom instruction does improve.

The process involves both an internal and external evaluation and thus ensures maximum validity. The internal portion of the evaluation has the advantage of providing a more conducive environment

for formative evaluation. Being less threatening, it allows for participants to actively work towards improvement without undue stress over the consequences

Yet, a summative component of evaluation is needed as well. As the process entails the attainment and/or maintenance of prescribed standards, there needs to be a process put in place that ascertains whether or not these standards have been reached. External evaluation would best serve this function by minimizing bias and subjectivity. The best means by which to evaluate all aspects of the school is to involve a combination of both external and internal evaluation. This point is clearly made by Nevo (1995) as he writes:

Another reason for the need to combine internal and external evaluation is related to the special characteristics of those two kinds of evaluation. Internal evaluation tends to be more subjective and biased, while external evaluation is often perceived as a threat to the school, and stimulates defensive behavior of teachers and administrators. Therefore, rather than getting a biased perspective from reliance only on internal evaluation, or stimulating a discourse of accusations and apologies by external evaluation, a more constructive evaluation discourse could be obtained by combining the two. Such a combination can create a communicative evaluation discourse - a dialogue between internal and external evaluation concerning ways to improve schools

(Nevo, 1995, p. 2)

Evaluation forms the basis for making enlightened and productive dialogue about school improvement. By combining both internal and external evaluatory methods the school assessment process is engaging schools in a valid exercise for determining where they currently are in relation to their targets

2.6.2: Empowerment

By its nature, school assessment is an empowering process. Teachers are involved in the formation of the school's action plans either directly or indirectly. They are involved in the internal team and do have the opportunity to sit as the chair of this committee. Those teachers who are not members of this internal team are still involved in the process as school based sub - committees are central to the success of the model.

Allowing participants at the school level to play an important role is a key component of effective reform. Roy (1995) advocates site based management as a means of implementation and maintenance of reform in education. She holds that such practices promote involvement and with this involvement comes greater dedication to the proposed reform. She writes, "Site based management promotes involvement, this involvement must be viewed as a means to an end, not the end itself" (p. 18). Later, in the same article, Roy states: "Involvement leads to commitment" (p. 18). Her opinions on the necessity for grassroots input are clear, the more of this input that is present the more likely the reform is to succeed. She writes:

Change is more likely to result when the people most directly involved help create the solution. One of the lessons learned about the process of change and reform is that teachers need to be involved in the process. The commitment to new ideas and new classroom practices will not occur without the involvement of the faculty members."

(Roy, 1995, p. 19)

The sentiments expressed by Roy are echoed in many ways by Wheelock (1995) who maintains that reforms will not last or remain effective without the participation of stakeholders. Wheelock writes:

"research suggests approaches that define teachers as individual consumers in a marketplace of workshops do not yield lasting change in school or student performance."(Wheelock, 1995, p. 25.)

If the reforms are to work, those individuals responsible for carrying out the reform initiatives need to be committed to the process. The benefits of empowering teachers, as school assessment does, is supported by Wheelock's research on school reform in Louisville schools. She found that students benefitted from reforms that had such involvement. She writes, "empowered teachers are nurturing more empowered learners" (Wheelock, 1995, p. 31)

Research suggests that not only must effective reform involve teachers, it must involve the school community in general. The generation of the school profile entails garnishing information from teachers, parents and students. Such involvement means that these groups are an integral part of the process. Middleton, Smith and Williams (1993) make the point that this involvement is imperative if change is to occur. Their study on the effective schools process in Columbus, Ohio revealed the importance of broad community involvement. They wrote, "Collaboration among the school staff, parents, and the community would be essential for the total community to buy into the comprehensive change process" (Middleton, Smith and Williams, 1993, p. 15)

The process of school reform is a tenuous process that takes time. As such it is important that the policy makers responsible for initiating the change allow for a long term plan that does not expect immediate solutions. The avoidance of such ill-placed sentiments can be accomplished if members of the school community are involved with the process. By being involved they can develop reasonable expectations that will not cripple the process.

Community involvement is crucial to implementation and, more importantly, continuation of successful change initiatives. If the school is to examine what it is currently doing, as it would do during the internal review, all stakeholders should be involved (Hickman, 1988) School districts have been successful in implementing reforms and policies that have utilized members of the school community. As an example of this process, Gorman (1990) is cited:

The Contract Committee did its work and in 1984 the Halifax District School Board set up a Teacher Effectiveness Committee made up of the Director and Assistant Director of Education; the coordinators of elementary, junior high, and senior high schools; a supervisor; six principals; a high school department head; a representative of the Halifax District of the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union; and a classroom teacher. The committee's recommendations became school board policy in May, 1986. It was required that this approach be started by all schools in 1988-89. (p. 185)

The example illustrates the importance of including members of the staff and general school community in school reform initiatives. School assessment in this Province has taken this one step further than the preceding example, in that school assessment involves a broader school community. Parents and students can be involved in generating the initial school profile. Their involvement will likely lead to changes that are accepted and supported.

Once the school profile has been compiled the school is responsible for identifying priority areas and designing action plans to address them. This notion of acceptance by involvement is one that Fullan (1985, 1991) has expressed and the School Assessment process in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has followed this view.

The reasons for involving stakeholders at the school level reach beyond pacification of faculty. Staff are involved not so that they can be involved but rather because it provides a more effective means of implementing the proposed change. Roy (1995) states:

Participatory Decision Making is not an end in itself but rather a means for a school to accomplish more effective learning and instruction for students. Yet, in many cases, it is treated as the desired change and not as the vehicle for improved student learning. According to Gillickman (1992) the reason for involving staff is "not simply as an exercise but to establish a covenant to guide future decisions about goals, staffing, scheduling, materials, assessment, curriculum, staff development, and resource allocation" (p. 14) (p. 19)

The school assessment initiative in Newfoundland and Labrador is structured so that Participatory Decision Making is utilized. The advantages of this approach are advocated in the literature. Teachers are more appreciative and likely to adopt reform initiatives when their realities of classroom activities are taken into account. This point is referenced by Conca (1996) who writes, "Evidence abounds that innovations are successfully implemented when the need for change is appreciated by teachers and when the particular existing realities of their classrooms are taken into account" (p. 40)

2.6.3 Planning

School assessment is designed so that schools can determine their standing in relation to prescribed goals. To bridge the gap, schools plan. This strategic planning allows the school to have a focused approach to broad school improvement. Strategic planning is defined as, "a process and discipline which...produces a plan characterized by originality, vision, and realism....aimed at total

concentration of the organization's resources on mutually predetermined measurable outcomes" (Truscott, 1989, p. 12). The provincial Department of Education echoed this sentiment in its strategic plan, Ready to Learn, Ready to Earn (1998). This document outlined the purpose of strategic planning as being to establish a general framework that could be used to guide future endeavors to improve education.

Planning is done to improve the quality of education through the management of innovation and change. (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991). According to Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) four basic questions are asked during the process. 1) Where is the school now? 2) What changes do we need to make? 3) How shall we manage these changes over time? 4) How shall we know whether our management of change has been successful?

The school assessment process is very similar to the development planning cycle proposed by Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991). Similar patterns of data gathering, planning, implementation, evaluation and additional data gathering and evaluation are found. (Appendix H)

The advantages of strategic planning are many. It provides a template from which a school can operate in order to focus reform efforts. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991) write:

Development planning is designed to allow the school to organize, with greater efficiency and success, its existing program of development and change. Because it promises greater control over the ubiquitous problem of 'innovation overload' greater success in making the changes actually work development planning is worth serious consideration. (p. 6)

A similar pattern of planning and address of identified needs is advocated by Dalin (1993) as he outlines a pattern of school improvement based on the same principle of identified needs, prioritized goals and evaluation of action plans. Dalin's (1993) Institutional Focus illustrates the importance of the planning process after a large scale organizational review. The advantages of this approach are

- *It is theory based and provides a comprehensive assessment*
- *It provides a broad database and gives all actors a chance to provide data on an equity basis*
- *It documents strengths and weaknesses of the school. Individuals do not need to stick their neck out to put sensitive data on the table. (p. 66)*

Plans at the initiation stage must be based on sound theory yet remain flexible enough to adapt to the local situation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976) It is within this context of flexibility that schools are allowed to develop their own plans within departmental and district level guidelines. Planning involves setting up a team to guide the innovation. The Internal Team referenced in the School Assessment Model serves that function. This team should consist of facilitators, users and other concerned persons. This team must be responsible for the early use of the innovation, including such important areas as establishing goals, identifying resources needed and available, determining the support mechanisms needed, determining the scope of the change, deciding if the change is realistic, and selecting early users. Fullan (1991) describes these functions as being concentrated in three areas: relevance, readiness, and resources. It is clear that the task of the facilitation team is crucial to the change.

The benefits of long range planning abound. School assessment involves setting long term goals and striving to achieve them. Having a goal in mind helps to focus the school improvement initiative. Asayesh (1993) reminds us that, "Plans can help schools maintain a clear focus in times of stress instead of latching on to one bandwagon after another. Planning provides a credible process for sorting through and evaluating new ideas and programs" (p 13)

The value of planning to school improvement initiatives such as school assessment was further supported by Gould (1991). She made the case that, with planning, school developers provide themselves with a blueprint that allows a guided and structured approach to quality generation. She wrote " Strategic Planning provides a 'blueprint' for staff developers and can serve as a model process for school improvement projects addressing major educational and social issues.(p 18)

2.6.4: Accountability and Outcome Based Reform

School assessment is designed such that schools are expected to work towards meeting or exceeding minimum levels of expectations as developed by the provincial department of education. The reform process is intended to guide schools towards becoming quality educational institutions. The criteria statements that are addressed in the organizational review provide the outcomes towards which schools are to work

One of the earliest supporters of Outcome Based Education (OBE) and reform was William Spady. His statements on what OBE means were delineated in 1988 as he wrote

(Outcome Based Education (OBE) means organizing for results: basing what we do instructionally on the outcomes we want to achieve, whether in specific parts of the curriculum or in the schooling

process as a whole. Outcome-based practitioners start by determining the knowledge, competencies and qualities they want students to be able to demonstrate when they finish school and face the challenges and opportunities of the adult world. Then, with these "exit outcomes" clearly in mind, they deliberately design curriculums and instructional systems with the intent that all students will ultimately be able to demonstrate them successfully. OBE, therefore, is not a "program" but a way of designing, developing, delivering, and documenting instruction in terms of its intended goals and outcomes. (p. 5)

Mitchell et al (1993), whose views coincide with Spady's, state their views on outcome based reform as

The fundamental restructuring of schools require staff development which far exceed the propagation of philosophy and the explanation of procedures. It requires integration of instruction initiatives and collaboration in teaching and learning. These efforts are driven by constancy of purpose as stated in Gwinnett's mission (p. 31)

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has attached a great deal of importance to the concept of outcome measure in school reform. The priority attached to the attainment of acceptable standards in the education system is outlined in the provincial Department of Education's Strategic Education Plan which was released in May, 1998. Schools are encouraged to follow the Department's lead and, together with the school district work to reach the outcomes that are desired. The strategic plan states:

Outcome Measures are yardsticks, or benchmarks used to measure progress toward achieving a strategic objective. They measure how well the organization is doing. A measure is a tool, or indicator, to assess the actual impact of the organization's activities. Every objective uses a set of

outcome measures to indicate progress. The measures provide a context against which the outputs and longer term outcomes of the education system can be evaluated.

During the next phase of the planning process, measures, baseline data, achievement targets and strategies will be identified for each of the nine objectives. It is important to note that any single measure will not provide a complete indication as to whether a particular objective has been achieved. Rather, a set of measures will be developed that, together should describe the Department's progress toward achievement of each objective. As part of the 1998 Action Plan (see section 8), an assessment team will be established to: develop, track, and analyze measures, identify targets, and prepare an annual report. Analysis of these data will influence and guide future iterations of the Department's plan.

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998, p. 14)

The direction in which Department is steering its schools mirrors the one it has set for itself. The idea is that a focused reform of the province's schools will occur. Literary support for outcome based reform efforts abound, including King and Evans (1991). They readily acknowledge that outcome based reform efforts have the potential to dramatically change school systems. Indeed, this approach to education reform has broad reaching appeal primarily as a result of its ability to couple control and autonomy (King and Evans, 1991). Schools are given expected and intended outcomes but they have the autonomy to decide themselves how to reach them. Schools are to fulfill the criteria statement in a manner that best suits the local school situation. The action plans that the school designs are responsible for providing a method to move the school closer to achieving the goals outlined in the criteria statements.

It would be reasonable to classify the mode of outcome-based education modeled under School assessment as transformational (Soto and Roth, 1993). Their description of transformational

outcome based education is that. " Transformational Outcome Based Education directs all educational efforts towards student achievement of exit outcomes" (p 42) The goal of school assessment is to generate quality schools from which graduates have mastered the prescribed exit outcomes. School assessment is designed such that all school efforts are directed to ensuring that the graduates do attain the levels of quality demanded.

This approach to outcome based education reaches beyond merely establishing curricular objectives. When a district compiles its strategic education plan, these goals are passed down to the schools. The schools work towards attaining these in the context of its own action plans. Ensuring that graduates have acceptable levels of efficiency in the prescribed exit outcomes are the focus of the school's efforts. This is a shift in education as it creates a broader picture of outcomes for students. Soto and Roth (1993) state

Transformational outcome-based education redefines the educational process, fosters a new paradigm that promotes equity of excellence in learner outcomes, and helps prepare our students for the 21st century (p 43)

This sentiment of support for such a mode of educational delivery was echoed by Spady and Marshall (1991). They also state that such a structure would benefit schools by having a mechanism for ensuring that graduates do attain established levels of competency in the prescribed curricular outcomes. They write

Why do schools exist today? The Transformational OBE answer to this question is bold "To equip all students with the knowledge, competence and orientation needed for success after leaving school." Hence, its guiding vision of the graduate is that of competent future citizen. When viewed

from this future-oriented, life-role perspective, success in school is of limited benefit unless students are equipped to transfer that success to life in a complex, challenging, high-tech future. (p 70)

The nature of the criteria statements ensure that the ideal graduate acquire the level of mastery as advocated by Spady and Marshall. The School Assessment process works towards helping schools grow so that their graduates are equipped for life beyond their secondary education.

The view of outcome based education as a tool for focusing school improvement initiatives is an approach adopted under the school assessment model. Schools have their prescribed targets that they develop. Throughout the process the school will implement plans designed to move the school towards accomplishment of the prescribed objectives. In outlining prerequisites for adoption of outcome based education, Boschee and Baron (1994) paraphrase the School Assessment Model

School Districts or schools interested in becoming outcome-based must make a commitment to educational improvement that is learner - centered and results- oriented. The process begins by identifying a common set of educational beliefs held by educators, learners, parents, and the community. From these beliefs will evolve a definition of what outcomes learners should attain in their preparation for the future and what processes need to be in place to ensure achievement of those outcomes by all learners. (p 196)

School assessment as a reform model seeks to have schools develop action plans to address concerns arising from a school profile that ascertains the schools standing in light of criteria statements. The criteria statements formulate the vision of what the school wishes to be. They constitute the desired outcomes and the aims for the school. The literature supports the common sense notion that until a school has an idea of where it wishes to be it is very difficult to plan to get there. Doherty and

Peters (1981) wrote, "Until the aims of a school system are stated and evaluated, there is no way of telling how well the system is performing its mission - or even knowing what its mission is " (p 607)

The advantages of using outcomes as focus for educational planning was further reiterated by Stephens and Herman (1984) The case was made that engaging in a solid assessment to determine what the desired goals of the schools are prior to planning is a much more effective means by which schools can be improved Involving the entire school community in this assessment, as the school assessment process in Newfoundland does, is more likely to be successful as consensus is built first They write, "This outcome-based planning model increases the potential for success because it starts by obtaining consensus on desired results." (p. 45)

The statements of Stephens and Herman (1984) have been supported in practice as well Since 1968 a school development program has been promoted from Yale University The Comer School development program utilizes the principles of outcomes and school planning to improve schools through methods that are very close to those implemented in the Provincial School Assessment model ([Http //www med yale edu /comer /quicklook.html](http://www.med.yale.edu/comer/quicklook.html)). The information contained on the aforementioned web site indicates that the levels of student achievement have risen significantly in Comer Schools. The levels of success in these school often results in schools that are at the forefront of their districts

At Whitmore Lake School District, Michigan, outcome based educational planning has been utilized to make their schools better Stephens and Herman (1984) state the following with respect to Whitmore Lake

The understandings and awareness created by using an outcome-based planning model, which involves and defines the responsibilities of students, parents, community members, and school people, have been very beneficial to the Whitmore Lake School District. The process has given us the support we need and a method we can use to develop and implement an innovative delivery system that promises to achieve the desired outcomes we have agreed upon (p. 47)

Similar initiatives are being followed in the Lawrence Public School System in Kansas. This district, utilizing an approach that involves evaluation, monitoring, and address of outcomes, has been recognized as an effective means of education reform. These same items are a part of school assessment in Newfoundland and Labrador. The intended long term outcome is sustainable reform that make positive, long lasting, and fundamental change to the quality of education. Speck (1996) advocates this model of school and staff development as being a valid means of reforming schools. Speck holds that the model which focuses on needs assessment, planning and professional activities can form the basis for school development. It too follows an outcome based approach to garnish holistic and long lasting changes at the school level.

In support of this Speck (1996) writes:

Figure 1 on page 34 outlines the professional development model for educational change. This overview gives educators a look at what must happen for sustained change to succeed within their schools. Too often, schools simply adopt the latest popular educational innovation without adequate training, overlooking what we know about the essential elements of best practice in professional development.” (p. 33)

If reforms are to be outcome based it is necessary that there be a means of ensuring accountability. With school assessment the accountability factor is worked into the system by having the requirement that the internal report from the school be signed off by the CEO of the district and the external team. This process ensures that the school has developed action plans that address the concerns identified during the formation of the school profile. Nevo (1995) identifies accountability as being one of the prime functions of evaluation at the school level.

The importance of high standards in education has been referenced in the literature. If high standards are to be expected, a system to ensure that these standards are being reached, or in the case of school assessment, being worked towards, must be in place. With school assessment the action plans are approved if they will address the identified concerns at the school level. The importance of setting standards based on the local situation, as school assessment does, is documented in Lieberman (1991). She proposes

We need high standards, but those standards must be adapted to local needs. They must be flexible, situational, and multicultural, rather than national, mandated, and standardized. They must be tied to instructional decisions that teachers have helped to make and for which they can be held accountable. (p 220)

Establishing and maintaining standards in education has been a core issue for school reform. The focal point for this issue was arrived at with the publication of the Royal Commission report. Recommendations 192 and 193 state:

Recommendation 192: that schools initiate a comprehensive assessment of each school every five years.

Recommendation 193 that the results of these assessments and other school level indicators be reported to school councils. Such reporting, particularly in small schools, must safeguard the anonymity of individual students
 (Williams et al., 1992, p. 392)

With assurances of standard attainment in place, schools under school assessment can work to achieve fundamental components of improvement. Schools are expected to operate within provincial and district expectations. School assessment, in keeping with Recommendation 192, allows for a system of accountability. When schools are expected to attain standards and a system is in place to ensure that these standards are reached, the likelihood of success improves.

2.7: Summary

The intention behind all reform initiatives in education is the improvement of the quality of education being delivered at the school level. Quality in education is the foremost concern of all reform processes. The importance of quality in education to the general public has increased. Those in charge of the public trust are scrutinizing educational institutions much more closely. As a result of such scrutiny, "Discussions of quality have begun to replace those of organizational effectiveness....the notion of quality is not tied to products. Rather, it deals with the quality of the system and all its components; hence researchers and practitioners are interested in the quality of inputs and processes as well as outputs" (Hoy and Miskel, 1996, p. 256)

School reforms are established so as to, "help schools, accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs and/or practices with better ones" (Fullan, 1991, p. 15). School assessment is a proposal to elicit this type of change in the Province's schools. It is similar in many

ways to change initiatives practiced elsewhere. Numerous school districts in the United States and Canada follow a similar pattern of needs assessment, goal establishment, strategic planning and evaluation. Success has been found in these districts under those models. The Charlotte - Mecklenberg School District, North Carolina, under the leadership of John Murphy, made tremendous improvements in the areas of student improvement by utilizing the principles of goals, planning and evaluation. (Doyle and Pimental, 1993)

The intended outcome of these reform initiatives and restructuring models is to generate quality schools. Such schools are defined by Barlosky and Lawton (1994) as being:

Quality Schools are committed to creating enhanced learning environments through the purposeful and cooperative actions of all individuals engaged in the educational enterprise. By developing knowledge of the system and processes through which education is delivered, Quality Schools are actively engaged in continuous selfimprovement and the educational enrichment of the communities they serve (p. x.)

If quality is to be reached it is imperative that the school continue to move forward. Improving schools cannot happen overnight. Time, commitment and a focused approach is needed to ensure that the schools of tomorrow are better than those of today. Crix and Ladbrooke (1998) state:

A school cannot stand still for very long: if it is not growing it will soon be deteriorating. While swift remedial action may occasionally be needed to improve a situation quick fixes are not the answer. School Improvement is a cumulative process. It is a journey not a destination, and it happens only as a result of goal setting, careful planning and building your team. Planning not only means thinking things through but writing them down as well. The school development plan has become

recognized as a tool of fundamental importance in enabling a head teacher to provide strategic leadership of a school. (p. 3)

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the education department is supporting a model of school development that does not involve the granting of accreditation. It is similar in process to the Accreditation Model of British Columbia minus the accreditation component. From a consultation paper released in 1995, the concept of accreditation was addressed.

*Assessment is a systematic process of gathering information about the nature and quality of schools
Accreditation is a status granted to a school after it has been assessed and found to meet or exceed stated criteria. The question of what to do with the assessment results once the Assessment has been completed, is critical. What and to whom will information be disseminated? How will this information be used to implement change? How is improvement going to be achieved?*

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995, pp. 8 - 9)

Within the literature there are published works that lend support to reform initiatives at the school level based on both an assessment or accreditation scheme. The questions that formed the focus of this study sought to gather an understanding of how it came to be that it was an assessment type model that was promoted.

Chapter 3 - Design of the Study

Section 3.1: Introduction

This study solicited information from key participants and administrators of the school assessment program in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Of key interest was the reasoning behind the adoption of this particular model for school reform in the province. In addition, the study obtained information from interview subjects regarding the history behind the development of the reform model. Information was gathered during the 1998 - 1999 school year.

Section 3.2: Population and Sample

The data were collected from 9 persons identified as key participants in the development and implementation of the school assessment model for school reform. All participants were sent letters prior to the interview to request their participation. Inclusion in the study was voluntary and all subjects had the option of nonparticipation.

Data for this study were collected using interviews conducted with a targeted sample group. These participants were selected on the basis of their involvement with the School Assessment Initiative in the province and their professional expertise in the area of school reform. Prior to the interview and following the subjects' agreement to participate in the study, a pre-interview questionnaire was sent to each participant. The results of this questionnaire were used to give the researcher a starting point for the interview. The participants comprised:

1. Two Persons from the Provincial Department of Education, Province of

Newfoundland and Labrador

2. **Four Persons from Memorial University of Newfoundland**
3. **Two Persons from Vista School District**
4. **A School Principal from a school involved in the Process of School Development.**
5. **A chairperson of an Internal School Development Committee.**

Section 3.3: Instrumentation

Semi structured interviews were conducted with the study participants. These participants were chosen as a result of their insight and involvement in the process that allowed school assessment to be developed as a means of reform in the education system of the Province. The interviews were loosely framed around the following research questions.

1. **Why is there a desire to reform schools at this time?**
2. **How committed are key educational administrators to reforming the educational system?**
3. **How is school assessment different from other reform initiatives such as school improvement?**
4. **What are the reasons the Department of Education opted for an assessment-based model of school reform as opposed to an accreditation-based model?**
5. **What are the benefits and challenges for the Department of Education, school districts and schools in supporting school assessment at this time?**

Subjects were encouraged to add information that was outside of the scope of these questions.

Prior to the interview, correspondence was sent to the participants which included a multi-item

questionnaire that gave the researcher a starting point from which to begin the interview process. (Appendix H)

Through the use of the interview and the pre-interview questionnaire, data were attained which helped the researcher attain an understanding of the school assessment model and its promotion by the provincial Department of Education. Being a qualitative study, its design was consistent with the research techniques desired for such studies, as espoused by LeCompte and Preissle.

Qualitative researchers, including ethnographers, deal with empirical data, or potentially verifiable information obtained from the environment and accessed via human senses. Sources and types of data are limited only by the creativity and energy of the researcher.

Data, then, are any kind of information which researchers can identify and accumulate to facilitate answers to their queries. A hallmark of qualitative and ethnographic research is eclecticism. The complexity and variability of human life in its natural habitat mandates that those who study it must collect rich and diverse data on whatever they study.

(Lecompte and Preissle, 1993 p. 158)

3.4 : Validity

In preparing the instrument for this study, the available literature related to school reform and change was reviewed. Accordingly, research questions were formulated. From these an interview schedule was designed that included a pre- interview questionnaire. The pre-interview questionnaire was a 12 item Likert scale that elicited responses to the research questions identified in Section 3.3. In addition space was made available for participants to add additional comments if they were inclined

to do so. Clarification of points made on the questionnaire was asked for and elaboration of comments made was requested. The structure of both the interview schedule and the pre-interview questionnaire was reviewed by Dr. George Hickman of Memorial University of Newfoundland and Dr. Harold Press of the Provincial Department of Education.

3.5: Collection of Data

In the Fall of 1998 and Winter of 1999, questionnaires were sent to, and interviews conducted with the research participants. Where it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews, phone interviews were conducted

The study used the technique of key informant interviewing. This entailed selecting persons that had, as a result of their involvement with the process or professional expertise, a special knowledge relating to school assessment. The participants that were selected had special knowledge of the process. Lecompte and Preissle (1993) advocated this technique as being valid for studies such as this one.

Key informants are individuals who possess special knowledge, status, or communicative skills and who are willing to share that knowledge and skill with the researcher. They frequently are chosen because they have access - in time, space or perspective - to observations denied the ethnographer. They may be long-time residents of a community, participants in key community institutions, or individuals knowledgeable of cultural ideals. They often are atypical individuals and should be chosen with care so as to ensure that representativeness among a group of key informants is achieved.

(Lecompte and Preissle, 1993. p. 166)

The subjects for the study were selected as a function of their involvement in the development and implementation of the reform model.

3.6: Analysis of Data

Following the collection of data through the interviews and questionnaires, an examination of the data was conducted to determine trends and commonalities. Interviews were transcribed and compared to identify recurring patterns. Of interest were patterns that revealed answers to the research questions indicated previously. The result of this analysis is indicated in chapter 4

Chapter 4 - Analysis of the Data

The following sections summarize the viewpoints of the research subjects'.

Section 4.1: Data gathered concerning Question 1. Why is there a desire to reform schools at this time?

Subject 1:

One of the key reasons offered by this subject for the desire to reform schools in this province was that the levels of achievement being attained by our students were not satisfactory. This was evidenced by the results from standardized tests such as the CTBS and CRT examinations. With poor scores by the students and the province as a whole being near the bottom on a national comparison, there was a natural expression of the need to improve the situation through a reform of the school system.

This subject also felt that as a province, there is a need to stay current and be effective. This entails a constant drive to continually improve the system. All organizations, including schools, need to be in a constant state of renewal. Unless the organization is working to improve, it will run the risk of becoming stagnant and falling behind its competitors. Any organization that draws on public funds is responsible for ensuring effectiveness and efficiency within the system. In light of declining student enrolment, reform is a necessity. This subject summarized this point by stating,

“There is always a notion that we have to constantly improve. We have to constantly be vigilant in the effort to ensure that the graduates of our school system are as qualified as they can be and that they are in a position to be competitive in the local and international markets. If you assume that goal, you will never be satisfied with where you are.”

(Subject 1. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998)

Subject 2:

This subject felt that the reform issue was brought to a head by the Royal Commission Report in 1992. This report clearly identified a need for reform in this province. Government, in this decade, has identified and promoted the concept of structural reform as a starting point for improving the education system of the province. These reforms dealt with governance issues as attested to by the debate over denominational education, restructuring and consolidation of School Boards, and later schools. Economics was a prime motivator for these reforms. Cost cutting was more of a driving force for reform than was the attainment of a quality educational system, at least from government's perspective. This subject stated, "Reform was more an issue of governance than of classroom issues."

Support for the notion of change within the educational system, was reinforced by the Province's poor showing on standardized tests. As our Province was performing poorly on these, few could argue the need to improve the system through some sort of reform.

Subject 3:

This subject stated that the notion of change and improvement should be inherent in any system. Leading the drive to improve, and thus reform, were three main factors. The first of these was a sense that the school system was not performing as it should and graduates were not at the level expected in terms of academic achievement.

The second factor was the desire to cut costs. This was in line with developments in the rest of the country. Education was a prime target for such cost cutting measures as it had a large initial budget. A declining student enrolment in this Province meant that justifying cuts to education would be easy for government. With so much money being spent on education in the province, and the results not being what were expected, many felt that there was a need to dramatically change the system.

Thirdly, there was the issue of governance. Government wanted to gain control over the school system so that it could implement further reforms. This was a dominant facet of Educational Reform in this province and continues to be an issue as it is still being contested in the courts

Reform was needed because of a concern with quality. This subject acknowledged that the Wells' government was quite critical of the education system and the role of government in it at the time. Under the current government, however, this subject felt that there was a return to the "old ways". He felt the present government has taken the stance that the system is quite good and the problem lies with those that are trying to tear it down. This subject concluded this point by stating, "The reality is if you are complacent and self congratulatory and believe you are good, that is a recipe for never improving."

Subject 4:

This subject began answering this question with the statement, "Reform is associated with growth and development. The alternative to growth and development is stagnation. When you stagnate, you start slipping backwards." (Subject 4 Personal Correspondence, December 11, 1998)

National trends and directions helped shape reform efforts. This province began a move to reform largely as a result of what was happening elsewhere in the country. As the rest of the country was moving to improve its schools, this Province had to move forward or be left behind. This subject elaborated by stating that, "A set of wheels was set in motion nationally. Royal Commission reports identified concerns with the education system in virtually every province where such reports were made." (Subject 4. Personal Correspondence. December 11, 1998) The subject indicated that there were other reports filed that identified deficiencies in the education system on a national basis.

In this Province, students have not achieved as well as hoped on various achievement indicators. The Royal Commission report made a statement to the effect that we need to move our students from a group that is persistently underachieving to a group that consistently ranks with the best in the nation. This became the impetus for reform at the provincial Department of Education. Current reform initiatives at the school level are results driven.

Governance issues have dominated the present reform initiatives. This move began in the 1960's and was promoted by NTA (the predecessor to the NLTA) as there was a desire expressed by them to reform denominational education in the Province.

Governance and learning are the objects of reform. There was a desire to gain more control over the system by government and there was also a desire to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom.

Subject 5:

From this subject's perspective, reform and restructuring had a political basis. The desire to alter, if not remove the Denominational Education System, drove the issue. Many of the reform initiatives were moved on primarily for economic reasons. This subject stated, "The feeling was there that there was too much of the provincial budget being spent on education. The provincial budget had to be reduced and the way to do this was to reduce the number of boards, schools, and so on "

Subject 6:

This subject felt the purpose of reform is to get schools refocused on the mission of the school. Academics are a priority and, as evidenced on a number of achievement indicators, the quality of classroom learning and indeed instruction needs to be examined. Reform will reorient schools so that academia becomes the prime focus of their operation.

Subject 7:

This subject indicated the release of the Williams report which spoke to a curricular basis for reform set the wheels of motion. Students are not as prepared as they could be for life after graduation and, as a result, our school system needs to be changed in a positive way. Today the public are demanding more from the publicly funded institutions. We have entered into an age of accountability and, consequently, schools are expected to perform or make the necessary changes

The taxpayers of this province are demanding that their tax dollars be used wisely. As a result, fiscal restructuring is a core component of the desire to change the school system so that it may be more effective and efficient

This subject summarized this question by stating, “ Society and the workplace are becoming more competitive. As a result, more is demanded of the education system. Reform is necessary in order for our schools to continue to meet public demands”.

Subject 8:

This subject strongly advocated that the reason for reform lies in the Province’s standings on standardized tests. These test results often show Newfoundland students below the national average. The subject felt that the perception is out there that our students’ scores do not equate with those of other provinces. The interviewee felt that over the years the standards in the Province have dropped. A mark of 80 Percent in this province would not be equal to a mark of 80 percent from some other province, however, the subject did not use concrete examples to illustrate this point.

The subject felt that the Province had to engage in some sort of reform as other provinces were involved in such matters. If the Province did not participate it would fall further behind. The need for this reform was identified by educators and the subject revealed that NTA was promoting the idea of reform as far back as the early 1960's

The Royal Commission Report focused attention on the need for reform. It delineated the state of the province's education system and clearly outlined the need for change. This coincided with concerns from the business community that the graduates of the education system were not equipped to meet their needs. The expectations they held for graduates were not being met. Many graduates were not as job ready as the business community would like them to be.

The drive to reform the schools of the Province was also pushed by increased parental involvement. Parents were asking more questions. As a result, the school system had to change so that those questions could be answered.

Subject 9:

This subject felt that reform in this Province was spawned from the reform initiatives being pursued globally. With reforms being pursued elsewhere, the pressure exists to move forward or be left behind. In an era of public accountability this is not an option. The Province could not remain in the past. Reform was born out of a process of globalization. Our students had not performed well on standardized tests and thus would have to be given the opportunity to do better. This would involve reforming the education system.

Coupled with this notion is the issue of student employment. The possibilities of finding employment without a quality education is much lower in today's provincial, national, and international context than it was when we were more dependent on the fishery and forestry sectors for employment. The importance of a quality education has increased significantly. As a result, the

public is demanding more of its schools. This subject summarized by stating that. "There is a recognition that being poorly educated won't suffice in the new economy"

Subject 10:

This subject addressed this question by referring to work that had begun in 1998. The indicators project undertaken by the Newfoundland Department of Education had looked at the concept of Outcome Based Education and its application to the Newfoundland context. This project was an attempt to set up accountability in the K - 12 system. Contained in the Indicators Project was the production of school profiles and school report cards.

With the release of information to the general public, a shift in thinking occurred. The instillation of public accountability was a necessary first step in school reform. It prompted those within the system to look inward and become self critical.

With respect to the concept of reform itself, this subject did feel that there was confusion as to what school reform actually is. In many cases, school reform is analogous to school consolidation. Yet, classroom reform is a much broader issue. Since the William's Report (previously referenced as "Our Children. Our Future), there has been an impetus on curriculum review and accountability

With the removal of the churches in terms of governance, barriers to structural reform were ousted. With a declining enrolment of approximately 4% annually, school closures and consolidations are inevitable. The Denominational System prevented this to some extent. This was qualified by the

subject who added that the necessarily existing status of some schools would prevent removal of schools entirely from rural areas.

The subject stated that school consolidation allowed for wiser expenditures of dollars in the education system of the Province. These savings are largely administrative and would allow for more money to be spent on things such as professional development. This is important as the demographics of the teachers in the Province show an aging population, many of whom have been away from formal training for many years. Also, as a result of cutbacks and the seniority clauses in the teachers' contracts, teachers' assignments do not always match their academic qualifications

In terms of academic achievement, the subject stated that the Province of Newfoundland has historically lagged behind the national average on standardized measures, such as the CTBS. The subject felt that this gap has gotten smaller, partly due to the improved qualifications of the teachers in the Province

The subject advocated the view that, as a result of Newfoundland being isolated as a province and having an economy that has traditionally been weak, world class students are needed. Out-migration levels dictate that our graduates need to be better than average. When they leave the province they are competing with the students from outside the province, indeed in many cases outside the country. The loss of many unskilled jobs from the labor market means that our students need to be better trained. As a result, the K-12 system has to prepare students for a post secondary education. The current labor market demands more skills and higher literacy levels from our students

Section 4.2: Data gathered concerning Question 2. How committed are key educational administrators to reforming the educational system?

Subject 1:

This subject began addressing this item by indicating that all organizations will have individuals who resist change. The success of the change depends upon the nature of the organization itself. Within the organization the culture may be conducive to changing or not, and schools, from this subject's perspective, are no different. Some schools will be more accepting of change than others. This was evident in the initial pilot phase where, in one of the twelve schools the project was not successful largely as a result of the principal not being open to change.

At the Department of Education, some divisions are more committed than others to change. This is representative of the nature of all organizations, and the Department is no exception.

This subject went on to add that, in terms of resources, the commitment is there to the extent that budgets allow. The subject added however, that more effective planning would allow for better management of the resources being provided. Districts and schools should plan for activities well in advance and allocate their priorities accordingly. If this were done, the resources currently provided would be sufficient to allow the program to work. In closing, the subject made the following statement:

The point is why are you in business. You are an organization that is funded by public funds and one of the things in order to see where you are going and to see how you are doing is a need to plan. If you don't have a plan, what direction are you going in? You are simply following the direction of the past and hope somehow to get there.

(Subject 1 Personal Correspondence December 21, 1998)

Subject 2:

This subject felt that there was certain commitment at certain levels. This subject added that commitment is most important at the school level. Unless all stakeholders, particularly local stakeholders are on side, there are going to be problems bringing about change. This person reiterated this point by stating that,

If this (the school assessment reform initiative) is not communicated properly with full information to people in schools and school councils, unless everyone understands what its about and how it can help education, then there are going to be problems

(Subject 2 Personal Correspondence December 21, 1998)

This subject felt that it was unlikely that new resources will be provided. It will be necessary for districts and schools to redeploy present resources. This subject did acknowledge that it would be difficult to redeploy resources to such an initiative if new and more pressing problems such as air quality arose. The level of funding for resources is limited by fiscal realities.

Subject 3:

This subject contended that the present government is not as committed to reform as the previous administration was. He felt that the Wells administration was more supportive of and committed to changing the education system in the Province.

This subject added that teachers are professionals, but in all organizations there are those who resist change. Teachers cite the unwillingness to change as being caused by a lack of resources to support change. This, according to the subject, is not a valid argument. Resources have been provided to the schools to support reform. Schools need to be aware of fiscal realities and creatively use what they have been given.

Subject 4:

This subject acknowledged that many people do feel that there is insufficient commitment to reform is not there and cite historical precedent. The subject mentioned the previous school growth initiative specifically in this regard. This subject did believe that there was a great deal of support for the School Assessment model. He elaborated by stating, "I haven't seen anything in my career where commitment is there to the extent this is. This follows from the district, the Minister, and all the way to the school trustees. (Subject 4. Personal Correspondence. December 8, 1998) The subject felt that this was how schools will do business in the future.

Within the local school district he felt that commitment to school assessment was very high, especially among school administrators. According to the subject, 95% of the districts' administrators are supportive of this initiative.

In terms of resources, fiscal realities limit what districts can do. Schools and districts will have to be creative in how they utilize what they have been given, as it is unlikely that new resources will be provided.

Subject 5:

From this subject's perspective, financial decisions are dictating level of commitment to initiatives in education. The Department of Education is forced to make many of its decisions based on financial priorities. Politically there is not the will to finance education as it was in the past. As a result, it is the budget that determines what the Department will or will not support and this carries over to the school level. Often the refusal comes not out of not wanting to support a given initiative, but simply being unable to. This subject conclude by stating, "The will is there for the administrators of the system to reform but the resources are not there to enable administrators to reform the way they want to" (Subject 5 Personal Correspondence, December 21, 1998)

At the classroom level, this subject felt that there was a tremendous amount of commitment to improving the education system. Yet, there cautions that develop when people hear the phrases school improvement and school growth. Some in the system will be resistant because of the bad experiences they may have had with these initiatives.

This subject concluded by making the point that with all the chaos in education over the past few years, it has only been the amount of commitment by people in the system that has kept it running.

Subject 6:

From this subject's perspective school assessment is a high priority item for the District. At administrative council meetings school development and reform are frequently part of the agenda.

School administrators are expected to report and be accountable for the status of school development in their schools.

By way of resources, this initiative is getting as much support as anything. Time has been made available for schools to carry out reform activities. This project has been placed at the top of the list in terms of giving time to the schools; however, schools do have to operate within fiscal realities. Districts can only support this within the realities of their budgets.

Subject 7:

From this subject's perspective, the Province is fortunate to have a group of teachers that are as committed to their work as you will find anywhere in the country. The subject stated, "We have people who are prepared to work hard to do whatever they can to ensure that students get the best out of their schooling experience." (Subject 7 Personal Correspondence, January 6, 1999) The subject did acknowledge that there is a need for people in the system to work more efficiently.

The subject went on to say that 99% of the individuals he knew were very committed and the willingness to work smarter was emerging. Additional funding is needed, but as receipt of this is unlikely, we have to be willing to work within present realities. It was felt by the subject that working strategically can allow much to be accomplished.

This subject felt that the Department of Education provides resources to the extent possible in budgetary allowances. The funding provided is not enough but this is a common theme throughout

the country. Districts, in turn, allocate resources to the schools based on their budgetary restrictions. Classroom reform has not been funded in recent years but, at the same time, this subject acknowledged, classroom level reform has not occurred. Reform to this point has been largely structural.

Subject 8:

From an administrative point of view the commitment level is very high. The Department of Education and the local school district has mandated that this process will be a core part of school reform in the future. Most boards are beginning to look at incorporating it into the school reform initiatives in their schools. In Vista School District this process has been incorporated into the district's strategic plan.

In terms of resources this subject felt that resources are provided to the extent that budgets allow. Government has not provided enough to the districts and, as a result, what can be allocated to the schools is limited. The Board is doing the best it can within its limitations.

Vista District is very committed to implementing a structured process of school reform. Reform has been incorporated into the strategic plan and school assessment is how schools in the District will address reforming. At district office there is a person assigned to ensure that schools operate within a school development model. The district has gone as far as to develop its own model that grew out of school assessment.

Initially, at the school level, there was some skepticism about the process, largely due to the perceptions about reform generated by school improvement and school growth. This subject felt, though, that once teachers became involved in the process and could see the possibility for results, the commitment would be there.

Subject 9:

This subject felt that the commitment to reform schools exists but not necessarily reforms to classroom practice. The subject felt that government has shown commitment to reform along structural lines. He elaborated by stating, "They (government) are committed to reform, to structural reform as referenced in the Williams' report. There is a heavy emphasis on structural reform."

(Subject 9 Personal Correspondence December 21, 1998)

This subject felt that, up to this point in time, districts have had to focus on structural changes. Classroom reform issues have not been addressed as they should; however, there are exceptions to this. Vista School District was one district that required very few structural changes. As a result, it was able to press on with curricular reforms. All districts want to do this but they have had to deal with the structural issues first. Thus, at present, the focus for most districts is on the structural changes.

This subject felt that there is frustration by principals at the school level with reform. Professional development days have been cut and the quality of work life is not improving, and in some cases it

is declining Teachers and school administrators want classroom reform but they are not seeing it at present

Resource provision is also a problem. Implementation of reform without proper support is difficult Yet districts and the Department of Education do provide resources to the extent that budgetary decisions allow

Subject 10:

The subject felt that there is a strong commitment to eliminate duplication in the system. As a result of the financial squeeze that all government departments find themselves under there, is a need to be more efficient There have been improvements in education in the Province but that may not be related to reform efforts.

People, active in the reform process, have had to push to keep reform on the Department of Education's agenda. Senior executives at the Department have had to be concerned with short term critical issues such as air quality The challenge is to keep long term thinking in the picture

All personnel have very large workloads. Yet the time has been found by key personnel to address and to keep school development as a current issue. Commitment is needed by senior people, which has been there, in order for the process to work. The Minister of Education has publicly stated that there is a commitment to accountability in the education system.

The school districts get supported from the Department of Education under the blanket of School Development. For those Districts participating in this initiative there has been a unit provided to coordinate the process at the district level. All districts have focused on school improvement initiatives. The Vista school district has put in place a very specific model that is unique to its schools. All districts have expressed that they do not want an imposed model. To that end, the Department is in the process of compiling a resource binder that districts can use in their school reform initiatives.

Once the pilot phase was completed, the Department provided a consultant for three years to work with the districts. This work tied in closely with the school indicators program. The model of school reform that seems to be most favored is one whereby the districts develop their own specifics with Departmental support where needed. This is the approach that the Department will follow.

Section 4.3: Data gathered concerning Question 3. How is School Assessment different from other reform initiatives pursued in the past such as school improvement?

Subject 1:

This subject stressed that the school assessment process is designed such that its focus is on student achievement. It is a model of school reform that requires more accountability. School Improvement was primarily a process model that tended to focus on staff issues.

The school assessment process incorporates the broader community and utilizes a discrete set of standards on which the school is judged. The subject elaborated by stating, "School assessment

articulates the standards by which you are going to assess yourself". (Subject 1. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1999) This model, unlike past efforts, provides a measure by which a school can measure progress.

In closing, the subject made the following statement:

The way school Assessment is set up it will probably be more effective than any other government project. Typically government projects are setup such that government sets it up and resources it in order to get it done. Eventually the resources runs out and the project dies. This project has been set up in a school district and this district has implemented it. If it proves successful then nothing breeds growth like success.

(Subject 1. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1999)

Subject 2:

This subject did not see the school assessment process as differing greatly from previous reform initiatives. This subject felt that school assessment systematized the previous reform initiatives in that it standardized the means to ascertain what is occurring in the schools.

Subject 3:

This subject felt that there was no conflict between school assessment and school improvement. The School Assessment Model merely moves to provide an external validator within the system. The subject went on to state, "If you believe that school improvement is all that is needed, you do not need an accreditation model." (Subject 3. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1999)

The School Improvement Model was largely an internal process in the view of this subject. He felt that it was hard to be critical with the inherent bias. Subjects would be biased as a result of their vested interest in the system. School assessment, with its external validators, removes some of this bias. This subject saw school assessment as being an improvement as it standardized the process of school evaluation and critique, and made it less open to subjective interpretation.

Subject 4:

This subject, whose district has developed its own model that has grown out of the School Assessment model, identified the key difference with school development, as that it operates from a strategic plan. This makes the reform more focused and outcomes driven than school improvement. The process also places a greater emphasis on student achievement.

Any action plans that are developed during the process grow out of documented needs, as opposed to a consensus, as would have been the case with school improvement. As a result, the adversarial role of district office, as this subject viewed it, is reduced. This model promotes addressing strengths and weaknesses in a non-threatening professional manner.

Subject 5:

This subject felt that there was a role and need for both school assessment and school improvement. She strongly felt that it is a mistake to assume there is a "one best way" to proceed with school reform. She felt that there is a need for action research in the schools that school assessment does promote this type of ongoing reflective practice among teachers.

Subject 6:

This subject saw school assessment as being a vast improvement over the school improvement initiative. The school assessment process would lead to development of a strategic plan that the school system is more accountable for attaining. Under the school improvement initiative there was very little accountability.

Subject 7:

From this subject's viewpoint, the School Assessment Model is considerably different from School Improvement. The Vista School District expanded the original School Assessment Model to develop its own School Development Model. Unlike school improvement, this model operates from and requires the development of a strategic plan at the school level that will follow the guidelines set by the District's own plan.

The process being followed in Vista School District identifies student achievement as its primary focus. This was not necessarily the case with school improvement. This subject felt that often student achievement was pushed to the bottom of the priority list under school improvement.

In order for the process to work, reform initiatives at the school level have to be tied to the District's strategic plan. All schools will operate under the strategic plan's guidelines. This is a notable change from School Improvement where schools were free to establish their own directions and goals.

Subject 8:

This subject stressed that this process requires and operates from a strategic plan. School improvement did not do this. There is an emphasis on student achievement which was not necessarily present with school improvement. The School Assessment Model is a more focused and accountable model for school reform as it has an external validation component.

Subject 9:

The School Assessment Model focuses on feedback. Through assessment, it is established where the school is in relation to its targets. Plans are developed on the basis of this assessment. Data is gathered that serves as a baseline. Action plans are developed that reflect identified needs and implemented. A comparison can be made to see how effective the initiatives conducted actually were. Under School Improvement the comparisons before and after could not be drawn. The subject stated, "Schools did a very good job of planning but a very poor job of implementing. If they did implement (action plans) they didn't know the outcomes of the implementation." (Subject 9 Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998)

This subject felt that school assessment provides a mechanism to help those in the school improvement process. Once plans are made the school assessment process ensures that the consequences of those plans are known. This model provides a means of accountability. If the initiatives attempted are unsuccessful it would allow people to be aware of this and raise questions. By having an internal look at the school environment a more valid assessment for the school

situation can be conducted. School improvement did not provide for such an indepth assessment of the school community.

Subject 10:

School Assessment has two unique elements from this subject's viewpoint. These are.

1. criterion statements
2. the importance of external accountability

School assessment has focused on student achievement as being the primary goal of school reform efforts. In the Vista District the whole process operates from within the confines of the district's strategic plan.

Section 4.4: Data gathered concerning Question 4. What are the reasons the Department of Education opted for an assessment-based model of school reform as opposed to an accreditation -based model?

Subject 1:

This subject felt that in this Province the educational climate would best favor an Assessment Based Model of reform. The desire was for the schools of the Province to develop and grow, in short improve and achieve, as the subject put it, "more than a plaque on the wall". (Subject 1, Personal Correspondence, December 21, 1998) As one of the proponents of the Reform Model, the subject felt that it was important that a model be put in place such that those involved in the school system would not be threatened by, while at the same time being subjected, to accountability measures.

In Newfoundland their interest was in developing a process model. The subject went on to state that the interest was in developing a model in which schools, "engaged in active self assessment, and look at themselves in light of certain defined measures and getting external validation of that "(Subject 1 Personal Correspondence December 21, 1998)

Subject 2:

From this subject's perspective, there was a feeling that reform was needed from a curricular standpoint. Coupled with this was a desire to demonstrate that reform was about more than governance of the school system. Assessment became the preferred option largely because, at the time, there were more people in the Department that had an expertise in assessment than in accreditation.

Accreditation would have been difficult to implement in the Newfoundland school system. If a school did not get accredited there would be numerous barriers to school closure. Geographically, this would have been impossible in some areas of the Province.

This subject did feel that accreditation would be revisited in the future. The subject felt that assessment is a step in the direction of focusing on achievement but it is not enough. Parents will, the subject felt, ask more direct questions as they become more comfortable with their expanded role in the school system. The subject felt that assessment will be a stepping stone to an accreditation based model.

The subject concluded that she felt that the Department was convinced by people from outside that accreditation had inherent difficulties that would lead to failure. Assessment was a softer model and would be able to make in-roads. Rather than do nothing, the Department decided to adopt a model that had a chance of success.

Subject 3:

The Province promoted an assessment model over accreditation largely because it placed less importance on the notion of the external evaluation. With a lessened role of the external evaluation, an assessment model would suffice. There was also a higher cost associated with the Accreditation Model. The original team did have a means of overcoming this; however, but the subject stated that he would rather not elaborate on this.

Subject 4:

When accreditation was first proposed the timing was wrong for it. This initiative was proposed when other larger reforms were being put in place. Hence this initiative got pushed to the side. There were also collective bargaining issues to be dealt with.

Accreditation was not adopted partly because of political reasons. The Chair of the committee that proposed accreditation was losing favor. At the time he could do no right in the minds of many at the Department of Education. Regardless of what this person put forward it would meet with resistance at the Department. The subject did feel that accreditation will be revisited in the future.

Subject 5:

This subject addressed this question by making reference to the fact that accreditation had been examined in this Province on numerous occasions in the past. In the past, the concept has been rejected as a result of concern over implementation in rural areas

In light of the history of accreditation in the Province, the Department opted to examine another model. The subject elaborated by stating:

There has been a history of looking at accreditation, looking at the pros and cons of accreditation and not being totally comfortable with all aspects of accreditation. This is partly the reason that the Department opted for a different model.

(Subject 5 Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998.)

The subject also felt that the expense associated with an accreditation type model was a barrier to its acceptance. Implementation of an assessment based model, though costly, is less expensive than an accreditation model. Assessment is also a better fit, according to the subject, with previous school improvement initiatives.

Subject 6:

One of the major barriers to accreditation was the cost factor. This model would prove to be a big budget item. The subject explained by stating, "If a school fails to be accredited you can no longer open as a school. School districts would be responsible to do whatever was necessary to make the school accreditable again." (Subject 6. Personal correspondence. December 12, 1998)

The subject felt that assessment, on the other hand, would identify the areas of concern for the school but still allow the school to operate. As a result of this, as well as political and budgetary reasons, school assessment was promoted instead.

Subject 7:

This subject began by referring to the State of Kentucky which, he felt was the home of the accreditation type models of school reform. Accreditation is a punitive model in which penalties are brought to bear. In this Province, there is a larger degree of unionization which would impede the implementation of a punitive type model.

With accreditation a school either receives accreditation status or not. Refusal to accredit schools in rural Newfoundland would create problems that have not been witnessed in other provinces. Criticisms of the local schools could cause great strife. Regardless of the status, parents would have to send their children to those schools. As a result, accreditation would create the potential for strife and acrimony. The subject made the point that, "Accreditation would be rife with all kinds of potential divisiveness between teachers and parents, students, you name it..." (Subject 7. Personal Correspondence. January 6, 1999)

The subject strongly felt that an accreditation type model had the potential to tear small communities apart. It could potentially drive a wedge into these communities. As a result of this, accreditation is not a model we desire for the Province. It has too great a potential for problems.

Subject 8:

In this subject's view accreditation would operate from a checklist. It operates from the premise that all schools are the same and thus can be evaluated under the same criteria. Assessment on the other hand is a broader model with a wider focus. It has more flexibility, is more process oriented, and involves all stakeholders. The model focuses on the individual school and is a living model. Unlike the accreditation models which are evaluative, assessment revolves around quality evaluation and is more outcome based. It is a formative model that would be more conducive to collegial reform within the school community.

Subject 9:

This subject made the statement that:

A number of people in the Province when they looked at various models of accountability would have promoted one that heavily emphasized an external validation. (Accreditation) The Chair of this reform knew enough of the research that in districts where this had been done it hadn't translated into improvement. He knew the research and realized that accountability could be used as a growth model. (Assessment)

(Subject 9. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998)

This subject felt that the internal teams could assess schools and the presence of an external team was not crucial to ensuring a quality reform. As a result a cheaper, more efficient model was adopted - that being Assessment.

Subject 10:

This subject felt that other subjects would be better qualified to comment on this question and declined comment.

Section 4.5: Data gathered concerning Question 5. What are the benefits and challenges for the Department of Education, school districts and schools in supporting school assessment at this time?

Subject 1:

One of the key benefits that this subject saw for this initiative was the focus it gave to school reform. It is an Accountability Model that ensures that reform efforts are focused on the education of the children in the school system. In addition, it sets the guidelines by which schools will evaluate themselves.

The subject added that, "School Assessment articulates what the standards by which you are going to assess yourself." (Subject 1 Personal Correspondence, December 21, 1998)

This subject was very optimistic about the possibilities for success with this model. He felt that the model incorporated a broader school community than previous attempts at reform in the Province and by involving a broader base success was more likely. The subject elaborated on this by stating:

The way School Assessment is set up is in such a way that it will probably be more successful than any other Government project. Typically Government projects are that government sets it up and resources it in order to get it done. Eventually resources run out and the project dies. This way, it

has been set up in one District (VISTA) and this District has implemented it. If you get a success, nothing breeds growth like success

(Subject 1. Personal Correspondence December 21, 1998)

This subject saw the possibility for partnerships developing between the school districts out of this initiative. This again was interpreted as being a positive facet of the Model. Being involved in the Model provides in itself strong opportunities for professional development

By way of challenges, the subject acknowledged that a strong commitment from the top is crucial. The process is labor intensive and does not produce immediate successes. As a result, positive leadership is needed to keep the process moving. If a plan is in place, it will alleviate the pressures in a situation where there are concerns about a schools' level of achievement. Parents and other stakeholders would be less concerned if they knew a plan were in place at the school to address areas of concern. School assessment does ensure that these plans are developed

Subject 2:

This subject expressed support for the school assessment model. The sentiment was expressed that he would support the Department of Education in pushing for its implementation. But, there was also concern expressed that the model was very expensive to implement. He was not sure that it was a model we, as a Province could afford but, at the same time, was not sure that we could afford not to. (Subject 2. Personal correspondence December 21, 1998)

The subject was not totally convinced that the external team was necessary to provide the level of accountability that was desired. As a cost saving measure the subject felt that it could be provided in other ways

There were many parts of the model that the subject felt were quite positive. The action planning, evaluation and reassessment were felt to be crucial and necessary to build on the previous school growth initiatives in the Province. The school growth model failed in that it did not emphasize assessment. This model builds on and improves the school growth process.

The literature, as this subject saw it, strongly supports a model that was flexible and could adapt to individual school situations. The subject was not totally convinced that this model was able to do that. Yet the subject did agree that this model may have a chance of succeeding based on its uniqueness

Subject 3:

This subject adamantly made the point that a key benefit of an initiative such as school assessment was that it focuses schools on improving. The subject was clear in making the point that he/she did not see school improvement as being a substitute for either an assessment or an accreditation based model

The subject felt that these types of initiatives could stir up activity and cause people to be reflective. These types of activities, as this subject viewed it, helped to disseminate what people are doing. The

subject felt that this type of model, with its external validation, could provide concrete means to ascertaining how well or how poorly the reforms are working.

The subject did acknowledge that there were challenges. Schools are, as this subject put it, "busy places to be" (Subject 3. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998) As a result, teachers would be hard pressed to find more time to put into this initiative.

In addition to the time factor, there is also the question of funding and resources. This model is a costly one. Yet the cost is worth it from this subject's perspective.

Subject 4:

This subject saw the school assessment pilot and the reform initiatives that grew out of it, as being a far more focused means by which education in this Province could be improved. The process centered its attention on issues dealing with the student. The core goal that was addressed under this process was student achievement. The subject saw a shift, "a paradigm shift away from the touchy feely - to the institution of academic expectations." (Subject 4. Personal Correspondence. December 8, 1998) As a result there was a move toward Outcomes Based Education. The measure of a school's success would be its results. The school assessment process provide a model that would focus a school's reform efforts on the achievement of the students in the prescribed curriculum.

By doing this, the reform effort was structured so that, in schools that participated in the process, the entire school community would be involved. This ensured that a broader spectrum of subjects would

be party to and indeed take ownership of the initiative. As a side benefit, the often adversarial role that is felt between district office and the school with such initiatives would be lessened. Teachers are often resistant to those initiatives that are imposed from central office. With this process, teachers should feel less threatened. As professionals they should come to realize that this process is designed to assist in the delivery of the prescribed curriculum. It is not set to point out any inferiority (Subject 4. Personal Correspondence. December 8, 1998)

In terms of challenges, this subject saw the biggest challenge as being the implementation of the developed plans. The process is labor intensive and to find the time and energy to fully implement it may be challenging for schools. Yet, if the process is to work, implementation is the key. As principals will be accountable for the implementation of the plans, strong leadership is crucial.

Subject 5:

This subject had some positive views on the assessment model of school reform. The subject thought that this model reflected current thinking on school improvement. The subject elaborated by stating that,

The idea of having a team go into a school, do the kind of in-depth observations, feed back and report to the staff is a legitimate means by which to conduct school reform initiatives. Such a formative model can lead to real school growth without the threatening overtones as would be present under a more summative means of reform.

(Subject 5. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998)

The subject also added that this model promoted action research which is very necessary in our schools. By having the members of the school community, teachers, parents and students involved in assessing the needs of their school, the process is indeed promoting a real means to true reform and professional development for staff.

In terms of challenges, this subject felt that there was a very large cost factor associated with the model. The model is a "Cadillac System," (Subject 5. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998) which the subject was not sure could be afforded at this time. The cost for travel, lodgings, and substitute release time would limit the Province's ability to effectively implement the model.

Yet the biggest challenge to the success of this model was the perceived reservations from those in the system. History has not been kind to such reform efforts in this Province. Words such as school growth and school improvement generate caution and cynicism among teachers of this Province (Subject 5. Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998)

Subject 6:

This subject felt that school assessment does produce a document that can hold schools accountable for what they are doing. If schools are to be effectively reformed we need to get to the issue of what schools are supposed to be doing. To date the bulk of the reform efforts have been on the infrastructure. This school assessment process allows the focus to shift to classroom issues.

In terms of challenges, the subject felt that the process would be easier to implement if the "baggage" of past reform efforts were not there. Many teachers are resistant to going through the process because they feel that it will be an unproductive use of their time and energies (Subject 6 Personal Correspondence December 9, 1998)

The process is labor intensive and teachers need to see a purpose for the effort and time. The process requires too much time and effort for teachers to engage in it entirely on their own time. Districts will need to be willing to devote human resources if the process is going to succeed. (Subject 6 Personal Correspondence December 9, 1998)

An additional challenge comes from the deadlines and time frames inherent to the process. More time needs to be made available. The issue then becomes one of how often can schools be closed for in service/professional development time. The loss of instructional time could negate the gains attained through the process.

Subject 7:

This subject felt that, in light of the structural changes that are occurring in the school system, a realization would have to be made that things are not going to be as they were. Schools are going to have change in light of this. There will be less contact from district offices with individual schools. This, in itself, is in keeping with the concept of site based management.

This subject felt that there was a lot to be gained from this type of model. There is a need for a blending of bottom up and top down approaches to school reform. If a district has a strategic plan and schools are asked to do an organizational review, develop a mission, vision, and determine strengths and weaknesses and develop plans to act on them then the potential for real growth is there (Subject 7. Personal Correspondence. January 6, 1999) It is the staff that develop this plan and, as a result, it is likely that the staff will take greater ownership of the process.

This subject saw the consultation that occurs with the broader school community as being a positive with this model. The more schools are accountable for what they do the more important it is to get members of the school community involved. This model promoted this type of involvement. The subject again emphasized that with involvement comes ownership or "It's hard to mutiny if you've been part of the decision". (Subject 7 Personal Correspondence. January 6, 1999)

As an added benefit the subject felt that being involved in the process would provide an avenue for professional development for teachers who were part of the internal or external teams. In depth involvement in school improvement issues would allow teachers to focus on what it is that can be done to improve classroom instruction. This model allows a focus on classroom issues, which was not necessarily the case with other reform models.

Yet, the subject did acknowledge that this model would provide challenges. Foremost, would be the motivation of teachers. With this process there is delayed gratification. As a result, the teachers in the system may find it difficult to commit to the long term. The demographics of the teaching

population in the Province compounds this issue. We have a large percentage of senior teachers that are going to be exiting the profession soon. Motivating them to devote considerable time and effort will be difficult. (Subject 7 Personal Correspondence. January 6, 1999)

With strategies outlined in the action plan, another obstacle is to remain on course. Time deadlines and adherence to them will require considerable effort and strong leadership. Yet the chances of success with a plan are considerably greater with a plan than without one. The subject elaborated by stating:

If you have a framework put in place, knowing that it is going to be a 3 - 4 period before benefits are apparent that is one thing. If there is no plan in place and schools are going to be helter skelter without a plan it is unlikely results will occur. The chances of success are greater with a plan than without one.

(Subject 7 Personal Correspondence January 6, 1999)

Subject 8:

This subject saw the process as creating opportunities for growth. He acknowledged that all schools need to improve and grow. Everyone who has a stake in the education of the Province's children can participate in the process. This model provides a means to gauge progress and indicate whether or not the targeted objectives are being met.

The model does present problems and challenges. Primarily this model requires an abundance of time and work on the part of teachers. The schools that had internal teams established found that it required weekly meetings of 2-3 hours in duration for a one year time frame. If everyone is to be

involved it will be a challenge to find the time. (Subject 8. Personal Correspondence December 10, 1998) It is crucial in this process that people are brought on board from the beginning. Past efforts to reform schools have made many teachers leery about becoming involved in this type of initiative. Overcoming this is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Subject 9:

This subject felt that a prime barrier to the incorporation of the School Assessment Model was the concern that this model would have difficulties dealing with individual school situations. The subject had reservations about whether the process could take into account individual school cultures and the various socio-economic factors in the school. The setting of arbitrary standards that all schools are expected to meet caused this subject a degree of concern.

The nature of teachers and their customization to various periodic initiatives have left them with a level of detest for "buzz words". Many have taken the view that this, like other initiatives, is a trend that will pass. If the initiative is to be a success then strong leadership is needed.

Teachers may feel threatened by this type of initiative. Many teachers may take this as a personal attack on their abilities as professionals. The subject elaborated by stating that:

Unfortunately sometimes teachers see measures like this as being some sort of accountability on the profession. And there is always that mix between the attempt to move forward and do better with what we're doing as opposed to seeing it as something that's evaluating how teachers are doing.

(Subject 9 Personal Correspondence. December 21, 1998)

Subject 10:

This subject expressed views on the challenges and benefits by stating that there were considerable positive and negative aspects of the process. The subject felt that the model provided a means through which accountability could be accomplished and focused efforts on reform at the classroom level. School development is all about improving learning opportunities and outcomes for students. Planning for change involves a review of current status, an analysis of what a school is doing well and what it is not, development of goals, and development of a plan to see those goals achieved. Challenges arise because this involves hard work, and some factors lie beyond the traditional scope of what has been considered to be the domain of the school. A focused effort has a better chance of succeeding when all those who have a stake in the outcomes are supportive, but this is not always the case.

Section 4.7: Conclusion

The issue of school reform is a very complex one. The education system and its improvement are the intended goals for all who are involved in this process. Yet, often the process advocated for reaching this goal can differ greatly. Often it is a matter of perspective on the part of those charged with the facilitation of the reform process. If it is felt that an external validation is needed and crucial, then an accreditation based model will probably be the method of choice. If the external validation is of secondary importance and it is the reform process that is viewed as having the greatest benefit, then an assessment based model will be promoted.

The provincial Department of Education advocated an assessment based model during the initial pilot. School districts were then free to pursue the reform as they saw fit. The Department of Education did encourage districts to become involved but it was not a mandatory exercise. One district did pursue this option to a considerable degree and developed its own model which bore some semblance to the original pilot but was unique enough to be called the district's own model. This model will be elaborated upon along with other items in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 - Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the major findings of the study, reports the conclusions and offers some recommendations for action and further investigation.

Section 5.1: Summary.

The main purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the rationale behind the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education's decision to promote an assessment as opposed to an accreditation - based model of reform. The investigation centered around five research questions, namely:

1. Why is there a desire to reform schools at this time?
2. How committed are key educational administrators to reforming the educational system?
3. How is school assessment different from other reform initiatives such as school improvement?
4. What are the reasons the Department of Education opted for an assessment-based model of school reform as opposed to an accreditation-based model?
5. What are the benefits and challenges for the Department of Education, school districts and schools in supporting school assessment at this time?

Data for the study were gathered by interviewing key subjects. Subjects were chosen on the basis of their involvement with the process or their professional expertise in the area of school reform.

The subjects were sent a preinterview questionnaire that allowed the researcher to have a starting point from which to conduct the interviews

Section 5.2: Summary of Data gathered concerning Question 1. Why is there a desire to reform schools at this time?

There were numerous explanations given by the subjects in response to Question 1. One of the most common reasons given was that the achievement levels of the students in the Province, as reflected on standardized tests, were typically lower than the national average. This was a reason offered specifically by eight of the subjects. As the public is becoming more and more aware of the results of the scores, there is considerable pressure to take corrective measures. Thus, there was a desire to reform the schools so as to increase the quality of education in the Province.

It was suggested by three of the subjects that those charged with administering the system felt the need to be at the forefront of educational change, both nationally and globally. If the system was not continually improving it would become stagnant. With the rest of the country moving to improve the quality of education, the Province had to follow suit with national trends or be left behind.

Six of the subjects felt that the move to reform schools was motivated largely by economics and governance issues. If the government of the day could convince the people of the Province that the reforms proposed by government would lead to a more effective education system, then the economics and governance concerns would not be seen as the key issue in school reform. The

subjects mentioned that they thought that the cost savings and control associated with reform was a large motivator for pursuing it.

Section 5.3: Summary of Data gathered concerning Question 2. How committed are key educational administrators to reforming the educational system?

This question sought to gather an understanding of the level of commitment to the reform initiatives for the education system. A large portion of the subjects felt that commitment was there to the extent that budgetary restrictions allowed. This was a point made by nine of the subjects. Clearly the subjects felt that fiscal realities dictated the extent to which resources can be put into this sort of program.

Four of the subjects agreed that, as in all organizations, the level of commitment varies throughout. These four felt that, within the education system, there are those who are very committed and those that are not as committed. There is considerable cynicism in the schools; yet, there is considerable commitment by the administrators of the system. Three subjects mentioned the high level of commitment by the school administrators. These same three felt that the level of commitment from those in the schools was quite high.

One subject did mention that he/she felt that the level of commitment to classroom reform is not as high under the present government as it was under the Liberal Government of the Honourable Clyde Wells. The commitment to reform, as this subject phrased it, is more in support of structural reform than classroom reform.

Section 5.4: Summary of Data gathered concerning Question 3. How is school assessment different from other reform initiatives such as school improvement?

One of the more common statements made regarding this question was that this model had more accountability features than the reform initiatives attempted in the past. With the presence of external validators, schools are more accountable for the success or failure of the reform initiatives. This was a point made by six of the subjects.

Another commonly expressed sentiment was that this initiative focuses on student achievement to a much greater extent than previous reform initiatives. The former school improvement initiative focused more on staff issues. This point was made by three of the subjects. The school assessment process involves the application of a discrete set of standards on which the schools are to measure their progress. This involves having the school operating from a plan. The method of data gathering is made consistent and five of the subjects felt that this would allow for a more valid means of cross school comparisons.

One of the subjects felt that this project incorporated the broader community than former initiatives. The same subject felt that this project, if incorporated on a broader scale, would allow schools to work on improving in a less threatening manner than was previously felt. The traditional adversarial positions of schools and district office might be diminished according to the views of this subject.

According to one subject, the model focuses on feedback and creates a climate that is more conducive to an in-depth examination of schools. This same subject went on to state that this process would promote action research in the schools. This was seen as a considerable change by the subject.

There was also a subject that did not see this initiative as being largely different from the past reform efforts. This subject felt that it merely standardized the means by which data was gathered.

Section 5.5: Summary of Data gathered concerning Question 4. What are the reasons the Department of Education opted for an assessment-based model of school reform as opposed to an accreditation-based model?

One of the more commonly expressed sentiments by the subjects was that they felt that the educational climate in this Province was more conducive to promotion and acceptance of an Assessment Based Model of reform. As a result of the province's geography, history with reform initiatives and financial realities the possibility of an assessment - based model succeeding was more likely than that of an accreditation type model. In addition, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, an accreditation - based model would carry with it the potential for causing divisiveness within communities. In rural Newfoundland, there is not the luxury of attending other schools if one loses its accreditation status. These were opinions expressed by five of the subjects.

Two of the subjects felt that the assessment - type model was promoted partly because it was less threatening and would be a better fit with past reform initiatives. It is a more outcome -

based model that centers on the process of change in the schools. Three subjects felt that this model would promote self assessment in schools

Another significant reason offered by the subjects was that of cost. Five subjects felt that the accreditation model would be too costly for the province. Hence, the assessment model, which would be less expensive, was promoted.

Another subject added that, at the time of the development of the model, there was more expertise in assessment based reform than in accreditation. As a result, the assessment - based model was promoted. A different subject added to this by suggesting that the accreditation type reform, which was punitive in nature would not be accepted in the province. The high level of unionization in the education system would resist a punitive model of reform.

One subject felt that a major reason for the exclusion of an accreditation based model had a great deal to do with politics. The person pushing for accreditation had lost favor at the Department of Education and regardless of what this person suggested it would not be well received by those that would make the decision. The same subject added that at the time there were numerous other initiatives on the table. Accreditation marked a more radical departure from the past reform efforts and would require more energy and time to implement. As a result accreditation was passed over in favor of an assessment based model.

This is not to say that all subjects felt that accreditation is not going to reappear. Two subjects suggested directly that they felt accreditation was an issue that will be revisited in the future.

Section 5.6: Summary of Data gathered concerning Question 5. What are the benefits and challenges for the Department of Education, school districts and schools in supporting school assessment at this time?

A large portion of the subjects felt that a considerable potential benefit arising from this initiative was that its focus on students. This proposal sets the standards upon which schools are to be evaluated. It also puts in place concrete measures that can be used to gauge the level of success that the reform efforts have had. It ensures that student achievement is the primary reason for making change. The process forces, as one subject put it, "schools to be schools". There is a forced accountability which increases the likelihood that the reform efforts will be successful.

Five of the subjects mentioned this specifically:

Four of the subjects felt that this initiative involves a broader school community than past initiatives. Parents, teachers, students, and all other stakeholders in the education of the province's children would have input under the proposed school assessment initiative.

Planning is a major part of the reform initiative. Two subjects noted that, in developing the plans, the school is expanding upon the work of the prior school improvement efforts. This promotes action research and provides further opportunities for growth.

As an added benefit, two subjects mentioned that those teachers involved in the process would be exposed to excellent professional development opportunities. Coupled with this, there was the possibility that districts could develop partnerships that could allow cost saving measures and increase the possibilities of learning from each other

This is not to say that the subjects felt that there were no challenges with this initiative. One of the major obstacles, as identified by the research subjects, was the cynicism felt by many within the system. Having gone through numerous reform efforts in the past, and having little to show for it, have left many in the system resistant to put time and effort into another initiative. In addition, five subjects mentioned that some teachers might interpret this sort of professional examination as being a personal threat and hence would be resistant to it.

This process is a labor intensive one. Considerable time and effort is required for this proposal to be successful. Finding the time and motivating teachers to become involved and committed will be difficult. Strong leadership will be needed for this initiative to be a success. With the demographics of the teaching profession as they are, and the fact that this process is not one that shows immediate results, motivating senior teachers to put time and effort into a process that will not show results until after they have left the profession will be a challenge. Six subjects mentioned the amount of time and effort needed as being a concern.

One subject added that this initiative, with its prescribed criteria statements, might not work in our schools. This subject felt that this proposal might be too inflexible and possibly be too rigid in its approach to individual school situations.

Four subjects mentioned the cost as being a challenge for this initiative. With fiscal restraint being a common theme in all government departments, finding the funds to support this initiative will be difficult.

Section 5.7: Recommendations

School reform has been at the forefront of many discussions regarding the school system in this Province for a considerable time. Initial reforms took place with respect to structural and governance changes. Yet despite all of these structural changes the quality of education delivered to the children would not have improved unless reforms are implemented at the classroom level. The recent report of the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom referenced this in writing:

The need for program reform has not been diminished by th structural reform of the last several years. Further, there is evidence that structural reform has created high expectations for improvement in teaching and learning, the use of technology and the overall ability of the system to develop graduates prepared to cope with new and rapidly changing social and economic realities. Finally, there is widespread expectation of a substantial reinvestment to address the complex range of needs reflected in school classrooms.

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2000 p. 1)

The issue of school reform is a very complex one. The education system and its improvement are the intended goals for all who are involved in the reform process. Yet, often the processes advocated for reaching this goal can differ greatly. Often it is a matter of perspective on the part of those charged with the facilitation of the reform process. If it is felt that an external validation is crucially important than an accreditation - based model will probably be preferred. If the external validation is of secondary importance and it is the reform process that is viewed as having the greatest benefit, then an assessment based model will be promoted.

If schools are going to improve at the classroom level it is important that site based reforms be made that allow for a critical examination of current classroom practices. On the basis of this research project, the author would propose the following recommendations:

1. Based on the literature review and the research findings that all districts in the province would engage in the development of their own model of reform. These models should be constructed such that there is sufficient flexibility as to allow schools in the districts to adapt the model to their own needs. This being said, the districts should ensure that the underlying goal of the reforms are improved classroom instruction.
2. As the process of School Development is a new venture, in this Province an evaluation of its effectiveness could not be validly conducted at the time of this study. A longitudinal study that examines the effectiveness of the initiative with respect to improving classroom instruction would be warranted at this time.

3. This initiative will require financial support if it is to succeed. Professional development, release time for teachers and adequate resources for the reform initiatives will need to be provided. Unless the support for the initiatives is provided the teachers of the province will become apathetic about any process and see it as being just a temporary means by which to demonstrate a desire to improve without substance. This was a common concern expressed by the research subjects. They acknowledged that the reform process was a labor intensive one. As such teachers will need to have some source of motivation for doing what is necessary in order to make it succeed. If they view the employer as being unwilling to support the initiatives then teachers will be less likely to expend their efforts.
4. There will need to be a mechanism with which to ensure accountability. With any change model it is important that there be some means by which to motivate those involved with it to successfully implement the desired changes. There are several recommendations referencing this in the Ministerial Panel Report on Educational Delivery in the Classroom (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2000). The panel references the need for accountability in writing:

An accountability system, whatever form it takes, is only as good as the basic data used to formulate the necessary indicators. Because of efforts within the Department of Education over the past two decades, the information now available for tracking system performance is comprehensive. Several extensive databases are maintained, including a student information system, the Teacher Payroll System, the High School Certification System, and student level databases incorporating a variety of assessment information.

A comprehensive survey of teachers is also conducted periodically, the last occasion being in the fall of 1999. Periodic follow-ups of graduates have also been conducted giving a picture of where students go after leaving school. Much of the available data have been incorporated into the school profile system making it available at the school level

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2000. pp. 86)

In sum, the need for improvement in our province's educational system is imperative. A means to accomplish this is through a focused and well planned examination of the needs of schools as determined on a local basis. The process of school development does provide a possible means to accomplish this. The actual effectiveness of such initiatives depends heavily on the implementation of them. Determining the success of the implementation is a task that future research can determine.

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