HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY PRACTICE TO ENHANCE

THE TEACHING OF LITERACY?

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I perceived the pursuit of my doctoral studies and the writing of this thesis to be equivalent to the trials and sense of fulfillment of those venturous souls who choose to climb Mount Everest to quench their desire of adventure. My main guide and supervisor Dr. Kate Le Maistre was instrumental in showing me the way and reassuring me on frequent occasions that my research was both relevant and important and that I needed to continue to finish what I had begun. Without her gentle but constant nudging, I might easily not have reached the pinnacle. I owe her great gratitude for being so available and providing support on all levels. My other guide on this tumultuous climb was Jean Fillatre, a fellow doctoral student whose action research study was closely interwoven with mine. The midnight email exchanges, offering words of encouragement and sharing of ideas between critical friends were greatly appreciated and gave me more bolstering and guidance than Jean probably realized and when it was most critical.

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There are also the many teachers on staff who became my partners in this journey and openly braved the many challenges we encountered along the way. Without their willingness to explore new literacy-teaching practices coupled with their continuous efforts to improve students' literacy, a lot of what was accomplished in our school would not have been

Abstract

The objective of this study was to improve the practice of an elementary principal to enhance the teaching of literacy in an inner city school. Based in the literature on educational leadership and action research, this action research study examines how the role of the principal over a seven year period affected the teaching of literacy. In keeping with action research methodology, the study undergoes three 'think-act-reflect' cycles. These action research cycles inform practice, guide the development of literacy initiatives, and result in change. This evolution is documented in the form of vignettes throughout the thesis. Data collection consisted of personal reflections, field notes, results of a researcher-developed questionnaire given to teachers, administrators, and parents; and students' *Developmental Reading Assessment* scores. The data analysis incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods to triangulate the research findings and to ensure that all of the key research questions are addressed in a trustworthy manner. Results showed that the nine literacy interventions employed by the principal were effective and that the principal's practice grew and improved over the study. Stemming from the analysis, an assessment tool was developed to measure the principal's effectiveness in promoting literacy, a measurement tool that can be used by other principals to gauge their own effectiveness in developing literacy initiatives. The thesis concludes with a reflection addressing the objective of the study, the contribution to living educational theory that conceptually frames the study and offers suggestions for future research in this area.

Résumé

Le but de cette étude était d'améliorer la pratique d'une direction d'école afin d'accroître la qualité de l'enseignement de la littératie dans une école élémentaire urbaine en milieu défavorisé. Fondée sur la littérature portant sur le leadership pédagogique et la recherche-action, la présente recherche-action examine, sur une période de sept ans, comment le rôle d'une direction d'école influence l'enseignement de la littératie. En conformité avec la méthodologie de la recherche-action, l'étude passe par trois étapes soient : planifier, agir, réfléchir. Ces étapes renseignent sur la pratique, servent de guide pour le développement d'initiatives et mènent au changement. Cette évolution est documentée sous forme de vignettes tout au long de cette thèse. La collecte de données est constituée de réflexions personnelles, de notes prises sur le terrain, des résultats des élèves au *Trousse d'évaluation DRA* et des résultats d'un questionnaire développé par la recherchiste. Ce dernier a été complété par des enseignants, des administrateurs et des parents. L'analyse des données incorpore à la fois des méthodes qualitatives et quantitatives pour cerner les conclusions et s'assurer que les questions essentielles sont traitées de façon valide. Les résultats ont démontré que les neuf interventions utilisées par la direction ont été efficaces et que leurs pratiques se sont améliorées au cours de l'étude. Issu de l'analyse, un outil d'évaluation a été développé pour mesurer l'efficacité de la direction relativement à la promotion de la littératie. Cet outil peut être utilisé par d'autres directions pour évaluer leur propre efficacité quant au développement d'initiatives en littératie. Cette thèse se termine par une réflexion sur le but de cette étude, la contribution d'une théorie pédagogique qui cadre cette étude et offre des suggestions en vue d'une recherche éventuelle dans ce domaine.

Dedication

As I think of the many people who have made significant contributions in shaping my academic development and instilling in me a keen interest to pursue doctoral studies, there are several names mostly those of women who come to mind. But there is one person to whom I feel both morally and emotionally obliged to dedicate this thesis to in her honour posthumously and that is Fran Halliday. I met Fran in 2000 and while the work we did together is documented in this thesis what is not shared in the text is the profound influence she had on me and on this study. She became my mentor, a title I do not bestow lightly and even after her death, which occurred at mid-point in my doctoral research, her sage words and guidance resounded with me throughout the study. In a sense her love of education with all of its facets lives on through her influence that is intricately interwoven into this work. I thank Fran, for taking such a deep interest in my work, for kindling my interest in action research and for lighting the way; without her I would not have undertaken this study. I only regret that she was unable to witness the fruit of her labour which she conducted with endless enthusiasm, passion and commitment.

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CHAPTER ONE
CONTEXTUALIZATION

1.1 Framing the Context

Literacy for the purpose of this thesis refers to the teaching of reading and all of its facets. In this chapter, I will provide a detailed account of the early years of my principalship so that the reader may form an opinion about the degree of change I achieved and my impact on literacy-teaching practices within the school. I will also describe two pieces of legislation, the replacement of the confessional school system by linguistic school boards in Québec, and the Québec Educational Program (QEP) that thrust Québec schools into massive upheaval. Later in the chapter, I will present my first action research reflective cycle that is formulated from reflections that I wrote as I was striving to make sense of my work in my first year in the school, and the impact that the contextual changes had on me, as principal. It is these reflections that led me to consider action research in my second year and to slowly begin to use its methodology to assist me in my daily work. Through reflection and discussions with critical friends I learned to analyze my context to create an understanding of the school's learning environment and plan how to bring about deep changes to literacy-teaching practices. The evolution in my thinking is reflected when I begin to formulate my research question. My analysis of the early years concludes this chapter and leads into the review of literature that guides this study.

1.1.1 The Provincial Context

My story as the school's principal begins in the year 2000; two years after provincial legislation (Act to Amend the Education Act (c.96) Québec, 1997) changed the Québec

school system composed of confessional (religiously based) schools divided between Catholic and Protestant boards of education to a linguistic school system divided between English and French school boards. One year later, the province began a major reform, the Québec Education Program (QEP) (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2000). The creation of linguistic school boards and the QEP were the two major political influences that directed the work of Québec principals when I was assigned to my new school. At the time, the loss of confessional schools was not well received in Québec's Catholic community. There was a long history that intertwined the power of church and state, and in Québec, the dominant church was Catholic.

Many Catholics felt betrayed by the province's move to abolish Catholic schools. Although the importance of religion was dramatically declining, as evidenced by dwindling church attendance, many Catholics nevertheless clung dearly to their schools and what they had come to represent within the community. Catholic, Protestant and Moral Education now constituted a required but small part of the curriculum, and many Catholic families continued to mourn the loss of their schools in which Catholicism had been such an integral component. On the other hand, Protestant families were very sceptical about the new alliances forged in the educational community. Even though all Québec schools were now non-denominational, many of the former Catholic schools retained their Catholic school names and continued to proudly display their religious artefacts. Non-Catholic families in the catchment's areas of redistributed school properties were uneasy and distrustful about sending their children to these schools.

The QEP entailed sweeping changes to Québec's educational structure with its cornerstone being a competency-based, constructivist approach that capitalizes on students'

learning in a social context. One of the most significant changes is the way that grade levels have been re-defined as two-year learning cycles with competencies defined for each subject and outcomes assessed at the end of each cycle. The elementary school program now consists of Kindergarten and three cycles of learning that mandated Québec educators to completely re-think how to deliver the basic elementary school program so that students may successfully meet the end of cycle competency outcomes. This has also had a major impact on assessment practices, not made any easier by the fact that the assessment guidelines were introduced well after the initial phase of implementation. As teachers looked to the principal for support, school principals became responsible for QEP professional development and for developing assessment practices that focused on rubrics and cycle competency outcomes.

Part of the new assessment practices included the formal introduction of authentic student assessment, in which students use samples of their work from their portfolios to share the state of their learning with their parents in student-led conferences. These conferences replace one traditional report card in each year of the two-year cycle, and are complemented by a summative report at the end of each of the three cycles. The end of cycle report contains judgments made by the cycle teaching team for every subject competency.

Along with the QEP also came public accountability for students' success. My jurisdiction within the school was to work in partnership with the Governing Board[1] and our joint responsibility was to develop and annually review both the educational project and the school's success plan. As principal, I was the team leader overseeing this work and

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[1] Governing Boards are parity committees of parents and school staff with the principal as a non-voting member. The province determines the size of the membership for each school based on the school's student enrolment. The Governing Board's membership can also include members of the community and students as non-voting members. The role of Governing Boards is to oversee the main functions, organization and operation of the school. The Québec Education Act defines the mandate and duties of Governing Boards and thereby empowers this body at the school level. Governing Boards approximate what other jurisdictions refer to as School Councils or Parent Councils.

accountable for the findings in the school success report that must be publicly shared. Our success rates are closely monitored by our school board and become a part of the board's success plan that is reported to the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports (MELS).

This intense level of accountability places tremendous pressure on Québec educators including school principals, who are leading this change at the school level and are mandated to ensure successful implementation, to change their practices. But it is each teacher who directly implements changes, and to improve their practice, teachers must be able to experiment without fear (Guskey, 2000). With annual reviews of the school's success published for public commentary, teachers are unwilling to take risks and test new approaches in case the results fall below expectations. This hesitancy further taxes a principal who is mandated to make changes to improve student learning and to support the teachers in their work.

The provincial context was a very important part of my story for two reasons. First, the provincial Education Act mandated my work as a Québec school principal and secondly, I used the QEP as the vehicle to drive changes within my school. Since the QEP is mandatory, teachers' criticisms and opposition to change are directed towards the Ministry and away from the principal, thereby reducing in-school conflict and fostering better staff relationships. This was a critical point because I believe it was imperative to have a positive working relationship with my teaching staff in order to successfully implement sustainable change. I envisioned this change arising from the creation of a sustainable professional learning community in our school and I could not form a learning community without strong teacher endorsement and involvement. Only a collaborative team effort would increase learning and provide opportunities for professional growth (Fullan, 1997) and it is this quest for

professional growth and development that form the underpinnings for professional learning communities (Eaker, Dufour, & Dufour, 2002). Paradoxically then, although the QEP added to my work considerably, at the same time it made my role easier in leading changes within the school. During the time covered by this study, the QEP had been fully implemented in Québec elementary schools and is presently in the final implementation stage at the senior high school level.

1.1.2 The School Context

In the spring of 2000, G.E.C. School had a history common to many Québec schools: two years earlier it had been an English Catholic elementary school in a predominantly French Catholic school system. The school had a proud history in the Catholic community and prided itself on providing a solid education to inner city children. It had gone through many program changes in an attempt to deal with steadily declining student enrolment. For much of its existence, its population was too small to warrant a full-time principal and had been overseen by the neighbouring high school administration. With school board restructuring, its enrolment doubled with the introduction of English-speaking students from the former Protestant school system, creating the need for a full-time principal position and I was appointed as its second principal in two years.

At the time of my appointment, it was a smaller elementary school with 150 students and a dual track of English and French Immersion Programs. The two school communities (former Catholic and Protestant students, staff and parents) that were legislatively amalgamated into one building seemed to share little. Protestant parents were not happy about their children being forced to attend the school, while the Catholic parents dearly hung onto their Catholic traditions with crosses adorning every classroom and the main foyer.

Additionally, having been a small English school in a large, predominantly French Catholic school system meant that the school had been allocated few resources and what existed was very outdated. Teacher professional development had not been encouraged among the English Catholic educators, while their Protestant counterparts had a completely different history. They had benefited from much better resources and had been actively encouraged to participate in on-going professional development. The school's teaching staff was comprised of mostly Catholic teachers with a few teachers recently added from the Protestant system. With such great entrenched differences in place, I soon developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of the strife in Northern Ireland.

1.1.3 My Debut as the New School Principal

For many reasons (some personal, political and educational) I initially found my appointment in May 2000, as principal of St. Peter's School now known as George Etienne Cartier (G.E.C.) School[2] difficult to view as a positive move. I was told that the board needed me in this school because I had successfully demonstrated political savvy and would be able to make the necessary changes. Although in retrospect these comments were complimentary and attested to the board's faith in my leadership skills, at the time of my appointment they brought me little joy or comfort.

> For me becoming the principal of G.E.C. School was the absolute last place I wanted to be as principal. I felt no joy when I finally got up the courage to visit the school one late afternoon in May and if anything my first visit confirmed all my feelings as to why I desperately didn't want to be there. The school's interior was unwelcoming with old and decrepit furniture in many of its rooms, including the staff room; the library was in the process of being dismantled and served as a junk room with broken furniture and books strewn everywhere; the halls sported a hodgepodge of lockers of different colors; few examples of students' work were displayed on the walls and what was

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[2] Please note that both the former and present school's names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the staff.

displayed was falling down. The principal's office was stark and served as an overflow storage room for in-coming supplies like grad photos. Overall I had never visited a more unappealing school in my life… *(Excerpt from journal entry May 2000)*

Two years had gone by since the creation of linguistic schools yet nothing had visibly changed in the school. Many of the parents who were already reluctant about sending their children to our school were getting increasingly anxious about the kind of school their children were attending. Some parents had already engaged in conversations with me about what changes I was going to introduce and vocalized their concerns. I heard, "There is racism in this school and what are you going to do about it?" "This school has never had a 'Meet the Teacher Night' and we hope that you will be able to hold one this fall", "I cried when I was told that my children would have to attend this school. There are no books." These comments clearly indicated a high degree of dissatisfaction and a need for change and it was also abundantly clear that I was to be the change agent.

I struggled with determining the right approach to bring about change in a place that existed in a kind of time warp with only imposed pedagogical changes having taken place for a long time. As I chatted with school board personnel whenever they visited the school, confidential comments were shared with me such as: "The staff has had very little professional development and many of their practices are out of date", "This school has a very different way of doing business and doesn't understand the special education services our board delivers", "Not much has changed in this school in a very long time."

Upon reflection, I decided that I was going to give the school a vision based on the QEP and that we would, as a school community, restructure around it. I also decided that my leadership had to appear to be decisive, focused, and dramatic if I was going to have any hope of making changes. To set the context for change, I deliberately chose a staff activity

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that I knew would catch their attention and signal change – I had teachers re-organize their classroom allocations to respect the QEP's concept of cycle teaching teams. All classes in the same cycle had to be in proximity to one another and this meant that most teachers would move classrooms. This activity met with strong opposition as I was told, "We don't want to move and you'll have to understand that teachers make these decisions here." In response, I arranged an *ad hoc* staff meeting and arrived with blank blueprints of the school. I delivered a visionary speech about how we were going to become a lead school in the QEP in time but for now we were going to start by restructuring our school to be more in line with the QEP's philosophy. I left the blueprints to be filled in and asked staff for their plan to be faxed to me. About a week and a half later, I received their plan with a note stating that they still didn't want to move classes. I sent them a note thanking them for their work and encouraged them to immediately start moving according to their plan. Purposely, I made no changes to their plan but I did assist teachers with their move by carrying boxes and learning materials.

My debut certainly did not go unnoticed but neither did it receive thunderous applause from the teachers with requests for an encore. Our parents watched from the sidelines. One parent whose older daughter had been a student in my previous school commented, "I wasn't going to send my daughter to this school but when I heard that you were going to be the principal, I changed my mind. I knew you would turn this school around and make it work. I can see that you have already started." I, however, did not feel as confident about long term success.

1.2 The Change Process

My long term goal was to change teaching practices but the staff was definitely not ready for that level of change in the spring and fall of 2000. I made a conscious decision when first

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appointed that I was going to do everything possible to bring about cosmetic changes, as these are less threatening, to create a climate in which change was accepted, if not embraced. So in my first year I embarked on making several external changes to our school environment, but even these changes created great emotional rancour. I later came to realize that I was in fact changing our school's culture as Deal and Patterson (1999) describe, the "school's own unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate everything …and how teachers feel about their work and their students" (p.2). I was establishing both deep and fundamental changes in our school's values and beliefs about how we do business (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1996). Changing a school's culture is exceptionally difficult as schools are historically conservative institutions designed to foster and protect students' futures usually in a fashion comparable to that received by their parents before them (Hulley & Dier, 2009).

1.2.1 The School Culture

The culture of a school – the distinct profile that shapes the direction and activities undertaken in carrying out the day to day operations that are mandated – is very important. I was very sensitive to the need for me to be as delicate as I could be when changes were occurring in highly sensitive areas. Many of the changes were profound and clearly marked the end of this school's Catholic history. I knew, from my experiences as a child growing up in Québec and having attended English Catholic schools, of the great symbolic significance of religious artefacts. From previous experience, having been involved in school closures as an elected Ontario school trustee, I had learned that a school has incredibly strong ties to its surrounding community. When a school was closed, or there were massive changes to a school's identity, I had been made very aware of the need of the local community to have a

memorial place to acknowledge its educational past. I therefore knew that some artefacts had to remain so that our school's history would be honoured for the members of our community.

The two most sensitive changes made during my first year were changing the name of our school to a less Catholic name and taking down the crosses. The re-naming of our school was by far the most acrimonious event. Although this initiative was the undertaking of some of our parents (mostly former Protestant parents), the teachers held me personally responsible and they refused to share with me their thoughts or voice their anger. The re-naming process spanned several months during which time the staff used union meetings that I could not attend, to vent and to plot their strategies to oppose the name change. On one particular occasion following a session where their input was requested by our board, the teachers and I had a very heated discussion about all the stakeholders and their respective roles in re-naming a school. I informed teachers that their input was sought but that they were not the decision-makers and since the majority of our parents wanted a name change, I cautioned them about the risks involved in challenging parents by openly opposing this change.

> …after two months of ugliness, our school board officially changed our school name in December. The staff told me that it was my board and I had to keep restating that it is our board. The staff refused to do anything about participating with the students in a re-naming ceremony. Most of them did not want to even talk about …why we changed our name. So I went to visit all the classes on my own and shared with our students our new name and answered their questions about why we changed our name. For five months, we didn't talk any more about it. *(Excerpt from journal entry May 2001)*

In early May 2001, I began discussing a re-naming ceremony that would be held in mid-June. Initially teachers refused to engage but as I got students involved in selecting our new school colors and in competitions to design new school crests, teachers very slowly began participating with their students and by the time the re-naming ceremony came around everyone was involved. Staff invited former colleagues, administrators and the parish priest

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who attended and also blessed our newly re-named school. We were now officially George Etienne Cartier School, a name carefully chosen to reflect many key elements of our school's culture and heritage.

The removal of the crosses was also a highly sensitive matter and I was seen as challenging the very core of our school's history and culture. I soon discovered that… "Tampering with symbols of importance is like playing with fire…symbols play a more prominent role than many initially suspect" (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Some members of staff had confided to me that they found the crosses offensive in a non-denominational school and a few teachers had already quietly taken them down. This and parental comments along the same lines prompted me to inform staff very early in the 2000-2001 school year that the crosses would need to come down and that I would find appropriate homes for them. Some teachers openly declared that they refused to take down the crosses and I replied that was fine and that I would have our maintenance staff remove them later. When the local parish priest visited, he told me that he had heard that I was ripping down the crosses. In response, I invited him to ask his parishioners if any of them would like a cross and he could forward me their names and phone numbers, which he did. During the March break, I had our maintenance staff remove the remaining ones and as they slowly trickled into my office, I became the keeper of the crosses.

I arranged for the crosses to be given to community members who expressed an interest in having one. By the end of the year we had more interested parties than crosses but I prioritized the list with staff members at the top. A small brass plaque engraved with our old school name, year and the name of the recipient was attached to each cross and I personally polished the crosses with my head teacher's assistance while the other staff took notice of

this activity. The crosses were presented to their new owners during our re-naming ceremony but I kept one cross and a picture of our original Catholic namesake.

> We established a memorabilia wall to honour our proud history and we framed a cross in a shadow box on the wall along with a re-hung picture of St. Peter with a small brass plaque with his name so that students would know who was in this picture. With the help of teachers, past teachers, and parents we framed some school photos from the past to give a flavour of the school's history. Interestingly, it was really very difficult to get pictures. It seemed that no one took any and there were not many events to remember. *(Excerpt from journal entry June 2001)*

Our memorabilia wall was unveiled at our re-naming ceremony and many teachers were visibly pleased to see cherished artefacts given a place of honour in the school.

When we moved to a different building a year and a half later, our artefacts came with us and now proudly hang outside the office area in what was, ironically, a former Protestant school. Our new school building has a unique blending of history with old high school honour rolls and a large bronze plaque commemorating former high school students who died serving in the First World War, including the name of John McCrae's friend whose death inspired the writing of *In Flanders Fields*. To this formerly Protestant school's memorabilia we added our Catholic artefacts. Our two distinct school communities of Catholic and Protestant parents came together to share our walls and their history. We later added more recent pictures and artefacts that symbolized what our school has become. These acts were critical to successfully integrating our shared values and beliefs (Deal & Peterson, 1999) and brought me peace with our community. Today, the school has an excellent relationship with the local Catholic parish priest and he attends important celebrations such as graduation.

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I tried to lay the groundwork for all of our students' ethnic and religious backgrounds to be treated with respect, tolerance and dignity. In doing so, we found a way for our Muslim children to pray during their lunch hour and we hold smudging ceremonies for our First Nation students. As our school community takes pride in being a diverse multicultural school that includes a significant First Nation student population, I also placed aboriginal art on our hall walls and in my office. Most of our First Nation students arrive from small and remote communities on reserves in the far northern regions of Québec. To support our aboriginal students, I arranged for Elders to visit regularly and for our students to have access to counselling services in their native language. I sought other means as well to assist these students' integration into our large inner city school.

> With 14% of our students being Aboriginal, our social worker and I worked to identify these students and to create a friendship club. Our students named the club as the Powerful First Nations Friendship Club. Our goal was to raise self-esteem. Our social worker trained peer mediators and one of our parents sewed aboriginal medicine wheel armbands for our student mediators to wear on the playground…I also spent time seeking funding to get more support for our Aboriginal students and their families. *(Excerpt from journal entry June 2001)*

In my first year, I also introduced other cultural activities that have now become annual events. One example is our multicultural potluck supper that features various ethnic musicians who entertain during the evening. I continuously searched for ways to celebrate our cultural diversity and as Deal and Patterson (1999) state, "Particularly when the school community consists of diverse cultures, something special must be done to lay the groundwork for a common mission and to build an inclusive, cohesive community" (p.134).

Given parents' concerns about racism in our school, when we moved to our new site, the Governing Board created an educational project[3] that focused on respect as a core instructional program. To enhance instruction, we brought in a number of trained professionals over the years to work with our students, teachers and parents, and to model and discuss appropriate strategies and behaviour. All of these efforts are integral elements that reduce racism and contributed to the success of our educational project. We tracked our behaviour reports electronically and although we did not eradicate racism, we greatly reduced the number of behaviour reports and especially those with racial undertones.

The school backs onto a housing project and because we tried to be good neighbours, we offered our local community free use of our gym one evening a week and one Saturday a year for their Christmas party. We also worked with the city to create a shared park on our grounds that features a soccer field, and a winter skating rink. Additionally, we offered support services to parents by working with our Québec local community liaison social service agency provider (CLSC), and I was able to arrange for the CLSC to deliver parenting courses in the school. The turnout was not high but we reached out to as many families in need of this service as possible. These initiatives all played an important role in our school's cultural transformation (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Traditionally, parents had not been very involved in our school and we now had two sets of parents from distinctive communities (Catholic and Protestant) who had their own ideas about how a school should function and about their roles in the school. One of my goals was to involve parents as our partners in student learning. My main initiative began with our first

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[3] Bounded by the Québec Education Act, each Governing Board must develop with its school principal, a school project to enhance student learning. The educational project is subject to annual review and shared through an annual report that is circulated to all parents and community members.

"Meet the Teacher Night". Parents were personally invited when I saw them in the school and I advertised it in the school's newsletters. That night, we had standing room only and staff was thrilled with the turnout of about a hundred and fifty parents. Each year, our parent turnout has been very good.

> … parents are more involved in our school. We are trying to build a sense of school community. I firmly believe that parents need to be involved... I often walk around with new parents popping into classes to see how children learn in our school. Teachers are beginning to get used to me popping in and out. I want our school to be open and welcoming. *(Except from journal entry November 2001)*

I sought opportunities to make our school a more inviting place for parents and tried to involve parents who might not normally be involved. To that end for example, I asked parents who could not afford to pay school fees to work off their fees by volunteering. Some of these activities experienced more success than others but the important thing was that teachers began to view parents as partners in helping students learn and supporting the work they did in the classroom (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

1.2.2 The Learning Environment

I believe that change should not be viewed as something negative, so to create a positive atmosphere, I redecorated the staff room with new furniture and upgraded the staff washroom. During the first summer parents also helped me to re-open the library. We culled and threw out old books and started with a small but updated collection of books on bright and freshly painted shelves. In addition, new classroom furniture and other materials were purchased to replace discarded old stock and parents were encouraged to use their fund-raising to buy new audio-visual equipment. Once our physical environment looked more inviting and cheery, I then moved to focus on learning materials.

Several book publishers (all previously checked to ensure that only quality and Ministry approved materials were presented) were invited to visit and meet with teachers. We used materials on loan and later made collective decisions about what to buy. I tried not to interfere with any decision made by the staff as long as their choices served our school well and there was consensus. Our school board assisted us in re-stocking our school with new materials by allocating additional funds (approximately $10,000 in the first year). A more sensitive topic arose when I announced that with all of our new materials and books, teachers were no longer going to need to rely so heavily on student workbooks for instruction and that this was the last year for workbooks. I wanted teachers to become more actively engaged in classroom instruction and learn to be more critical of the work they gave to students. Instruction needed to be designed to meet the QEP guidelines and the needs of our diverse student population, so that students would be given appropriate work for their instructional levels.

With the infusion of new materials, the classrooms did become more interesting places as teachers began to introduce students to these resources and to incorporate them into their teaching. However, there was still fairly traditional teaching taking place in most classes and to make learning more exciting, I wanted teachers to take their students on field trips that would be connected to various themes being taught. Previously, our school did not go on any field trips because teachers felt that many students were too poor to go; but I encouraged teachers to take their class on at least one cultural field trip and suggested local cultural activities that could be easily arranged. I ensured that students requiring financial assistance were supported by school fundraising so that no child was left out. Our field trips continued and teachers learned that learning can take place outside of the classroom, especially for our

kinaesthetic learners. The next step in promoting changes in teaching methods was to

encourage professional development for the teachers.

1.2.3 Professional Development

> As a staff, we started to work on school success initiatives…I strongly
> encouraged teachers to attend professional development workshops. I hope
> that as more teachers get professional development and have opportunities to
> meet with other teachers from outside of our school that they will begin to see
> the world a little differently and open up to more fundamental teaching
> changes. *(Excerpt from journal entry June 2001)*

In order to create a more vigorous learning environment (Dufour & Eaker, 1998),

teachers were encouraged to grow professionally by attending all professional development

sessions that our school board offered. I registered as many teachers as I could and for many

of them it was a novelty but they took comfort in knowing that other colleagues from our

school were also going so that they could travel and attend together. More importantly,

attending professional development sessions in groups enabled the staff to develop a more

common approach to teaching. For teaching practices to change, teachers must have

opportunities to work together on planning and developing what is taught in their classrooms

(Fullan, 1995; Senge, et al., 2000). This was further extended at the school level when they

engaged in professional conversations about the workshops they had attended, and how they

might implement some of these practices.

There were several other initiatives to scaffold teachers with varying degrees of success.

To further support a sense of professionalism (Booth & Rowsell, 2002), I began to invest in

current professional texts to begin an in-school teacher lending library. Professional articles

on topics of interest were downloaded from the Web and circulated to teachers to supplement

their professional reading. We now had two literacy book rooms – one for English and one

for French materials with each room containing an area for professional teacher materials and

books. Major gains were achieved in the first two years when our teachers opted to spend one night after school each week to work on professional development. Teachers set the agenda by selecting topics and we used in-house expertise to enhance their knowledge and sought outside help when we needed it.

1.2.4 Student Evaluation

Our report card format was in desperate need of updating and once again I used the QEP as the driving force. I believed that if we could use a QEP report style, then at least teachers would be examining QEP competencies as they assessed students' progress. I was interested in assessment for learning (Stiggins, 2001) but at this time I was focusing to a greater degree on the teachers' learning more about the QEP. Therefore in the fall of 2000, I set up an *ad hoc* committee of teachers, parents and me to review samples of QEP reports that were being used in other Québec schools. After a few meetings, a draft was circulated to staff for their input, and our new reports were ready for our first term report. As teachers used the new reports, they realized that they could not adequately assess all the QEP competencies as they were not teaching or evaluating certain skills. Up to this point our teachers had been very confident that they were teaching all that was required in the QEP and that our new reports would be easily integrated into our school's evaluation process. This revelation led to many productive pedagogical discussions about what we needed to do about implementation.

We also ran into a snag: although our school had on-line computers in every class, we could not easily find a way of doing our reports electronically. So we did handwritten reports for the first year but I vowed to find a way to do electronic reports in the future, and two years later we graduated to being the first elementary school piloting our board's electronic reports. This initiative required teachers to have several training sessions after school with

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our board's personnel. Teachers met this challenge with a sense of pride and accomplishment and there were smiles when their trainer presented them with an award and chocolates for outstanding work in quickly mastering a complex system.

As the staff grew more knowledgeable about the QEP and about evaluation practices, teachers were able to provide more detailed anecdotal reporting coupled with competency evaluation. Our special education students all receive detailed supplemental reports commenting directly on the goals set out in their Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.s). We also moved to using authentic student assessment, and every student has a student portfolio that follows him or her through elementary school. In year three (September 2002), I initiated student-led conferencing. During staff meetings we discussed how to do student-led conferences and I supplied teachers with as much relevant reading material on this topic as I could. Teachers discussed with other teachers who had been involved in these conferences, how to assist students in getting ready and how to organize both the portfolios and the conference. With this level of professional assistance we launched into school-wide student-led conferencing which proved to be exceptionally well received by our parents with over 90% of them attending these reporting interviews.

We did considerable work in developing our QEP assessment practices and I believed that we were ready to share our experiences with others as a lead school, but some teachers argued against this initiative. They felt that we had little to offer to the English schools' network of lead schools that were selected by their boards for their exemplary work in implementing QEP practices. To garner support for this idea, I brought two teachers with me to a lead and pilot school meeting, and they later informed staff that we were truly in step with other lead schools, and that we could feel proud of our work. Following this exchange,

staff supported this move and we officially became a Québec lead school in spring, 2003,

sharing with other Québec schools our student evaluation and assessment practices. Several

of my teachers and I have since presented at various workshops for Québec educators

outlining our assessment experiences. Our presentations are well attended and many schools

have expressed interest in our work by asking many questions and requesting information

packages. My teacher presenters have been written up in a provincial educators' publication

Schoolscapes (Katz, 2006; Krakow, 2004), produced by the Ministry and circulated

throughout Québec schools, instilling professional pride in the teachers about our school's

culture of learning.

1.2.5 Other Educational Changes

> Other changes also happened during the year. I created a teacher resource
> position. We increased the school's awareness of special needs' students: how
> to better identify them and how to better serve them…. Our special needs'
> population doubled – not because our clientele doubled but because the
> teachers got better in identifying them and were encouraged to do so…
> Teachers began to learn how to do I.E.P.s.

> I created a physical education specialist position in our school. As a result,
> our students participated in more sport events and competed against other
> schools.

> I timetabled the school differently. Teachers had equal workloads, as they
> must have contractually, but I had them teaching a little outside of their class
> in a neighbouring class. I hoped that this would open up the teaching
> atmosphere more and encourage them to talk and work with one another.

> When it came time to ordering school materials… I refused to give each
> teacher $200 as per tradition. I gave each of them $50 to order very basic
> personal supplies… but gave each team consisting of approx. 3 teachers per
> cycle team …$800… This was my attempt to get them to work together and
> to share materials.

> The school got a new school nurse and social worker…Our nurse was
> instrumental in increasing our social service hours from one day a month to
> one day a week…our school size has more than doubled in two years, so an
> increase in services was warranted but no one before now had sought these
> increases. *(Excerpt from journal entry summer 2001)*

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Our school did not have any criteria for entrance requirements to our French Immersion Program and so I spent time in another series of meetings. I strove to create a sound pedagogical position to help us make good decisions about students' placements. I did this because previously, too many students were failing in the Immersion program and in many cases; students were being withdrawn from Immersion classes in the middle of a school year. We established written norms for entrance criteria and the basic requirements for staying in the program. We held information meetings to inform parents about these new standards that now had to be maintained to guarantee an Immersion placement. Concurrently, we also set up screening procedures to determine the level of French oral, reading, and writing skills for all new Immersion students to ensure that their skills are within the range of our other Immersion students. We also established a new policy, to better balance our two programs, that a student's at-risk behaviour profile could not by itself prevent a student from access to our Immersion program. Stability in our Immersion program improved as we had fewer students leaving the program.

1.3 Tensions

When I recounted the highlights of my work to visiting Ministry personnel, they informed me that I had managed incredible change in my first year and that many schools had not yet addressed these sensitive issues. They also noted that the staff was friendly and overall I appeared to have a good working relationship with them. This was confirmed by my supervisory senior administrator who wrote following a school visit: "Thanks for my day on Thursday with such an upbeat meeting. What impressed me was the keenness of your staff and their industriousness! This is to a great extent, the result of your ongoing support and

encouragement." These comments gave me the much-needed encouragement to continue my transformation efforts.

> …I largely devoted my time and energy to… create a sense amongst the staff and the community of being a new school with a new future – my prime goal was to rebuild… to help forge a new identity for the school. There were times of dissent and acrimony as changes occurred. *(Excerpt from journal entry November 2001)*

Teachers came to accept that we were forging a new future but they didn't always agree with the changes. Some teachers made their dissatisfaction well known but no teacher resigned or requested a transfer. I took that to mean that I had had a successful first year, given the breath and scope of changes that I had undertaken. Fullan (2006) validates my belief when he cites Minthrop, "Job satisfaction affects turnover and absenteeism, and rather than compelling workers to extend effort and instilling the will to high performance, pressures are sometime avoided *with exit*…." (Minthrop, 2004). Since we didn't experience 'exits', I concluded that I had passed my first year as principal, but it had been a very difficult year.

I would be remiss if I did not discuss the many tensions that have arisen in my work as principal. For me, there are two types of tensions that exist - internal and external. The greatest tension is external and arises from the Ministry's demand for public accountability while at the same time demanding colossal changes to teaching practices through the QEP. From a teacher's perspective, there is less risk involved in maintaining less successful teaching practices than introducing new strategies that could yield lower student results than the status quo. There is a delicate balance that must remain because no matter what, teachers do need to be accountable and teaching practices do need to change if we are to see improved results. For large scale change to occur, a new 'mindset' must evolve, (Senge, 1990) and we

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must pursue what is necessary to build a 'learning organization' (Fullan, 1995) that develops a 'professional learning community' (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Certainly my initial work in laying a necessary cultural foundation on which to build a better climate for learning was highly contentious leading to internal tensions. There were many times that I felt quite isolated in my work as teachers chose to shut me out, resulting in a covert tension that lasted for most of my first year. I had adopted a kind of 'tough love' approach and after setting that in motion, I had to wait and see if desired responses would in fact occur. With this tension however, came the greatest number of changes in the school and the learning climate did truly change but it was, without question, my most difficult year with few enjoyable professional moments. However, without real conflict, successful changes cannot take place (Fullan, 1995). Historically, work disruptions arising from provincial contract negotiations have derailed our professional growth plan on several occasions. The pattern is that we have harmony in the workplace for a year or two before the next work disruption overtakes us for an extended length of time until a settlement is reached. This cycle affected my working relationship with teachers and added significantly to the complexity of my role. The tension arises from the need to follow through on initiatives and the need to wait it out until there is a willingness on the part of teachers to forge ahead according to plan. This start-stop cyclic approach to school improvement prevented smooth transitions from one stage to the next developmental stage in our professional growth plan.

Our student enrolment growth allowed me to hire many new teachers (comprising approximately two thirds of our staff), selected for their skills to best fill the school's needs. This was a mixed blessing as they not only brought enthusiasm and fresh ideas to the school but they also brought a need for on-the-job training and mentoring. A young staff also

translated into many maternity leaves, creating a cycle of staff turn-around that played havoc with stability, because teaching teams created one year are often gone the next, or even in mid-year.

Other tensions are covert and exist to fuel on-going internal pedagogical debates which are good but also time consuming. An example is the continuing tension between our English and Immersion teachers about how we fit and work together as the two programs[4] are often in competition with one another over students, resources and my time. There are other tensions between our regular, special education, and ESL staff, with conflicting interests that demand a constant re-vamping of services to accommodate our students, including the 15% who are transient. All of these tensions must be managed for meaningful changes to develop, for as Fullan (1995) writes, "Productive change is full of paradoxes, and components that are often seen as not going together…these tensions must be reconciled into powerful new forces for growth and development" (p. 4). Therein lies my challenge and best summarizes my professional tensions as principal.

1.4 First Action Research Reflection Cycle

In retrospect, even I cannot fathom the amount of changes that took place in the early years of my appointment. Every facet of the school had been bombarded with change. I instinctively knew that the leadership style I had initially chosen left my leadership vulnerable and subject to criticism. At the time, I felt that if I did not immediately begin with a rapid succession of professional changes that touched all staff then the school climate would encourage staff to continue to resist change. My approach involved high risks and the

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[4] G.E.C. School is a dual track school that offers two distinct programs of study; one is a 50/50 French Immersion Program in which the students spend half of their day studying in French and the other half in English (subjects are selected to be taught in one of the two languages) and the other program of study is a Regular English Program in which all subjects are taught in English except for French as a second language (FSL).

possibility that the changes I made might not necessarily be integrated into the inner workings of the school. Furthermore, I realized that I might not be able to engage staff to work with me as a team and that they would always view me as the enemy to be endured. I was fully aware that I was viewed as relentlessly pushing staff very hard in many directions.

I did push hard but in my awareness of doing so, I also tried to soften change by being supportive of teachers in other areas as often as I could. I listened to them, wrote copious thank you notes, supplied occasional treats at lunch and after school, provided all teaching materials they requested, arranged for extra funding for professional development from the school's budget for more teachers to attend conferences and workshops, channelled all parental complaints to my office, and quickly responded to discipline concerns arising in the classrooms by removing students as needed. Although many of my actions did bring me some basic level of acceptance from the staff, trust had to be earned and that took a much longer period of time to build. Teachers still viewed me as being a tough taskmaster and I knew that I desperately needed their good will to effectively change teaching practices, and that I would have to work hard to achieve this.

I also knew that with the initial wave of change I needed to be resilient. I felt confident that I had developed that trait by working as an elected school trustee for nine years on a large urban school board but I was not prepared for how truly hard the early transformation years proved to be. Figuratively, there were days when there was blood on the floor resulting from some of our exchanges. My leadership style took its toll and I did not emerge unscathed from these contentious encounters. I would often go home at night feeling exhausted, discouraged and frustrated. My front with the staff, however, was less emotional as my mantra became, "As principal, I am not paid to be loved but to run a school." Privately,

through all of this, I did continue to worry about the impact of what all this change meant for our teachers. I worried too about the sustainability of the changes that had taken place and I worried that without changes to teaching practices, student learning in our school would not improve. How to overcome this inherent obstacle of getting teachers on side remained my greatest challenge.

I wanted to ensure that our actions would improve teaching practices and effectively move students towards our selected targets. Our teaching practices needed to be grounded in research and sound pedagogy, and adopted by all the staff to provide continuity and student success. In preparation for the next stage of our school improvement initiatives, I began researching ways to facilitate professional change and how to scaffold teachers undergoing change. Up to this point, the teachers had been given a crash course on the QEP and now it was time to concentrate our efforts on one aspect of the curriculum to produce deeper changes to teaching practices (Fullan, 2006). To achieve this level of change, I needed help to identify a focus for the next wave of change, and how to implement it as I still struggled with making sense of my work. Since it is such a fundamental skill and one that was supported by teachers, literacy became the focus. In this endeavour I not only concentrated on my learning about literacy best practices but also on how to improve students' literacy by improving teachers' literacy practices.

It was at this point that I began to review action research and adopted it as a means to improve my leadership and guide my actions to be more effective. I thank Fran Halliday, one of the Ministry's Professional School Improvement team members, who, through her work in our school, became my mentor and introduced me to action research in the fall of 2001. She encouraged me to take an introductory course in action research that she was teaching in our

region for Bishop's University and I agreed to take this course as I needed to learn how to implement this level of reform at the school level. The need for principals to have opportunities to learn and to have professional development to assist them with school reform efforts is well stated by Elizabeth McCay (2001),

> To help other educators achieve their learning goals and to lead school
> reforms, principals need opportunities to learn, reflect, and change….. Recent
> efforts in school reform have focused more attention on the professional
> development of teachers than on the learning needs of school leaders,
> especially principals, who direct the process of change. Before principals can
> take on the challenges of school reform, however, they must become active
> learners (Erlandson, 1994), willing to change their own thinking and practice
> as they lead others in implementing reforms. (p. 75)

As part of my course work, I began to reflect on my practice and to formulate an action research question that would guide me in my next stage of reform implementation:

> ….as an action researcher, I have been examining the need to sensitize teachers to the need for change. This research has led me to explore the following questions:
>
> What is the problem?
>
> What evidence do I have that this is the problem?
>
> Which problems do I have control over?
>
> Which of the remaining problems have the greatest impact on our students' performance?

These broadly based questions have led to more specific questions as:

> How do I get teachers to recognize the need to change teaching practices to enhance students' literacy learning?

How do I nurture collaborative planning while maintaining the momentum of change so inertia doesn't set in or the tendency to retreat to old practices?

How do I manage perceived necessary changes that must be principal guided or otherwise they won't occur?

How do I address literacy changes in French and English programs that traditionally have not been all that complementary or in sync?

How do I create an English and French literacy team approach to better serve students and their learning? *(Excerpt from Action research paper, Bishop's University April, 2002)*

1.4.1 The Research Question

How do I as a principal influence the culture of learning in the school in a way that helps to enhance the education of students and the professional development of staff? *(Excerpt from Action research paper, Bishop's University April, 2002)*

1.4.2 Sub-Research Questions

How do I as a principal influence the teaching of literacy skills in my school in a way that helps to improve the literacy levels of our students and develops teachers professionally to be more proficient in their teaching of literacy skills?

How do I sensitize teachers to the need for change in their classroom practices? *(Excerpt from Action Research Paper, Bishop's University April, 2002)*

Through this course and my work at the school with Fran, action research became a

means by which I began to document my work and to reflect on my practice. As I grew as an

action researcher, I sought the counsel of critical friends, most of who were also engaged in

action research, to help me to better understand my role in the school and how I could make a

positive difference and contribute to both teacher and student learning. The difficult

questions that I began to ask in my journaling and the challenge in trying to find a successful

means to answer them prompted me to closely examine professional learning communities,

leading me to the work of Eaker, Dufour and Dufour (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek,

2004; Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Eaker, et al., 2002). I

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started to reflect on whether the creation of a professional learning community within our school could provide a learning culture in which teachers would begin to examine their literacy-teaching practices in a less threatening fashion. It was at this time that I realized that I had successfully become an action researcher.

1.5 Summary

In setting the context for this thesis, I have tried to provide a sense of the degree of fundamental changes that our school underwent in the early years of my principalship. I have outlined the provincial context that framed my work in the school and described in detail the context within our school, and the many challenges I faced in merging two distinct schools into one school community. Our school story is not unique but I have documented the process for others and it is hoped that by exposing my journey, other school leaders may be more successful in theirs.

I have discussed some of the tensions (Protestant-Catholic, French-English) that existed in the school and some of the measures taken to reduce them. I have also shared my earliest action research questions that arose out of my work in the school as I was making sense of my role in this initial change process. These emergent action research questions evolved in my study after further cycles of think-act-reflect. This evolution re-shaped my lead research question to be: How do I improve my practice as a principal to improve the teaching of literacy? Over the next five chapters, this evolution will be shared with the reader in context. I still wonder about the tensions[5] that continued to exist in the school and question to what degree these tensions impeded change. I still worry about the sustainability of the many changes that have occurred and question how effective my initial leadership strategies were

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[5] See Appendix A for an overview of school tensions.

in forging a foundation for establishing a professional learning community that later came to be centered on literacy.

In order to assist the reader in forming an opinion about my work in the school that is based on leading change in a time of reform, it is necessary to review the literature on both change and leadership as this sets the theoretical context for my research and as such impacts on my action research in the school. The elements of school leadership and change are examined in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO
THE PRINCIPAL AND CHANGE IN AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

2.1 Educational Leadership

As I began examining my practice and how it affects both student learning and teaching practices, a critical question evolved: How do I improve my practice if I can't define it? To find answers, I researched the topics of school leadership and transformational change to acquire a deeper understanding of effective school leadership and guidance for my own practice. My review of the literature on educational leadership underpins my action research study. In this chapter the social construct of school reform frames my school leadership and is the lens through which the principal's role is analyzed. In this discussion, tensions arising from reform initiatives will be discussed – tension between corporate and educational leadership models, tension between principal and teachers in sharing leadership are examined.

In my context, change is born directly from Québec's school reform and results from the societal demands: to improve student results, to be publicly accountable, and in essence to change the way the system does business. In this context I find myself being a change agent and therefore explore what critical elements effective change agents possess. In examining this facet of leadership, moral leadership (Fullan, 2003b) becomes a prime focus and I will present, as a significant part of my leadership discussion, how professional values guide my leadership practices in an ethical manner.

My quest for a comprehensive definition of school leadership leads me to the thought that educational leadership is in crisis. Few studies examine the correlation between school

leadership and student success, and the scant research that is available offers limited insights (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) while there is an intensified demand for improvements in student performance and outcomes. If school leaders cannot clearly define their educational role then their ability to effectively meet societal expectations to improve student success becomes very ambiguous.

This examination and my ensuing reflection result in finding a new leadership model for the schoolhouse – professional learning community leadership. This evolving form of school leadership I will offer as a possible solution: one that shifts much of the instructional leadership role away from the principal to share with teachers, making the heavy responsibilities associated with school leadership more manageable. The 'how' to share and distribute leadership leads me to review educational theories to frame my study.

To focus this complex discussion, I will examine: 1) the contextual framing of school leadership; 2) my Québec context; 3) educational leadership through political, symbolic, structural, and human resource frames; and 4) how the roles of school principal and action researcher will be addressed in this study. My research would be incomplete without a discussion of the impact of the power of the principal's role and how teachers' perception of this power influences my leadership practices in conducting action research within the school. I conclude this chapter by confirming my need for action research to assist me in improving my practice as I work to develop my own living educational theory about the role of principal and how it affects literacy-teaching practices.

2.1.1 Societal Context

Today's schools are complex places and their main purpose is to provide education that reflects their unique societal context. Within this societal frame, I struggle with the

dissonance between corporate and educational leadership practices that has added complexity. Corporate leadership practices are often reviewed with the view of transferability to educational leadership. When there is little transferability found, educational leaders become vulnerable to sharp criticism from corporate voices within the same societal context that schools are meant to reflect and support. My view of the school's societal context is bounded by the work of Fullan (1997) who writes, "…societal improvement is really what education is all about" (p. 14). School leaders must view leadership in a bigger social context that fosters learning and changes society (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Senge, 1990). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) further add, "The challenge for educational leaders and change is not to be dismissive of practices in the business world but to learn from those that are most successful and sustainable" (p.9). But to what degree are these practices transferable to the world of education?

There are fundamental differences and unlike business employees, educators find themselves embedded in social systems to a far greater degree. Schools are constantly exposed to societal demands made by parents as their governance partners, leaving educators unable to run their own affairs in the way they see best (Senge, et al., 2000). Adding further to the complexity of school leadership, in the framework of school renewal and reform, there has been a paradigm shift that focuses on a more collaborative and inclusive leadership model that increases the number of stakeholders and strengthens their voices (Williams, 2006). Leadership is evolving into shared leadership that includes parents and community members. To restore public confidence principals must work openly and jointly with all the groups that compose the school's learning community (Dufour, et al., 2006; Fullan, 2006). According to Fullan (2006) in referring to Elmore's work (Elmore, 2004), there is also a

fundamental difference between corporate and education professionals. Educators define professionalism by their degree of autonomy and do not necessarily subscribe to the body of knowledge generated by their fellow professionals while private sector professionals are more open to applying knowledge found by colleagues to enhance their professionalism (Elmore, 2004). With this entrenched distinction, I argue that educators are not likely to subscribe to the knowledge gained by other professions if they do not subscribe to what is generated by their own profession.

Leadership is always context bound (Foster, 1989) but as schools are open and ever changing systems, school leadership is very difficult to define. Principals must enhance instruction by directly working with teachers to ensure that students experience success (Rossow, 1990) and while instructional leadership addresses instruction within the school, this leadership model offers little to address other key components that Foster (1989) describes as critical (reflective), transformative, and ethical that assist in forming a supportive environment to achieve desired goals.

Expanding on the need to form supportive learning environments, Coburn's (2005) study of two Californian principals' work to improve reading instruction demonstrates the importance of principals being informed in literacy instruction to effectively guide teachers in their "sensemaking" (p.476) of students' learning needs. In her study Coburn "… argues that principals influence teacher sensemaking by shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of meaning making, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning. These actions are influenced by the principal's knowledge of both instruction and teacher learning" (Coburn, 2005,p.477). Therefore principals need to have a good "working knowledge" to make strategic choices that will increase the effectiveness of

their roles (Kennedy, 1982). This is especially true in times of reform when it is the principal's role to establish for teachers a conceptual understanding of how to change student performance outcomes on a school level (Coburn, 2005).

While Coburn's study (2005) provides a rich understanding of the close working relationship between the principal and the teachers that is required to enhance instruction, and details why principals need to develop and inform their instructional practices to increase their effectiveness; it does not provide insights into how principals inform their own practice. Leaving me with my research question, "How do I improve my practice?" and leading me to conduct an action research study to answer this critical question about my school leadership.

To enhance student instruction, I need to first make sense of my own instructional practice. In this construct of making sense of their leadership roles, how do school leaders become instructional leaders who are informed, critical, transformative and ethical and meet the growing demands for greater parent and community participation and shared decision-making? How do educational reform, the school community's values and culture factor into the learning environment? How do school leaders provide a basic level of continuity for instructional practices to develop and grow when societal demands keep changing what is required and shortening the time frames for turn around?

Given the relentless complexity and intensity of societal demands on schools, school leaders often find themselves leading from the 'eye of the storm' in search of clarity at the center of all the turbulences (Thompson, 2004) Principals cannot conceivably do effectively all that society expects of them and while societal pressure is mounting for school improvement to promptly yield better student results, how best to do this is still largely unknown. I must be able to define the school's learning culture in context, conceptualize the

'big picture' of the societal environment, test ideas in practice and finally, critically reflect on the effectiveness of my actions from an educational perspective (Senge, 1990). Therefore I question what form of leadership provides the best model for educators within the societal context of school reform and accountability.

The numerous recent books about educational leadership by such authors as Fullan, Hargreaves and Marzano (Fullan, 1997, 2001; 2003a, 2003b, 2005b, 2006; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, 2006; Marzano, et al., 2005) provide many helpful insights for school leaders to improve schools but I do not believe that they provide a leadership theory on how principals can affect student learning. This belief is supported by Marzano et al., (2005, p. 6) in citing Donmoyer (1985) "Recent studies of schools invariably identify the principal's leadership as a significant factor in school success. Unfortunately these studies provide only limited insight into how principals contribute to their school's achievements. (p.31). This is confirmed by their more recent review of more than 5000 studies and articles where only 69 examined this relationship in which two main variables for principals that affect student performance were found: 1) the focus of change (correct identification of the areas that will have the greatest impact on improving students' achievement) and 2) the order of change (comprehension of the magnitude of change). Coburn's study (2005) adds that the degree of the principal's knowledge about effective instructional practices also affects student achievement. But how principals should conduct this work was not studied. Principals do affect instruction through how they influence the key factors that affect learning (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995) but there has been a failure on the part of the educational system (educational ministry, school boards, and educational researchers) to re-examine and to re-define the role of the principal in student achievement

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(Fullan, et al., 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). An extensive literature review I have conducted confirms that we are as far away today from defining school leadership, as we were when *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was first written (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scriver, 2000).

2.1.2 The Learning Context

My experience leads me to believe that principals are the prime creators of the school's culture and when a culture of learning for all is fostered, teachers will grow and develop as school leaders (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Williams, 2006) . What happens in classrooms is more influenced by the school's learning culture and less by the principal's management strategies (Sergiovanni, 2003) and as principal, this means that I must be attentive to the 'mindscape' of the school (Sergiovanni, 2003) and not just the landscape. I define the school's mindscape as the collective thinking of all of its stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, staff, and community members. This thinking reflects how the school is viewed – its learning culture and climate, and how its success is defined. This awareness of the school's 'mindscape' leads to what Senge (1990) calls 'metanoia'– a shift of mind, a deeper understanding of learning. In this context, learning includes both students and teachers. If I am to enhance instruction then I must develop and foster a learning culture in the school, or my instructional theories will wither without a receptive environment. However, other competing roles can often hinder me from creating an effective and inclusive learning environment. A balance of the competing elements of the principal's complex role must be found, leading me to an ethical debate as I want to do the 'right' thing but cannot be all things to all people. Then whose values get supported and what culture dominates the educational framework?

2.1.3 The Context of My Principal's Mandate

Under the Québec Education Act (Act to Amend the Education Act (c.96) Québec, 1997), I have been given a mandate to make changes at the school level expected by the Québec government, my school board, and the community at large. With this mandate comes a degree of power to effect change and the power and influence of interventions undertaken by school leaders are not to be underestimated. But how to best construct and direct this sphere of influence is a question to which I have found no direct answers in the literature.

In order to understand the extent of power and influence of school principals, it is important to grasp the educational hierarchical structure (Williams, 2006). At the school level, principals have power as senior managers to manage local decisions and adopt leadership styles that are collegial and collaborative. Many directives, however, are initiated by boards of education or, in Canada, by provincial mandates. When decisions are made outside the school as is often the case with school reform initiatives, the principal becomes the middle manager and a messenger who is often left to implement directives within a prescribed timeframe (Stewart, 2006; Wright, 2006) and with little direction as to how to best proceed.

This position of intermediary is nonnegotiable with the policy makers (Clay, 2001) and it is during these periods that the principal's power enters a grey zone. The concept of principals entering into grey zone leadership originates from my experiences as an educational practitioner and leader and not directly from the literature review. I define this grey zone as being a state of professional uncertainty arising from how a principal will carry out directives that have not been clearly defined and where the implementation process has been left open to many interpretations. If the principal is too liberal in interpreting the

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directives, then she is open to criticism that she is not doing her job and is implementing actions that run counter to what the 'real' decision-makers had intended. However, if the principal is too narrow in her interpretation, then staff may view her as unreasonable and over-demanding especially when compared to neighbouring schools' principals. The line between the two interpretations is very fine. To add complexity, in the principals' grey zone of power the principal's sphere of influence is perceived by teachers as being far greater than the hierarchical power structure allows principals to have.

I believe, from experience, that principals encounter the greatest ethical dilemmas and experience the most tension when they are operating in the grey zone. This tension heightens in cases where mandated directives run counter to mutually agreed upon goals established jointly by the principal and the teaching staff or are in direct conflict with the moral beliefs of what the principal believes is best educationally (Bolman & Deal, 1991). In these situations, the principal's realm of power cannot perform miracles (Clay, 2001) and dissension may result. When dissension results, tension in the working relationships between the principal and teachers increases and the principal's decision-making may not reflect what is best for the school overall. Further tension is kindled by the distinct differences in the needs of the school and the needs of the larger institution.

Our Québec reform implementation creates an 'institutional needs dimension' that may be in conflict with a 'personal' or 'group needs dimension' (Letiche, Van Der Wolf, & Plooij, 1991) posing additional ethical dilemmas. What this implies for me as a Québec school principal is that, in the name of reform initiatives, I am left to pursue school improvements that will probably generate quick results but not necessarily those that will create the deeper changes society is demanding of our schools or that will allow meaningful

learning to take place (Murray & Murray, 1999). The impatience of legislators and society, who see educational changes occurring too slowly and impeding our ability to compete globally (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002), has quickened the pace of reform efforts. But the rushed pursuit of these goals undermines the instructional journey required to achieve them. In this rush to fix the problems, the principal's mandate to direct instructional change is greatly compromised.

2.2 The Framing of School Leadership

Researchers strive to understand school leadership and its role in making schools better places for learning (Sergiovanni, 2003). Leadership has to be able to answer to societal challenges with new and more in-depth responses (Flanary & Terehoff, 2000) and as such, school leadership wears many faces and has many dimensions. In my search for an appropriate leadership model I reviewed the many facets of the principals' leadership role and leadership models:

- as a change agent (Fullan, 2001, 2003b, 2005b, 2006; Fullan & Ballew, 2004);

- as in the contextual framework of culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1990, 1996, 2003);

- as ethical leader (Hester, 2003; Raun & Leithwood, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991) ;

- as instructional leader (Foster, 1989; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995; Rossow, 1990);

- as shared leadership (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Eaker, et al., 2002; Wright, 2006);

- as strategic leader (Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Hughes & Beatty, 2005);

- as transformational leader (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1992; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Stewart, 2006)

- as creating sustainable change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006);

and this list is far from being exhaustive. As evidenced in the great amount of literature, the increasing demands made of today's principals have led to the evolution of a highly complex leadership role (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1986; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995).

School leaders must be able to solve problems at the 'grass root' level (adaptive challenges) that academic experts cannot always solve – this is when school leadership is truly required and principals must be able to adapt their leadership practices (adaptive leadership) on an 'as needs' basis (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). Effective leadership does not have a 'one size fits all' (Senge, et al., 2000) but is a blending of 'best practices' tailored to fit the task at hand as well as the context and learning culture. In my new school my task was to find effective strategies to bring about desired changes.

With only three years of experience as a principal at the time of my appointment, I researched leadership strategies. Bolman and Deal's (1991) *Reframing Organizations Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* greatly influenced me and especially their view, "…that effective leaders and effective organizations rely on multiple frames"… and …"need multiple perspectives" (p. 342). Therefore I set out to construct a leadership style that had elements of their four leadership frames (structural, human resource, political and symbolic) and deployed elements from each to fit different situations. These frames were a better match to the strengths I brought to the school and I believed that only a combination of leadership styles would be effective in turning this school around. My school, with its great need of

fundamental changes to improve learning, challenged the core of my leadership. How to

identify the right things to do and proceed effectively became focal points in my research.

Situational leadership that assumes the application of different leadership characteristics

and styles for different situations (Hersey & Blanchard, 1975) comes closer to defining my

work. But I must also take into account the need for me to develop a learning culture to set

the stage for on-going professional inquiry (Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2003b; Senge, 1990; Senge,

et al., 2000; Sergiovanni, 1995, 2000; Sergiovanni & Corbaly, 1984); to develop a

professional learning community that regularly questions professional practices and

examines student learning in a collaborative team approach (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Eaker, et

al., 2002; Fullan, 2001, 2005b; Williams, 2006) but guards against 'groupthink' (Janis,

1972); and to build leadership capacity that shares leadership practices to provide for the

sustainability that allows school improvement initiatives to firmly take hold (Fullan, 2005b;

Harris & Lambert, 2003; Senge, 1990). These elements are of paramount importance to me

as they reflect what I have come to include in my set of beliefs about my practice and

promote what I believe are components of my work.

2.2.1 Educational Reform – Political Frame

There is no right way to effectively lead schools as each school's context requires different

types of leadership at different times (Hallinger & McCary, 1990). As my literature review

implies that leadership theory for the schoolhouse is an intricately interwoven mix of

leadership styles built from a multidimensional construct, I question what are the

implications of this in an age of reform practices? In practice does it include a form of

situational leadership in which the leader's personal traits are matched to the task at hand

(Fiedler, 1997)? Do principals also become servants to serve the educational community

(Crippen, 2005) in the form of Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership? To what degree does transformational leadership (Burns, 1979) get factored into a reform leadership equation? Is leadership of the schoolhouse adequately prepared to meet societal demands?

The voices of educational reform demand that principals become more effective instructional leaders as they implement provincial educational policies (Fullan, 2001); that they adopt versatile and interchangeable leadership styles (Bolman & Deal, 1991) to purposely guide not only what happens in the school and in the classroom, but also shape teachers' professional development (Leithwood, et al., 1992). The degree to which professional development changes teaching practices to improve student learning is determined in part by the learning culture that is encouraged by the principal (Guskey, 2000) and within the school, principals are the gatekeepers of this change (Fullan, 2001). The school principal's role therefore remains a key position that greatly influences climate and learning (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001; National Association of Elementary School Principals & ILIAD Project, 2001) creating the conditions for an effective school (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; W. Smith & Andrews, 1989).

What is apparent from this literature on school reform is that a defined state-of-being must exist in the school – its learning culture must first be in a state of learning readiness in order for reform changes to take place. Ironically, however: this state of readiness can be hindered by reform expectations that call for immediate 'dramatic departure' from established practices without allowing adequate time to study problems and to identify appropriate solutions (Marzano, et al., 2005). Change in itself is not enough as the educational improvements being sought must be sustainable and meet clear and specific

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goals (Fullan, 1993). As Marzano et al., (2005) quote Elmore (2002), "The pathology of American schools is that they know how to change. They know how to change promiscuously and at the drop of a hat. What schools do not know how to do is to improve, to engage in sustained and continuous progress toward a performance goal" (p.1).

I argue that Canadian schools are no different from our American counterparts in this regard (Hulley & Dier, 2005). I believe that numerous schools have met what Marzano et al (2005) describe as first order change but they now need to strive for second order change to reach that breakthrough that Fullan et al., (2006) describe. Second order change dictates that educators move away from relying only on known strategies to solve problems and move to deeper levels of thinking to seek new uncharted ways to solve the increasingly complex problems that schools face (Marzano, et al., 2005). Principals and teachers need to collectively problem-solve how to achieve second order changes. It is this level of interaction that will create deep level changes – deep system transformation (Fullan, 2006) that will enhance learning and assist more schools in moving closer to their targets and when this occurs, second order change will have taken place. School leaders are encouraged to continue in their pursuit of changes to improve schools by Fullan (2001) when he states that "Change is a double-edged sword. Its relentless pace these days runs us off our feet. Yet when things are unsettled, we can find ways to move ahead and to create breakthroughs not possible in stagnant societies" (p. 1).

Although school leaders are considering new practices, there is a "… continuing focus on traditional bureaucratic management and hierarchical structure" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999,p.26) and while many principals are interested in increasing participatory leadership, many continue to follow outdated management practices. I argue that principals cannot

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afford 'to get it wrong' but when there is pressure applied, they will retreat to comfort zones of old managerial styles (Fullan, et al., 2006). There is little insight into how principals develop political astuteness while engaging all stakeholders (Burns, 1979) to effectively resolve reform issues. Deal and Patterson (1999) advise principals that they will need to balance opposing forces as they contend with educational paradoxes and this must involve planning (Drake & Roe, 1994) that is regularly reviewed and revised (Sergiovanni, 2003). Leadership practices must change but the focus must be on the change process to improve and not just change (Fullan, 1993).

McCay's (2001) case study of six elementary school principals with three or more years of experience found that school leaders also need to grow and learn in the context of their work while leading reform changes in their schools. They must also be able to focus on teachers' motivation to change teaching practices to enhance learning outcomes. But in order to improve students' results and increase accountability, school leaders need to have their jobs re-defined to drop what Fullan (2006) refers to as "distracters" (union and labour, plant, financial and personnel issues) (p. 82) so they can focus on creating the environment for pedagogical exchanges. In this context, growth is designed to be precise and personalized (Fullan, 2006), encapsulated in moral actions determined to reach core goals. While this a logical outline of what needs to be done to free up principals' time to lead reform changes, in my practice, I have found myself powerless to remove many of these distracters that can greatly reduce the pursuit of pedagogical initiatives, as they are often defined by outside legislative forces that are beyond my sphere of influence.

This suggests that the necessary leadership components for school improvement must be re-examined and that shared leadership within the district or province be developed in order

to build school leadership capacity, improve student learning, and foster skill acquisition; (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004). Fullan et al., (2004,p.42-46) identify ten components (compelling conceptualization, collective moral purpose, catching the right bus, capacity building, lateral capacity building, ongoing learning, productive conflict, demanding culture, external partners, and focussed financial investments) that are further discussed by (Fullan, et al., 2006) who argue that this set of criteria is a 'meal' and not a 'menu', meaning that one cannot select items from the list because of the synergy that is created by the interaction of all the criteria. This holistic approach has tremendous implications for effective school leaders as it implies a large scale concerted effort. Successful school leaders cannot dabble in reform efforts.

2.2.2 Moral Leadership – Symbolic Frame

To change school climates, principals need to focus on doing the right things and not only on doing it right (Sergiovanni, 1990, 1996). Schools require principals who have set moral standards that reflect the school's core values (Sergiovanni, 1992) and make a focused effort to tie their personal values and beliefs to those of the school. In doing so, they become ethical leaders who use the cultural fabric of the school to focus on core purposes to motivate teachers and energize learning (Peterson & Deal, 2002). Learning is enhanced when ethical leaders build relationships through modeling and mentoring and create a community within an ethical multidimensional framework that fosters creativity, flexibility, and reflective practice (Hester, 2003; Starratt, 1991).

Sadly however, the literature does not discuss how values stemming from ethical frameworks might be applied in a situational context (Campbell, 1997) and there is a deep sense of a disregard for the kind of moral dilemmas educational leaders face (Willower,

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1996). In the reality of their school environments, principals are left making moral choices that are too often guided by strategic and not by ethical standards (Strike, 1993). Campbell (1999) found that principals tended to deny the moral nature of their problems and focused instead on other concerns that were political, practical or strategic or sometimes neutralized problems by using conflict resolution. With these findings in mind, my belief is that principals frequently make daily moral decisions without ethical guidelines outside their own value systems and rules of conduct. To address this dilemma, many principals adopt elements of democratic (open) leadership to provide transparent leadership that is based on shared decision-making and active member involvement (Gastil, 1997). But as Fullan (2003b) argues, in order for educational leadership to be good it must have a moral purpose, and if this is the case, then where does this leave principals who are making moral decisions without ethical guidelines?

As a principal, I have learned to rely on my personal values to guide the many decisions I must make without the time for consultation or reflection. Moral philosophy supports the transfer from personal values to professional ones and this transfer develops over time through one's life experiences (Raun & Leithwood, 1993). Many of the changes I sought reflected the training and the moral beliefs that I brought to the school and became incorporated into my action research. These "professional" values are very important in the design of reliable learning communities and for researchers working with their colleagues (L. M. Smith, 1990). Practitioner researchers should work from their own values to pursue educational goals. This process in action research is about living one's educational values while improving educational practice (Lomax, McNiff, & Whitehead, 1996).

The moral imperative in school reform changes as described by Fullan (2003b) calls for principals to build new cultures based on trusting relationships and on a disciplined approach to inquiry and action. Professional relationships are more likely to be effective when they are based on the notion of shared leadership than on hierarchical leadership (Letiche, et al., 1991). From this, I understand that I must build trusting relationships with my teachers as I continue to explore ways to share leadership to nurture a professional learning community. How I go about building trusting relationships with my colleagues greatly influences how I conduct my practice.

2.2.3 Shared Leadership – Human Resource Frame

I believe that educational leadership is in crisis due to leadership overload. I define this as the state of being that school leaders experience, when the demands made of them are too numerous causing their effectiveness to break down. Leadership overload arises from the imposition of corporate/business models of leadership on education in the contemporary period, as well as the pace of educational reform itself. Principals are endeavouring to address too many issues in a societal context in which their roles are not well defined and inadequately supported. In this reform environment, principals are left to address divergent practices while they review moral, ethical and political questions about how to best 'reform' schools. As there is no single definition of educational leadership (Bates, 1989), there is also no one model that fully captures my multifaceted role that is situated in a highly complex society. With this knowledge, I have viewed emerging school improvement leadership theories that include collaborative and inclusive leadership. Fullan et al., (2004) advise that, "…large-scale reform requires pluralized leadership" (p.43). Effective principals must foster leadership support to adequately address contemporary challenges and this requires a team

approach – pluralized leadership. It is therefore in this framework I have chosen to analyze my practice and foster change.

School change results from good educational leadership that involves lead teacher teams working collaboratively with the principal towards achieving critical school improvement goals (Fullan, et al., 2006). But principals must move away from traditional leadership that directs what teachers do to improve student learning to a new theory that includes teachers in making important decisions about how to improve learning (Stewart, 2006). "If schools are to be significantly more effective, they must break from the industrial model upon which they were created and embrace a new model that enables them to function as learning organizations… professional learning communities" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998,p.15). In the formative leadership theory developed by Ash and Persall (2000), teachers become leaders within the school and in this framework the principal makes a profound leadership change to become a 'leader of leaders' (Childs-Bowen, et al., 2000).

To foster shared leadership, principals must create an environment that supports collaboration among teachers, provides time for professional development and actively encourages teachers to be leaders (Ash & Persall, 2000; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). This shared leadership must also include shared vision (Senge, 1990). Shared decision-making sustains a positive school culture in which everyone leads, not just the principal (Deal & Peterson, 1999). To meet these challenges, the leadership paradigm has shifted to be more collegial, collaborative and inclusive while focusing on improving student learning (Williams, 2006).

Accordingly, there is a growing amount of literature about professional learning communities and the style of leadership encapsulated in this community of learners and leaders. Its underlying central theme is that to improve student learning, teaching practices

must change and in order for this change to occur, teachers too become learners. Teachers need to learn how to develop "critical learning instructional paths" (CLIPs) (Fullan, 2006). Developing CLIPs involves teachers' understanding of how to assess students on a learning continuum and knowing how to move students to their next stage of learning and being able to respond appropriately when students do not master the essential skills and knowledge being taught (Dufour, et al., 2006). These practices are more skilfully developed when principals provide a supportive learning environment for teachers within a professional learning community that nurtures "precision" (Fullan, 2006).This new model of leadership attempts to create a new leadership paradigm based on educational needs. It focuses on students' learning and is based on professional collaboration. It engages teachers for the first time as full partners in the education process to work as an educational team to improve both teaching and student learning while empowering teachers to become leaders.

Additionally, this model of shared leadership comes at a time when changes are accelerating so quickly that it is impossible for one leader to fulfill the mandate set for them. This sharing of leadership is especially critical in smaller schools in which there are no vice principals to share the leadership role. In my practice as principal, I was encouraged that I had critical friends with whom to share my reflections and who could assist me in formulating actions to meet new demands. I believe professional learning communities offer school leaders hope.

Professional learning community leadership will require, however, a major mind shift for educational administrators and I am concerned that many principals who tend to be more traditional in their approach to school leadership will find this paradigm shift to shared leadership and decision-making to be a daunting task. But I firmly believe that a new

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leadership model for the schoolhouse is long overdue and that professional learning community leadership appears to be the best model offered to school leaders at this time. Its very construct allows for leadership to grow and evolve in a new dimension. This evolution will not be easy or without challenges and conflict but from this exchange, change will occur (Fullan, 1993) resulting in what I believe will be a stronger educational community led by real school leaders.

2.2.3.1 Professional Learning Communities – Implications for School Leaders
Professional learning community schools have school cultures based on shared mission, vision and values, collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation, continuous improvement, and results' orientation (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Dufour and Eaker (1998) describe the role of school principals in forming professional learning communities as: leading through shared vision, sharing decision-making, providing all necessary information to make good decisions, and focusing on teachers' behaviours and not their attitudes. The principal as chief learning officer, in this environment, encourages and supports teachers to assume leadership roles. Leadership takes place throughout the school through multiple forms of capacity building and professional development exercises (Ash & Persall, 2000; Fullan, et al., 2004; Williams, 2006). Principals initiate this leadership change by starting with a dedicated core group and working towards greater staff participation over time but Sergiovanni (2000) cautions that in order to be effective, regardless of the collaborative model used, teachers need to engage and to examine their practices together.

Mohr and Dichter (2001) advise principals to be prepared for a journey that goes through several successive stages of evolution from what they refer to as the honeymoon stage as a sense of community emerges, the conflict stage, the confusion stage, the messy stage, the

scary stage and finally the mature-group stage in which a learning community is born. To create and sustain a professional learning community requires strong, consistent, and patient leadership.

2.2.4 Sustainable Leadership – Structural Frame

Does creating a professional learning community facilitate sustainability? Hargreaves and Fink (2004) found that sustainable leadership requires principals to pay attention to sustainability from the onset of their appointment to the school. Their study also showed that in order for principals to leave 'a lasting legacy', school leaders must share and develop their vision with others in the school. In essence, school leadership must be shared through professional networks that work to achieve common goals; focus not only on instruction but also on the school's culture to promote on-going improvements to teaching practices so goals can be achieved and sustained. However, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) also caution that setting common goals must not lead to working towards standardization – one template will not fit all students or teachers.

"Sustainable educational leadership develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006,p.17). Sustainable changes are morally driven (Fullan, 2006). They bring about change to the immediate future and stretch into the unforeseeable future. In this model, teachers and principal fully immerse themselves in learning while sharing leadership and working towards sustainable change to improve student achievement in positive and ethical ways. "Leaders develop sustainability by committing to and protecting deep learning in their schools;…by distributing leadership and responsibility to others; …sustaining themselves so they can persist with their vision and

avoid burning out; by promoting and perpetuating diverse approaches to reform…and by engaging actively with their environments" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004,p.12-13). It is clear that the steps required to establish sustainability are closely aligned with those required to create professional learning communities.

Fullan (2006) extends the concept of professional learning communities to three levels: the school, the district and its community, and the state; to create what he calls 'permeable connectivity' (p.96). These connections between the three levels create a learning culture that extends the flow of power and allow for resources to be provided to the local level – the school. This delicate balance of joining the efforts of all three levels to engage in 'lateral capacity building' underpins a supportive context where 'turn around leadership' (Fullan, 2006) can occur to create 'deep level' sustainable change.

The question of sustainable change is one that is very important to me as a school principal as sustainable change is my legacy to the school. If my work unravels with my departure then my work loses its meaning and my effort is valued less. More importantly, if change is not sustainable in the school to which I have been assigned as principal, student learning is unlikely to improve in the long run and ultimately, that is my chief mandate in the school. Professional learning community leadership addresses this point to a greater degree than any other leadership model that I have reviewed.

2.3 Leadership – Combining the Roles of Principal and Researcher

My review of the relevant literature has shown that the change process is very complex and can only result from very carefully chosen and applied strategies that foster shared decision-making in a culture of professional trust. My combined role as principal and researcher complicates my task and the literature does not provide clear answers for researchers in

leadership positions. But there are strategies that leaders can adopt to deal with the perception of power and its sphere of influence. First, in order to share power, leadership barriers have to be broken down and this requires the building of professional trust and caring. Harris and Lambert (2003) suggest that principals provide many individuals with broad-based involvement in sharing leadership and that principals skilfully involve teachers in ways to demonstrate their proficiency in leadership actions.

To further nurture a supportive environment for sharing leadership, school leaders need to view power as an investment and not as a control measure (Mills, 2003). When teachers are invested with power, they learn to participate in leadership roles with their principal as they jointly develop a professional culture for instructional changes to enhance student learning (Lieberman, 1988). Learning communities are collaborative structures and it is the collective approach that must be established in support of teachers' involvement in school decision-making. However, there are times when the principal has a mandate to carry out directives that cannot be changed and under these circumstances the best practice that the principal can put into effect is one of openness and complete honesty (transparency). I have come to learn from experience that if this climate is well established in the school setting then these attributes will carry the principal a long way towards mitigating feelings of coercion and betrayal. This basic approach is supported by Zeni (2001), whose ethical stance is largely based on John Rawls' (1971) "theory of justice", who sees the relationship between the researcher and the researched as complex and the only approach is to attempt to be clear, open and honest.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature on leadership and change within an educational context and of models of school leadership that were briefly reviewed. I have proposed that educational leadership is in crisis because of complex societal demands and the additional burdens of school reform. This context requires principals to bring about changes to teaching practices to improve learning and I have argued that change is very difficult to foster in an environment that is filled with social and political demands for immediate results. Principals must be instructional leaders who are able to build and sustain a school culture that improves learning while accommodating change.

As teachers are being asked to change teaching practices and principals are asked to manage this change, many schools are looking to ways of creating professional learning communities that will assist them with their work. The new leadership model that is emerging is that of professional learning community leadership. There is hope that, as this model is being designed for educators, not only will it build leadership capacity in the school but also bring about sustainable changes to the school community. I have presented my belief, based on my research, that this model of shared leadership is the best one to be applied to move teachers to change their teaching practices and improve student learning. It is one that I have embraced in my reflections,

> I do however, hope to remain in my present school to complete the next stage of my work – to create a professional learning community around literacy and to reach my main goal – to establish a culture for sustainability, this being a prime goal that I established when I joined the school in the spring of 2000.
>
> The next stage in our school's development is critical and I feel at this point that I too will be stretched the most as a school administrator as we move forward to grow into a professional learning community for until now, I controlled much of the external changes. Now I must shift gears smoothly and systematically to build leadership capacity in our teachers so they can direct

the next step in our journey. I worry if they are ready for the challenge and if I am able to let go of the control I have exercised in the decision-making process to date. I believe that the next level of change has to come from the teachers and that my role will become more of a facilitator. Now it is teachers who need to become the change agents as they develop their personal mindset and mastery (Fullan, 1995; Senge, 1990). I can guide, lead, and light a fire but the fire to improve literacy-teaching practices has to be within each teacher and fuelled by him or her. I cannot mandate what is important as Fullan (1993) writes, "The more complex the change the less you can force it. (p.21) *(Excerpt from professional notes January 2004)*

My journey in leading school improvement spanned approximately seven and a half years and I realize as I write this chapter that my staff moved from examining the concept of professional learning community to actually beginning to form one. Many teachers still appeared to be fearful of changes that mean a different way of doing business but I saw a shift. There was a growing focus on how teaching and learning interrelate, and teachers worked diligently to improve our students' success. In spite of the many tensions that existed in the school that I will describe in more detail in Chapters Four and Six, a professional learning partnership did emerge between us. If I can find evidence from my research that we were working towards second order change as discussed earlier in this chapter, I will know that I have been able to create a culture of learning with the teachers that fosters sustainable change. We will not have reached the level of change described by Fullan et al. (2006), but we will have created an environment that is morally guided for a professional learning community to flourish.

As I try to define my leadership style from a theoretical perspective, I still find elements from many frames that I apply in various contexts; that is, I borrow from all of the leadership models on a 'as needed' basis. I view challenges as problems that can be solved and use whatever strategies are required to do so. That fundamental approach to leadership has not changed over time, but what has changed for me is how I use reflection to determine the next

action I take, and the fact that I am seeking ways to share the leadership role and encourage others to be change agents with me. As a principal and an action researcher, I have had to examine and re-examine my practice as to how to best influence and further support our school's learning climate to enhance literacy.

Reading about educational leadership offered me various leadership styles and models but it did not yield answers to the questions I was asking. While I drew knowledge about the "how do I…" as a change-agent I came to understand that what would guide my work and offer solutions to my enquiries would be my reflections, my self-guided professional readings, and the critical conversations I have with colleagues. This realization led me to become interested in action research. In the following chapter, I will discuss action research and describe how "living educational theory" has become the theoretical framework that underpins my practice.

CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND FORMULATION OF A RESEARCH PLAN

3.1 The Study's Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I will present a brief history of action research and how this research design has evolved into a widely used educational research model. As the focus of my research is how I go about improving my principal's role to improve students' literacy, I will describe why other research models did not provide me with a framework to conduct an analysis of my daily work in context while I sought answers to the problems our school posed. It was this realization that led me to construct an action research model, in which my professional readings, reflections and critical conversations became meaningful to me as I embarked on creating my own living educational theory about my principalship. I will define "living educational theory" as developed by Whitehead and I will outline why this theoretical framework provides both the necessary conceptual grounding and validation process required for my study.

In reviewing my ethical stance, I will examine how the experiences of other leaders in a practitioner research role assisted me in safeguarding against any perceived misuse of power caused when a principal collects data from her staff. These discussions close with my rationale for choosing to conceptually frame my action research design with living educational theory. It is my contribution to living educational theory that adds knowledge about educational leadership to the field of education. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion on how I incorporated action research methodology into my study's research plan and I will explain my plan's evolution in the field.

3.1.1 Evolution of Action Research

As professionals in the fields of social sciences and the humanities began to inquire into their own practices, research methodologies designed for the pure sciences began to fit less well and a new research paradigm was sought (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

3.1.2 The Origins of Action Research

Among the early explorers was Kurt Lewin, commonly accepted as the 'father' of action research, who sought a new methodology for his investigations. The term 'action research' first appeared in his early works around 1934, and evolved during his practical social experiments and research, now referred to as the Iowa studies, during World War II. Lewin found that people do change (take action) when they experience the need to change (reflect) and will adopt new behaviours (new action) based on their values. Lewin's (1951) field theory is based on the proposition that our behaviour is purposeful and influenced not just by the physical constructs surrounding us but also by the psychological ones that occur in our minds as we make sense of situations in which we find ourselves. Given the depth of my new challenges in leading a very difficult school, I related very well to both of these constructs as I tried to make sense of my role in my new surroundings. It is however, the psychological constructs that fuelled my inquiry and my search for an appropriate research model.

3.1.3 Influence of International Action Researchers

Since its origins in the 1930's, action research has become a worldwide research methodology with theorists in the United Kingdom (Elliott, Lomax, McNiff, Whitehead), in the U.S. (Argyris, Mills, Stenhouse) and in Australia (Carr, Kemmis) whose work has shaped and refined it. Lewin's (1951) notion of taking informed action led to Argyris' (1974) double loop learning theory that also examines the governing variables in situational contexts, which

Schon's (1983) work later refined in his theory of reflection-in-action – think, act and reflect. Out of the foundation works of Lewin, Argyris and Schon, other researchers began conducting action research studies. The rationale for using action research resulted from the participant's desire to learn about one's practice in its natural social context through collective self-reflective inquiry with a view to improving practice and as a means of obtaining new knowledge (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982, 1985). In linking action and research to generate reflective action to change human behaviour, action researchers create a 'double burden' of both finding new knowledge and creating positive change (Argyris & Schon, 1991).

3.1.4 Action Research in Education

Given this construct of action research, I believe that this research model is well suited for educators who are continuously asked by society to act in context while afforded little tolerance for error. Action research conditions the researcher to be reflective but always with the view of taking informed action (praxis) to answer the research question – to 'do something about it' (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). Its methodology is not to test ideas by trial and error but to take deliberate action that is pre-determined to minimize error. It is therefore not surprising that many educators have chosen to conduct research through their own action research studies – beginning with Stephen Corey, the first researcher to use action research in education in the 1950s. Lewin's (1951) work provides a practical foundation and framework for educational research, as it defines action research as being a process that gives "credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on 'private troubles' they have in common" (Adelman, 1993). Educators need to make regular informed

decisions about their practice and student outcomes to enhance learning, and this work

necessitates collective research in the field to inform practice (Mills, 2003).

3.1.5 Methodological Applications of Action Research

Action research is very subjective as its methodology is defined by the individual researcher,

so it is difficult to provide a philosophical framework to encompass all action research

studies. Educators do not conduct action research according to only one design model and

presently, there are three main current schools of thought in action research (Mills, 2003):

American, with its roots in the progressive education movement as conceptualized by John

Dewey (Noffke, 1994); British, with a basis in curriculum reform and increased

professionalism in teaching (Elliott, 1991; Stenhouse, 1975); and Australian with a move

towards collaborative curriculum planning (Kemmis, 1993). Out of these movements, three

methodological applications of action research have evolved:

- 'critical' action research, also known as emancipatory action research, which draws from

  critical theory (Mills, 2003) and from postmodernism (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and in

  which there is a shared democratic commitment to seek new knowledge and to break

  away from traditional bureaucratic traditions for reform and social improvement (Carr &

  Kemmis, 1986);

- 'technical' action research that incorporates a scientific approach to problem solving and

  is product directed;

- 'practical' action research in which the researcher focuses on the "how-to" and "how do

  I" research questions (Elliott, 1991) and which is not so clearly framed theoretically.

Hammersley (1993) has criticized some research methodologies as being too scientific in nature and not always relevant to research outside of the pure sciences and he offers two reasons for educators to select other research methodologies, namely, that scientific research cannot always answer and solve teacher problems and secondly, that there is no scientific method that guarantees results as the world of education is ever changing and a traditional approach is therefore unlikely to be effective.

3.1.6 Theoretical Framing of Action Research

Today, for action research in education, the over-arching theoretical frame, or what Creswell (1998) refers to as an ideological perspective, is postmodernism. This frame emphasizes that a truth can be socially constructed by a particular group coming to know and understand natural human experiences in context. Stringer (1996) argues that elements of postmodernism, with its ability to deconstruct knowledge and to create transformative elements, allows action researchers to 'critically inspect' and explore social dimensions of their practices and then to reflect on possible transformations to their practice. This viewpoint implies a more universal application to action research than implied by Mills (2003). Quigley and Kuhne (1997) cite the work of Habermas (1970) and his assertion that knowledge can be socially constructed through technical, practical and emancipatory interests. It is the intent of the researcher in context that frames the action research leading directly to practical change. The research outcomes relate directly to the researcher and therefore can be applied immediately thus closing the gap between theory and practice. Through the cycles of planning, acting and reflecting, a change in practice occurs (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997).

Action Research is evolving as new practitioners engage in research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and providing a research framework for practitioners to reflect on their own practice

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while at the same time working towards improving it. This activity is guided by a series of action-reflection cycles, with proposed ethical solutions tested in the field, critically analyzed for validity and trustworthiness, subject to further action-reflection, and in the final stage, refined or changed as required to effectively answer the research question (Hubbard & Power, 1999; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003).

Habermas' (1973) notion of critical endeavours creates a conceptual framework for the social sciences that includes critical theory in the epistemology of human interactions and practice. However, Carr & Kemmis (1986) argue that Habermas has failed to produce "standards of rationality" in which critical social science can justify its own research procedures, and is lacking in examples of successful practical applications. Nonetheless, Habermas' work does provide a theoretical background to the methodologies advocated by action researchers (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Kemmis (1993) also raises the issue of how to best frame action research theoretically for educators: should it be part of a larger field that we know as social theory or should the focus be more narrow and limited to the development of educational theory? He supports an educational approach and explains the steps to be taken, "Our task as educational researchers involves us in taking concrete and explicit steps towards changing the theory, policy and practice of educational research, as well as participating in the work of changing educational theory, educational policy and educational practice…" (Kemmis, 1993,p.15). Educational theory needs to logically unify theory and practice with rigorous standards of practice by which to judge its realizations of practice.

As there is no universally accepted framework, no single educational theory, and certainly not one conceptual framing for action research, for the purpose of my study, I have

adopted a practical approach to explore "How do I improve my practice to enhance the teaching of literacy?" My action research links the development of my practice with new knowledge about how a school principal in performing her functions can purposely impact on literacy instruction.

3.2 Living Educational Theory

During a qualitative research methodology course in 2003, I struggled to find a conceptual framework to support my proposal for an action research project. I came across Whitehead's (1989a) "living educational theory" and I had a conceptual epiphany as the simplicity and sense of this theory appealed to me. It allowed me to frame my study rationally and to feel comfortable and confident in doing so. As a more informed action researcher, I think how lucky I was to have found this theory so early in my studies, because in all the subsequent readings I have done, no other theory comes close to making sense to me and rationalizes my study on my practice as a principal. From the initial stages of my study, I have used living educational theory to frame my research.

I believe that the different fields of research pull educational researchers in too many directions and prevent us from forging a common professional fellowship that is bounded by a conceptual framework – an educational theory that can guide educational researchers that will yield meaningful, relevant and trustworthy findings. Whitehead's "living educational theory" provides an approach conceptualized by educators for educators and he is the first educational theorist to do so.

3.2.1 The Influence of Whitehead

In Britain in the 1970s, Jack Whitehead, as a young teacher and a master's student, began to shape his conceptual framework for educational research. As he recounts (Whitehead,

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1989a), it was the reading of Polanyi's (1958) *Personal Knowledge* that led him to reflect on his positivist approach to research. In search of an alternative, he came to review the work being done in action research and became interested in its methodology, epistemology and ontology. He began conducting action research on his own teaching practice, and he resisted conceptual frameworks 1) that supported theories as closed systems of thinking; 2) that advocated only the propositional form of research in which external researchers manipulate variables to achieve desired fixed results and 3) that used the over-arching mindset that heralded positivistic research as being the only valid lens to view and judge the professionalism of teachers. In this he was influenced by Hirst (1983), Elliott (1987), Schon (1983), and by others such as Foucault (1980), Freire (1973), and Habermas (1987). In 1985, he loosely defined living educational theory as,

> ….a theory…generated and tested from a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in educational contexts in order to improve the rationality and justice of: their own educational practices, their understanding of these practices, (and) the situations in which the practices are carried out…The educational analysis which follows is focused upon the nature of the validity of an individual action researcher's claim to know his or her own educational development (Whitehead, 1985, p. 97, 2009, p. 176).

Whitehead argued in (1989a,p.1), "…that a living educational theory of professional practice can be constructed from practitioner's inquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' The significance of 'I' existing as a living contradiction in such inquiries is considered and other epistemological issues related to values, validity and generalisability are discussed from the living perspective."

This question of involving 'I' in the research is an important distinction as it definitely shifts the focus of the researcher from observer to active participant but more importantly, it places the onus on educational practitioners themselves to conduct research on educational

practice to derive understanding and meaning of their own practice and to add new knowledge to the field. It is these types of inquiries that are at the heart of Whitehead's work and imply quite an important distinction from inquiries that are conducted by researchers who are not participatory researchers. Whitehead proposes that through systematic reflection on their practice, educational practitioners can provide meaningful insights into daily practice and offer valid accounts of how educators develop and conduct their practice. It is through these living situational accounts (praxis) that educational theories evolve – "living educational theories".

3.2.1.1 The Framing of Living Educational Research Questions

Living educational theory is unique in its framing of the research questions in the format of "How do I...". " How do I improve my practice?" becomes a question framing the research methodology. But Whitehead goes beyond establishing just a subjective action research frame to study one's own practice. His work (Whitehead, 1985, 1989a, 1989b, 2001; Whitehead & McNiff, 2004) and especially his more recent work (Whitehead, 2005) delves at great length into how to judge and validate claims made by practitioner action researchers. He explores how to produce evidence that will bring the subjective experiences of one researcher to the educational community and provide meaningful findings that can assist others in their practice. From these findings, educational theory evolves and the living component – key and critical to Whitehead's conceptual framework, lives in the accounts produced by practitioners living their values in their practice.

Unlike Popper (1963), whose conceptual theoretical frame excludes all theoretical concepts (theories) in which contradictions exist, Whitehead's acknowledges that there are often contradictions between theory and practice and it is these 'living' contradictions that

researchers must research and explore in order to contribute knowledge to the field of education. He asked: How do we learn from the tensions that result between theory and practice? It is the resolving of these contradictions that formulate educational living theories. Whitehead's conceptualization explores the evolution of what people know (tacit knowledge) to how they come to know new knowledge from actively engaging in their practice and what they actually practice (living their values) in everyday context. McNiff (2007) further explains that although practitioners often hold values about their practice, in certain situations these values are denied because of situational constraints. It is when educators reflect on what actions they can take to address these types of contradictions that "living educational theories" begin to form. At this point practitioners begin to act out their values and it is from Stenhouse's (1975) idea of teachers as researchers that Whitehead and McNiff have come to realize educators as theorists (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). In doing so, Whitehead has re-conceptualized educational theory which no longer has to be propositional but now has a new form with a revised intellectual scope (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). Dialectic explorations and discoveries can stand alongside propositional theoretical discoveries as valid research results.

3.2.1.2 Social Formations in Living Educational Theories

In moving from living educational theory to living educational 'theories', Whitehead developed a notion of social formations (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). A social formation is a group of people working together and McNiff's (2007) description of social formations as groups of people working with unsaid rules that are commonly known and accepted is conceptually quite similar to Wenger's (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Synder, 2002) idea of communities of practice. Members of communities of practice steward

knowledge as a 'living process' that is dependent on their voluntary engagement within a climate fostering some degree of informality and autonomy. Leaders must broker relationships so that knowledge can be constructed and shared through the relationships and the exchange of information, and non-hierarchical leadership is critical. Whitehead (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005) encourages knowledge attainment in social formations by having its members critically reviewing their practices with a view to changing and improving.

3.2.1.2.1 Generalizability in Action Research

There are those who criticize action research for its lack of generalizability. Generalizability is important and it does exist in practitioner action research but it depends not only upon the practitioner providing detailed and rich descriptions of one's practice, but also on revealing the social relations that underpin the practice. Whitehead's notion of social formations postulate that these formations are created only when there is a social acceptance of the work being done, when tacit knowledge becomes explicit through the on-going dialogues amongst those who are a part of the educational practice contained in the action research study. It is these professional relationships and the academic review that gives credence to the research and permits the transfer of knowledge from one social formation to another. I believe that living educational theory in a situational context provides a frame for the transfer of knowledge from one educator to another that may be only meaningful to educators in comparable contexts. Sagor (2000) argues that because action research studies in education are usually conducted in "…a unique setting with a comparatively small sample…" (p.157) generalizability may be very limited but nevertheless, these studies "… do offer valid and reliable report(s) of what occurred inside one unique setting…" (p. 158). Educators can extract what is relevant and transferable to their own settings. In this way, case by case,

educators add to their knowledge bank or living educational theory. This one critical element may be the key factor that finally defines for educators an educational theoretical framework.

A research theory must have a validation process and Whitehead forcefully argues that educators must not only conduct research to study their practice and resolve contradictions, but they must also rigorously validate the claims arising from their research. Validation involves "making claims; critically examining the claims against evidence; (and) involving others in making judgments" (McNiff, et al., 2003, p.24) about the claims made. It is a formative process that includes these ascending levels of validation: self validation, peer validation, up-liner validation (management and those in authority), client validation, academic validation (academic community) and general public validation (McNiff, et al., 2003,p.108-109)

Whitehead agrees with Habermas' (1981) view that in order to strengthen social validation, the researcher must be mindful that the accounts contain sufficient evidence to justify the assertions made and the critical element is that tacit knowledge can only be made explicit through detailed reflection and social validation. Whitehead and McNiff (2007) maintain that action researchers must be accountable and that "accountability is grounded in a process of democratic evaluation" (p. 1). This supports Fay's (1996) claim that an act only takes on meaning when it is interpreted not just by one interpreter but by other interpreters in context and "meaning arises out of the relationship between an act and those trying to understand it" (p.142).

Guba and Lincoln's (1989) four trustworthiness constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability challenge validity if a critical trustworthy element is absent. Living educational theory meets Guba and Lincoln's accepted standards of validity.

However, Whitehead continues to seek new approaches to strengthen generalizability, or transferability. To this end, Whitehead (2005) more fully explores what he terms as living standards (explanatory principles that are themselves living) that are implied in a living educational theory. As part of the formation of standards for validation methods, Whitehead applies three logics – propositional, dialectical and inclusional (Whitehead, 2005). He (2005) firmly stresses the importance of ontological values in self-study as these values give meaning to human existence and form epistemological standards of judgment.

Whitehead's initial conceptualization of educational living theory has undergone a series of transformations. He cautions that action researchers should not to be overly affected by environmental and social influences and that the 'self'(self-identity) must be protected by boundaries (self-boundaries) that are put in place to allow an open exchange of both inner and outer aspects of self that can in turn consciously focus on standards of judgment. These standards then determine the quality of educational research accounts that are based "…on educational influences in the learning and evolution of social formations" (p.21) and action researchers must move toward newly informed practice that merges their values and practice. For these practitioners, social formations then become a key outcome of routine living and of conscious ethical practice.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), in what they call "social movement" (a community-based knowledge initiative), describe within the movement people who are at different stages of readiness but along the way identify key issues "…including core values, identity, relationships, and formal and informal structures" that cannot be obtained from outside the action but emerge and in doing so "…this participant, emergent approach …opens up a wide range of development options and enables the organization to adapt

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methodologies and insights learned from others to fit its own particular (and changing) conditions" (p.195). Social movement leads to social formations that share a knowledge system. Thus, Whitehead's theoretical arguments about the socialization component of validation of new truths in context are supported by the work of Wenger, et al, (2002).

This section has reviewed living educational theory and its evolution and the following diagram summarizes its critical properties as conceptualized by Whitehead.

Properties of Living Educational Theory
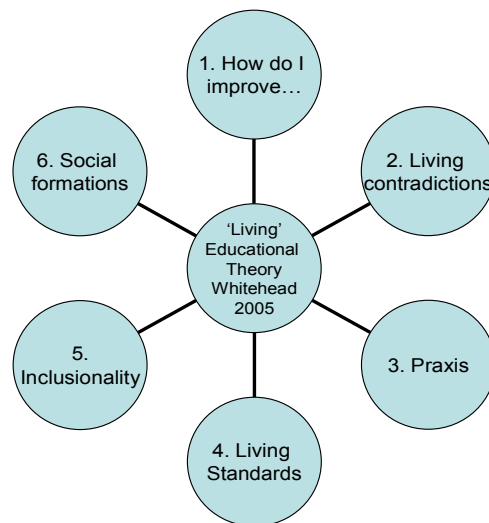
Figure 1:

Conceptualization of Whitehead's Living Educational Theory

3.3 Living Educational Theory Framing of My Action Research Study

After a lengthy review of literature on methodologies, I find myself returning to Whitehead's theory. I have considered critical theory and although it has elements that are relevant and have potential for my analysis of my claims, this framework's underpinnings are

propositional and as such do not fully capture the open nature of my inquiry. I agree with Laidlaw (1996) that the standards of judgment are living in my research as I live my practice adhering to my professionally informed ethical standards. I reject the critical action research approach offered by Carr and Kemmis (1986) as being too restrictive and leaving me with a sense of rigid clinical application in a living process. I am drawn to action research because it allows me to construct my research as I live my practice in context. If I restrict my research by placing on it theoretical parameters that will frame it quite differently, then I contradict and negate my action research design.

Argyris's double loop theory (Argyris & Schon, 1974) contributes to my research, but its validation process is also largely propositional and does not fit my participant research. Theories based on propositions have their place in research and add value to forms of social science research as well as to certain forms of action research but in an action research study on one's own practice, this theoretical frame does not allow for personal knowledge to develop and be critically analyzed in an open framework that fosters multiple choices. I strongly support what NcNiff and Whitehead (2005) outline for self-study:

> In self-study action research, the validity of a personal theory is in the explanations a person offers for their practices (sic). The claim to have explained their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of a social formation, constitutes their living educational theory. The validity of the claim can be demonstrated through the evidence that the researcher produces to support the claim. The meaning of the theory is communicated through the way the researcher lives and through the understandings they integrate into their meanings from the ideas of others (sic). (p. 5)

Living educational theory offers me a conceptual framework that gives me a fluid structure, or what Whitehead calls a living form, that allows me to deal with diversity in my leadership role through a multitude of ethically and morally based reflective actions (praxis),

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based on my embodied knowledge. At times, my informed actions may be propositional and at other times dialectic in nature. As I detail and record my professional actions, my validation procedures will borrow from those of Habermas's ideas of social validity as explained by NcNiff and Whitehead (2005) and previously discussed. Whitehead's standards of judgment provide my research with rigor in the form of meeting ontological, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical standards that are self-reviewed, peer reviewed and then supported as legitimate in the educational community that defines its educational theory.

It is my quest for deep understanding that brings me to living educational theories. I agree that there should be a merging of theory and practice so that the inner self and outer self that Whitehead (2005) discusses are consistent and allow the practitioner to live out personal and professional ethical standards in daily practice without contradictions emerging. Within this theoretical framework, I do not have to force fit my human practice into theory or vice versa. As Hammersley (1993) states, "sound practice cannot amount to the straightforward application of theoretical knowledge, but is an activity that necessarily involves judgment and draws on experience" (p. 430).

3.4 Ethical Considerations about My Leadership Role as an Action Researcher

Since action research is collaborative research being conducted in a social context that necessitates working with others and building relationships to improve practice (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997), action researchers must analyze what biases they bring to the study. Issues of race, gender, class, role, and power must be carefully considered as these elements affect the building of relationships. Questions such as how the researcher's position is different from the others in the study must also be asked (Zeni, 2001).

Mills (2003) argues that the first condition necessary to foster action research and encourage educational change is for teachers and administrators to review and restructure their power and authority relationships. According to Mills, power relationships in schools can either empower or 'under power' professional staff members. He suggests that it is the responsibility of the researcher to harness this power and direct it to empower other members to bring about change. In doing so, difficult questions must be asked and answered and inevitably these questions lead to conversations about roles, responsibilities and decision-making in which the question of leadership arises.

Equally important considerations in practitioner research are the closeness of the researcher to the practice under study and the double burden on the researcher of improving practice while conducting ethical research and constructing new knowledge. These inherent concerns must be addressed to ensure the quality of the data so that it is found to be trustworthy. Wolcott (1994) also warns researchers to be aware of the limitations of being objective when one is involved as a participant in the study and this concern is further compounded for me by my role as an authority figure in the school.

From the literature on the complexities of data collection inherent in action research, I also acknowledge the following considerations that need to be addressed:

1. that there may be a tendency to treat the nature and application of the evidence in too informal a fashion and with less rigor;

2. that ethical dialectic methods can be difficult to establish in one's own practice and with self-reflections;

3. that a more passive relationship between the 'researcher and the researched' can evolve especially when the practitioner researcher has a position of power;

4. that the voices of those on the receiving end of the service delivered by the practicing professionals are often silent;

5. that too simple deductive assumptions between theory and practice are made; and

6. that there exists the existence of a narrow focus on how practitioner research can be useful for practice (Wolcott, 1994).

As my action research study is a form of self-study, it is important for me to also acknowledge the steps required for self-study validation and to safeguard against subjective bias. Loughran (2007), Russell (2007), and Whitehead (2007) advocate for a social community validation process in self-study. Research evidence must be examined through the eyes of others to verify claims (McNiff, et al., 2003) which can be done through interviews, questionnaires and video-recordings to determine if the data and research findings resonate with the social community (Whitehead, 2007).

Ironically, depending on one's viewpoint, it can be argued that practitioner research's weakest point on one hand – its self-analysis is its greatest strength on the other – its practical usefulness.

3.4.1 The Action Researcher in a Managerial Position

Additionally, action researchers also caution that there are trade-offs between generalizability and local responsiveness to the research context. Then, the delicate question of the ownership of the study has to be considered. Does the study belong to the individual practitioner or is there multiple ownership of everyone engaged in making the changes? In changing practices,

actions taken to support curriculum and staff development are often seen as instruments of control if these actions are being prescribed by a person in a managerial position and are seen as offering little to empower or emancipate teachers (Letiche, et al., 1991). To counter this, action research methodology has developed ethical codes of conduct to emphasize the importance of voluntary participation, to ensure confidentiality surrounding teacher efforts and to guarantee that teachers retain a high degree of control over actions taken in these areas (Elliott, 1980; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). Particularly difficult for researchers who are in a position of power and authority is that in order to build trusting relationships with others, the leadership role must be downplayed so that an open and honest working relationship can occur. The irony in this is that action research is designed to empower the researcher and thus provide some level of autonomy but as Clay (2001) realized from her research, because her leadership threatened others' autonomy, her own autonomy had to be reduced.

In describing her action research study as a secondary school instructional leader, Clay (2001) refers to her experiencing teachers' opposition to change of any kind, lack of consensus on what needed changing, unwillingness to work for change, numerous references to previously failed change efforts, and incomplete understanding of issues that affect change. Clay says that as she analyzed relationships, two points emerged: 1) the extent to which power and authority exist to make changes; 2) the examination of what the practitioner-researcher has to do to form working relationships with teachers who are resistant to change. She also notes the importance of setting an agenda that mitigates the perception of power and coercion. It is critical that the researcher develops a working relationship with the other colleagues by analyzing the relationship that best brings about desired and effective changes. In establishing best practices, "…the ethics of action research

is really the merger of the ethically defensible actions of the practitioner and the ethically defensible actions of the researcher" (Clay, 2001,p.25). The central ethical concern for school-based practitioner researchers is relationships (Zeni, 2001) and in practitioner research it is the insider to insider relationships that pose the greatest ethical dilemmas (Clay, 2001). But education systems are also hierarchical organizations in which the power and authority of principals are also limited, adding further complexity to my role as a practitioner researcher. I must find both the appropriate time and balance between leading and inviting others to lead in order to build the necessary insider relationships.

To minimize the risk of subjectivity, the researcher must take great care in obtaining data from a variety of sources. But when the researcher is a person in a position of power, the subjectivity increases as it becomes more difficult to ensure that the information collected in the data is honest and not just what the leader wants to hear, or that the solicited data were not coerced. Complex relationships exist between the researcher and the researched and therefore the researcher must develop a 'critical consciousness' (Ebest, 2001) to safeguard the quality of data and the relationships. For the action researcher seeking to make changes, tensions also arise from the conflict between coercion and collaboration, imposition and negotiation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). These distinctions become less clear in what Carr and Kemmis (1986) call the pursuit of just and fair practices. Those who are subjected to the change process often oppose change, ignore or weakly implement changes, and direct resistance toward the change agent (Fullan, 2001).

3.4.2 My Role as a Practitioner Researcher

In my role as school principal and that of a change agent, I expected to encounter difficulties and road blocks and therefore I needed to strategize how to deal with these situations. My

research is bounded by two main ethical concerns – my practice and my research quest to find new knowledge to improve my practice. As discussed, my professional values led me to put forward my best efforts to work collaboratively and to establish positive working relationships with teachers to form a viable and self-sustaining learning community to improve student learning. How I fostered relationships with my colleagues was critical in my pursuit of an inclusive, collaborative, team approach to pedagogical and professional development. Through my action research I confirmed that teachers must have trust in my leadership, feel respected as professionals, know that they have a valuable contribution to make, and that I both welcome and value their input.

As a practitioner researcher in a leadership position, I needed to build open and trusting relationships to get honest and useful data from which to analyze and adjust my practice in order to 'live' my professional values. My practice and my research goals became closely intertwined in the building of relationships with my colleagues. I was completely accountable for every action that I took and the thrust of my actions in the school was always for the welfare of students and their learning. But I also had to be very sensitive to the professional needs of the teaching staff as long as their needs did not directly oppose my prime leadership mandate.

3.5 Summary of the Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the origins of action research, described its research methodology and offered a description of action research appropriate to my study. It is clear from the literature that educators conducting educational research in the field have not created an educational theoretical framework. Critical theorists call for critical research validation, but this approach limits practitioner inquiry to applying prescribed research

techniques to practice without openly examining the essence of educational theory – educational practices. I have advocated for an educational theory that is critical and reliable on its own terms.

Whitehead has conceptualized an educational theory with standards of judgment devised for educational researchers. The logic offered by Whitehead fits the rigorous validation processes required by Guba's (1981) definition of trustworthiness, Maxwell's (1992) theoretical validity and Anderson, Herr and Nihlen's criteria for validity in action research (1994). Living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989a) has been shown to meet these criteria. It provides a conceptual framework to produce theoretically informed accounts of educators that are grounded in their 'living' professional practices and validated by using a critical approach. I have argued in this chapter that Whitehead's conceptualization of a living educational theory with its standards of judgment, authenticating research from the 'living perspective', best frames my study.

My professional growth arises from the success of my research into my practice and this success was largely dependent on the extent to which I built both positive and collaborative professional working relationships. It was also dependent on the reflective practices I adopted to gauge the effectiveness of my actions and interactions with teachers as my research study proceeded. Building these relationships with my school colleagues was driven by a basic common sense approach that centers on the importance of creating a trusting, caring, open and supportive working environment in which we share a common vision: to be the best educators that we can be. If I have been successful in incorporating these factors into the learning culture of our school and if these values are reflected in our work, then every action I perform as a principal is ethically driven. My action research study will then also

reflect these values as my practice and my research are closely interlinked. My research plan will reflect the realities of the school's environment and respect my dual role as practitioner and researcher.

3.6 Research Plan

Establishing an action research plan is a messy affair and I found it particularly challenging given the complexity of my dual roles in the study as practitioner and researcher, further complicated by my leadership role in the school and how this impacted on my working relationships with teachers. I had a vision of what I hoped to achieve in my practice and I knew that improvements in literacy at the school level were needed but I did not set out to improve literacy with a clear research plan in mind. In fact, my plan evolved over the period of time – seven years – described in this dissertation as I learned more about action research, literacy, and leadership. I struggled with "action planning" to refine my research focus to suit my own "working context" and "personal value position" (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2001, p. 36). Over the seven years of my principalship of G.E.C. and in the context of the literacy initiatives, I developed a research plan that gave direction to my work as a researcher practitioner, a pedagogical leader, and a change agent. Each of my action research cycles contained a think-act-reflect period that fluidly spiralled from one cycle into the next with each cycle marking a period of time for which very specific goals had been set, and each involved collecting data, analyzing them, considering the next course of action and proceeding to act.
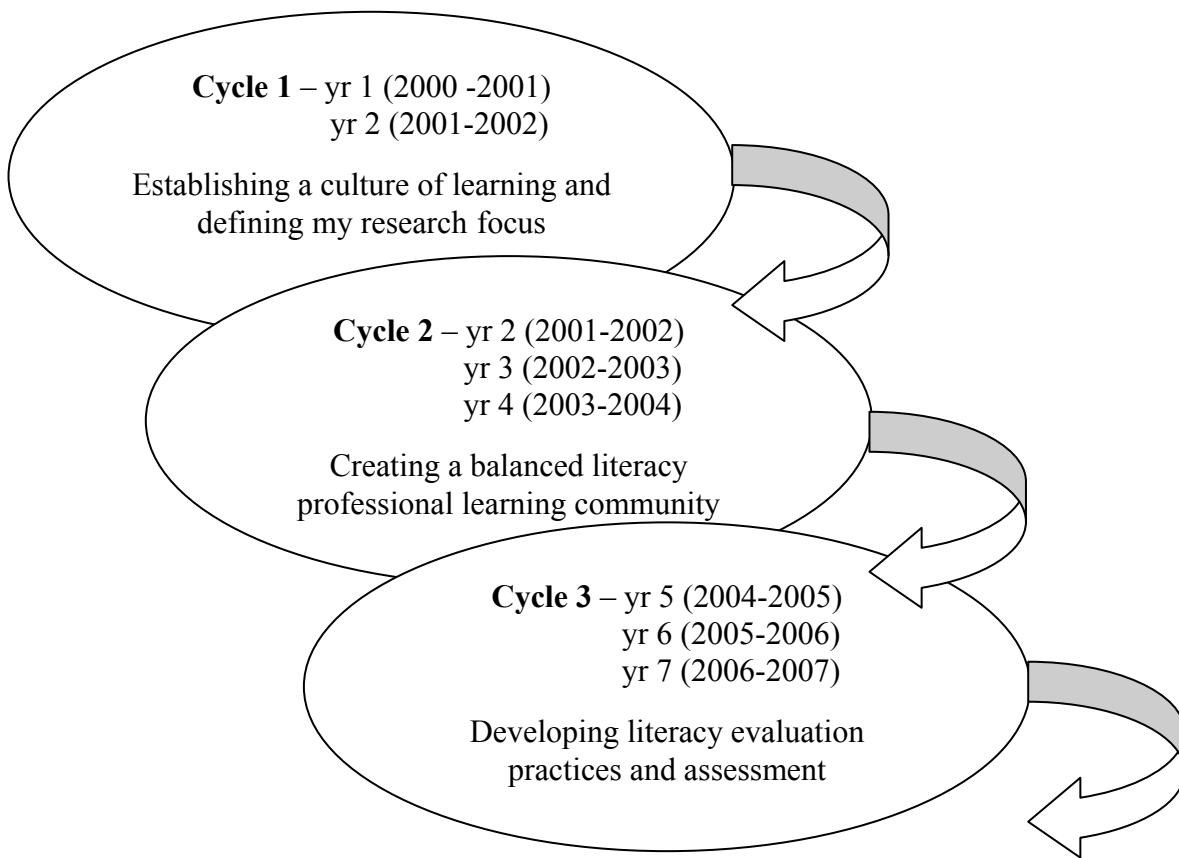
Figure 2:
Developing My Research Plan: The Action Research Cycles

3.6.1 Action Research Cycle 1

As I have described in Chapter One, my first two years were devoted to making sense of my

new work environment *(think)* and initiating first order changes that supported learning about

learning *(act)* or "reculturing" (Hulley & Dier, 2009, p. 36). I had began my new

appointment with ideas about how to proceed that I had extrapolated from Bolman and Deal

(1991), took action accordingly, and then reflected on the outcomes of my actions *(reflect)* –

a cyclical approach described by Mills (2003) as "planning, execution, and reconnaissance"

(p.15). During this introductory period, I also gained deeper knowledge about the school

community, the staff and student performance that refined my views about my role in the school. My desire to reflect on and to improve my practice as a novice elementary school principal of a challenging new school led me to consider action research as a strategy which I began using in my second year at the school. In Chapter One I refer to this earliest stage of thinking about my actions and strategizing my next steps as my first reflective action research cycle.

Although my action research did not initially have a plan, one slowly began to evolve during my first year and a half in the school as I started to question how I could become a more effective principal and assist teachers in improving their literacy-teaching practices. Reflection helped me to recognize the need for a school-wide literacy program and with guidance from Fran Halliday, my literacy mentor; it became a balanced literacy approach. My deeper level of understanding enabled me to narrow my research focus and to begin to formulate my research question. Once I had the beginning of a research question first developed during year two I was able to proceed to take "committed" action (McNiff, et al., 2001, p. 18) to improve my practice by becoming better informed about balanced literacy, literacy-teaching practices, and by working more closely with teachers to improve students' literacy. With "committed" action, my lead research question also changed and evolved as my study progressed over the next five years. I have described the early version of my research question in Chapter One and in Chapter Five I will describe how my research question changed over time, while staying coherent with the changes occurring in my practice.

3.6.2 Action Research Cycle 2

All of the work undertaken in my first action research cycle shaped the next stage of my study which was to educate myself and the teaching staff about balanced literacy programs and begin implementation. I gained knowledge about balanced literacy from a research trip to visit Edmonton public schools where this literacy model had been successfully implemented. The act of transferring this knowledge to our school formed the basis of my second action research cycle and which again was comprised of thinking, acting and then reflecting before proceeding to the next cycle.

My second cycle began in the later half of year two and extended into years three and four in which data were collected and analyzed and this work will be described in Chapter Four. As staff grew more knowledgeable about literacy practices, a new interest developed that led us to explore the idea of creating a literacy-based professional learning community. Significant progress was made during the second action research cycle due to the coaching and mentoring that had been made possible by a research grant and the nature of my work during this period will be shared through vignettes in Chapter Four. But unfortunately my research focus of establishing a strong balanced literacy professional community became derailed in year five due to mounting tensions caused by provincial labour unrest that resulted in my teachers filing a grievance. This collective action broke the natural flow of my study and prematurely halted the second action research cycle before we reached the goal that the teachers and I had set – to establish a balanced literacy professional learning community. As a researcher I was left to salvage what I could from the second action research cycle and reflect on how I could best re-direct my study. My struggle to determine my next course of action will be documented in Chapters Four and Six. Reflection caused me

to deeply question my actions and those of the staff as well as to review what we had accomplished in enhancing our literacy practices and improving students' literacy. I made a decision that the work that was being developed in the second action research cycle was not to be abandoned but to be put on hold until it could be resumed with full engagement. In the interim, by the middle of year five, I decided to shift my work with the teachers to more neutral ground (assessment) and also to continue improving my practice and the literacy delivery in the school through gaining knowledge about literacy assessment, thereby marking the beginning of my third action research cycle.

3.6.3 Action Research Cycle 3

The focus of the third action research cycle was improving literacy assessment practices and my rationale for this selection will be explained in the following chapters. To inform myself about assessment practices I sat for three years on our school board's assessment committee, read about assessment, and attended assessment conferences. I became knowledgeable about student-led conferences, students' portfolios, rubrics, exemplars, goal setting and how these critical elements could be factored into both authentic student assessment and assessment of and for learning. Through my research I came to comprehend how assessment practices not only direct individual student learning but also direct teachers' classroom instruction to meet the needs of individual learners (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2004). I also questioned how this knowledge could improve literacy-teaching practices and sought ways to achieve this goal. Transferring knowledge about assessment became the focal point of my work with teachers after the grievance was filed in year five and it continued until nearly the end of my study in year seven. During this period, I obtained another research grant that enabled me to take two teachers to visit schools in Hawaii to study their authentic student

assessment practices. This research was shared with all staff and grew teachers' literacy

practices. Teachers began to see how to involve students in understanding the link between

the assessment of students' reading and writing, and the resulting specific actions that were

identified to successfully move students to their next stage of reading and writing

development.

Although we were making slow but steady progress in our literacy assessment practices,

including the use of the *Pearson Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA) (Beaver, 2006)

across all grade levels, I was aware that we still had unresolved issues and so as soon as the

grievance was resolved at the beginning of year seven, I revisited the work we had begun in

the second action research cycle and I reflected on how to resume this work with the

teachers. I will describe the difficulty of restarting this work in Chapters Five and Six, but

eventually we did forge ahead with continuing to develop our balanced literacy professional

learning community. As this work overlapped with our work on enhancing literacy

assessment practices, I decided to put aside further work on developing assessment practices

to make time to continue our unfinished work from the second action research cycle. When

my study concluded at the end of my seventh year at the school, it was very evident that my

third action research cycle was not as cleanly delineated as were the first two cycles and this

made my analysis more difficult. This will be elaborated in Chapter Five and discussed in my

final reflection in Chapter Six.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

Action research methodology has allowed me to critically reflect and improve, whereas

empirical research would not have so deeply directed personal changes in my leadership role.

The rich understanding I developed about my practice was generated by on-going reflection

that I have documented throughout my study in a professional journal, email correspondence and study notes.

In keeping with action research, my practice was richly documented with thick descriptions of how I conducted my work with teachers in the school but I also collected some quantitative data, namely, the students' reading assessment (DRA) scores recorded over a five year period. I needed to find a way to accommodate both qualitative and quantitative data, and to answer my research question. I also needed to create a way to judge my practice and to determine if it had improved and whether I had enhanced literacy in the school. To resolve these research challenges I talked with critical friends and dug deeper into the literature before deciding to divide my data collection into two parts.

My first action was to review the hundreds of pages of my journal notes and course study notes to seek evidence to help to answer my research question. In conducting this review and analysis I also made the decision to lay open my work with all of its flaws and successes so that others could more fully understand the role of a principal in meeting the demands of the twenty-first century. I focussed in on a specific period from my study that was the most richly documented and that I believed provided the greatest insight into the slow evolution of my practice and that of the teaching staff as we informed ourselves about literacy. How I worked on developing enhanced literacy-teaching practices, determining what interventions I would use to improve literacy in the school and how I preceded to bring changes to the literacy classroom is the topic of the following chapter. It provides a detailed account of how I went about conducting my work to give insight into my ontological practice. This work also set the foundation for second order changes that would bring about deep professional changes to enhance student learning. These data are presented in Chapter

Four in vignettes to preserve their authenticity and my analysis is in the written text that binds the vignettes together.

The second set of data is quantitative and includes a questionnaire used to acquire other voices as well to triangulate my findings along with my field notes and journals, and the students' reading assessment scores. In Chapter Five I will show how I used a variety of data to help me examine my practice and validate my claims. I will describe my data collection methods, how I created my questionnaire, and a detailed analysis of my data and research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR
MAKING CHANGES TO LITERACY PRACTICES

4.1 Contextualizing Literacy Changes

There is very little in the literature on how elementary literacy principals conduct their daily

work in the field and therefore the purpose of this chapter is to offer insight into my role and

how I went about enhancing both my practice and literacy-teaching practices. I begin by

describing how literacy became our school improvement goal; how I developed a

comprehensive understanding of what elementary literacy really means; and how I

established a number of interventions that I believed would improve literacy instruction. I

will discuss how, through literacy, the school's learning culture began to change and how out

of our professional conversations about students' literacy assessment scores; we began

forming a learning community. This meant continuous professional development for each of

us and a commitment to sustain our focus on literacy. For my practice it also meant learning

to foster leadership in teachers and sharing leadership.

As I conducted this work in my second action research cycle, my practice evolved from

my reflective practice and, in the spirit of action research, the process is the series of actions I

undertook to change my practice to enhance the teaching of literacy. In examining my

practice in context, I will discuss team building, professional development, teacher mentoring

and coaching, authentic student assessment, services for 'special education' students,

learning resources, curriculum methodology and our school's literacy-based community of

practice.

In this chapter I will present my literacy development and that of the teaching staff

through excerpts taken from the journals I kept at the time and from my study notes on action

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research. My research notes give a richer understanding of my actions in context and detail the rationale that accompanied my actions during the evolution of my study. My professional concerns and frustration about the road blocks that at times prevented, delayed, or re-routed my action plans are embedded in this description. My second year (2001-2002) at G.E.C. School was a key year that established the foundation for much of our literacy work and the changes that transpired. In retrospect, I believe that the teachers and I made more professional gains in this one year than in any other, so I will focus my description more on year two and less on subsequent years. I will touch on my third action research cycle that focussed on enhancing literacy assessment practices but this research cycle and its challenges will be more fully discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Intertwined in these discussions are also my embodied professional values and beliefs, my moral leadership (Fullan, 2003b). My espoused theories of moral action through my action research become what Argyris and Schon (1974) term 'theories-in-action' (p. 10-11). I will conclude this chapter with a reflection that reviews my understanding of the literacy changes I initiated and implemented with my teachers. This examination of my practice reveals its impact on the school community and on me as a principal and research practitioner, and how it has re-defined leadership for me.

4.2 Defining Literacy for the Elementary School

I did not commence my work in the school as a literacy principal. When I first joined the rank of elementary principals, I was in awe at how knowledgeable many of my colleagues were about literacy and how well they transferred their literacy-teaching expertise to their roles as principals in their respective schools. My teaching background was more scattered. I taught for more than a third of my teaching career as a Kindergarten specialist; then spent

eight years teaching at the senior elementary level, concentrating on inclusive education for special needs' students, and including teaching a pull-out enrichment program; and then finished by teaching math at the junior high school level before becoming a secondary school vice principal and later secondary principal. Now working on restructuring our school's pedagogical delivery to implement the QEP, I recognized that I needed to be actively engaged at the same time in my own professional development. Through carefully planned professional development, my comprehension of literacy instruction broadened and over time I came to formulate my own definition of literacy for the elementary classroom teacher.

I came to understand literacy to be the students' acquisition of specific reading, writing and oral language skills; skills that are first set as goals in consultation with each student and then jointly developed with the teacher's support through an informed and balanced delivery of literacy instruction. As students provide authentic evidence of mastering their specific and pre-determined literacy goals, the teacher, student, and frequently the parent jointly confer to identify a new set of literacy goals to be developed. In this manner, each student moves along his or her learning continuum to the next stage of development. Through this repetitive process, literacy growth over time is tangibly demonstrated as students develop literacy competency and as literacy competencies are acquired, these competencies transfer across all other subject interventions. My definition respects the QEP's constructivist approach and its focus on authentic learning and assessment.

It is also important to note that as my study began the QEP was just being introduced into Québec elementary schools and its constructivism ushered in a new way of teaching. The full implementation of the QEP at the elementary level took seven years to complete, a period that approximately coincided with the length of this study. Efforts were made to

include teachers as active participants in these changes and not merely recipients of reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The literacy changes described in this chapter not only reflect the changes that teachers underwent to improve their literacy-teaching practices but also the deep changes staff had to make in order to successfully transition from skill-based instruction to one that is competency-based.

4.3 Introducing Changes to Literacy Practices

In the previous chapters, I have outlined the work I had done in the school in order to restructure its culture (Sergiovanni, 1996).

> .. . the stage has been set and all the changes accomplished to date were done with a vision of moving the school and the staff closer to the QEP model. This vision has been stated many times during this time of change however, if the staff has embraced this vision or not is another matter.
>
> Now that I am entering year two, a host of cosmetic changes continue to keep up the momentum and image of change, hence more decorating, painting. Six more classrooms will be added as well as other physical enhancements like a second washroom for the staff. The school's enrolment has gone from 180 students two years ago to 365 students for the fall of 2001. Our daycare has gone from 28 to over a 100. More learning materials were ordered including fifteen brand new computers to create a student lab.
>
> …This year we are the board's first elementary school to have electronic report cards. And the list of changes goes on.
>
> … as impressive as the list may be, I don't see these as indicators of real change. If I were to leave tomorrow, the school and the staff would quickly retreat back to much of its former self. Teachers would be a little wiser perhaps; the school would be better equipped and appear to be more physically welcoming but still no real changes in the classroom and in teaching instruction. I believe that I accomplished my first goal that was to arrive on the scene with a bang and to start the change process (that was the easy part for me as I am a doer)….
>
> My real goal and challenge is yet to begin. To change the way that teachers instruct students will be very difficult because it means fundamental changes and the staff has to buy into this process. I am nervous about this challenge because this will not only test my abilities but will also professionally stretch me in ways that may not always be comfortable. I will have to become a

better team player. I believe that this really will be the test as to whether or not I am an effective principal in bringing about the true implementation of the new QEP. How do I facilitate real changes in what happens in the classroom to advance student learning…This is the question and will be my quest. *(Excerpt from journal entry –fall 2001)*

This cultural reconstruction was undertaken so that I could develop not only a learning environment that would be aligned with the QEP but also one in which teachers would be able to embrace the next, most important and difficult part of our journey: to examine, analyze and change teaching practices to improve student learning. As Fullan (2001) explains, "Leading in a culture of change does not mean placing changed individuals into unchanged environments. Rather, change leaders work on changing the context, helping to create new settings conducive to learning and sharing that learning" (p.79). With a foundation for a learning environment in place, I believed teachers were now ready to discuss and analyze student learning. My intent was to help them shift from teachers to thoughtful practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

In my first year, the QEP had been the conduit to re-organize classrooms, to create cycle teaching teams, to assess students' academic progress, and to equip the school with new learning materials. As we entered into our second year, I believed that what was now required was to inject change into the heart of teaching practices, but how to do this was still unclear. All that I knew, from my discussions with senior administrators and from my previous work as a teacher and school administrator in other schools, was that the teaching practices that were evident in our school were out of date, not well grounded in educational research and, as I found from informal student testing, very ineffective in meeting the academic needs of our growing and highly diverse student population. I knew that I needed to change teaching practices to enhance student learning and achievement but I did not know

how to accomplish this goal. Through my action research, I came to the realization that in order to improve student achievement I had to move teaching beyond the status quo in the school (Marzano, et al., 2005).

> Now the staff under my leadership must develop a sense of team with a common purpose so that they can examine their teaching practices and define areas in which to grow and evolve as more competent and effective educators. As principal, I will be examining my practice as to how to influence this learning climate. *(Excerpt from journal entry –fall 2001)*

Cotton's research (2003) found that what principals do in the school does make a difference but principals alone cannot change a school. I could not change practices alone without collaboration and a shared vision. This task meant that I needed to reframe my leadership style to be more supportive and encouraging as I knew I was viewed by my teachers as being authoritative. Therefore in the early fall of 2001, I had resolved to develop a more positive working relationship with the teachers than I had had in my first year as their principal and that I would slowly ease into the conversation with teachers about establishing a curriculum focal point. I began what I have come to call the 'real change' process and as others in the field term second-order change (Fullan, 1993; Marzano, et al., 2005). This order of change extends from Argyris and Schon's (Argyris & Schon, 1974, 1978) discussion on double-loop learning that occurs when the complexity of the problem can only be addressed through new strategies that are tried until a solution is found. The level of internal changes we required to achieve this order of change demanded that we work as a collaborative and cohesive team (Eaker, et al., 2002; Fullan, et al., 2006). In this transformation, I saw my role as that of curriculum and pedagogical coach.

This process was soon hastened however, by provincial accountability plans that were being implemented. In response, our board decided to initiate board-wide literacy assessment

tools: the *Pearson Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA) (Beaver, 2006) and the

Developmental Writing Assessment (DWA) (Beaver, Carter, Taps, & Williams, 2002)

throughout its elementary schools. These assessments would be conducted twice every year

(fall and spring) and schools' results would be recorded centrally for on-going analysis and

review. Principals were also required to write accountability and school success action plans.

The schools were free to select their academic focus as long each school could measure and

demonstrate its improvement in student learning outcomes.

To give teachers ownership in the process and to encourage their more active

participation I had already decided that I would support whatever curriculum area they chose.

There was little discussion at the staff meeting and quite quickly and unanimously, we

decided that literacy would be our focal point. This was not surprising since, even before my

tenure, the school had chosen to work on literacy initiatives by introducing an "I Love to

Read" week that involved teachers in inviting local politicians and business owners to read to

students, and had also supported a *Reading Recovery Program* (Bourque, Huggins, Matczuk,

Stuart, & Van Dyke, 2006). Teachers also decided to focus their pedagogical development on

developing literacy-teaching techniques so I developed my plan.

> I…want to meet with each staff member individually to discuss…goals…how
> they are planning to improve literacy…and ask how I can help them to
> achieve these goals. I believe that the next level of change has to come from
> the teachers and I am merely a facilitator…Once I meet with each teacher, I
> will know more as to where each teacher is. I predict that every teacher will
> be on a different page and that some will be several pages apart.

> …the next step in the process must be to get teachers closer to…a common
> vision and a united approach to provide students with some consistency. Our
> assessment tools… are the Pearson reading and writing assessment tools.
> Since all teachers…will be using… these assessment tools, it will be easier to
> discuss common findings, concerns and goals.

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Part of the guidance that I provide must be to get teachers to examine their practice and to seek ways as to how they can improve...they have to want to change their instructional methods to become more effective teachers. There are two ways that can be initially used to create a need to change and an interest in changing.

First, our students' results from…testing have been examined and… although not at the bottom of the school board's range, certainly are not at the top. Teachers in our school have always prided themselves as being excellent teachers and (believe) that the kids in our school receive a good education…so it is important that they see our students' results as compared to those of other schools. We must take time to discuss this as a staff and explore ways in which to improve our results.

The second way to instil a desire to change is to place teachers in an acting lead position…if I believe them to be competent then they are more likely to perform more competently. With that thought in mind, I have volunteered our school and our teachers to participate in a number of research efforts that go beyond talking about changes in the classroom to actively doing educational research…These projects will focus us…

To further support a sense of professionalism, I have been investing over the last six months in a number of current professional educational texts to begin an in-school teacher lending library. I also download from the Web from time to time, professional readings to circulate to teachers. *(Excerpt from my professional notes for my action plan for 2001-2002)*

4.3.1 Action Research Cycle 2

My second action research cycle began in year two and extended into years three and four.

The research framework for this period was developed from the school's plan for

professional development (2001-2002) shown below (*think*). I believe that the most exciting

outcome in this period was the interest that teachers developed in exploring the concept of

professional learning communities (*act*). This plan evolved over time, was adjusted to suit

the learning environment in the school as changes occurred, and was at times changed by my

professional reflections when I believed that the plan had to be re-directed (*reflect*). Periods

of labour unrest are sprinkled throughout the data collection in my second action research

cycle and the resulting tensions also altered our work. However, significant changes did take

place during this action cycle as both the teachers and I grew professionally as illustrated through the many vignettes in this chapter.

4.3.1.1 School Plan for Staff Development Plan Year 2001-2002

These strategies became incorporated into the following professional development plan:

> This year at our October School Council meeting the following motion was passed: "That in-school training be directly related to cross curricular literacy in regards to our school success plan…" All staff at end of cycle 1, 2 and 3 will get training in using the Pearson DRA and the DWA. At our school all cycle teachers not involved in the Board's training will get in-school training from teachers attending the Board's workshops in how to use the DRA.
>
> Our Literacy plan will include guided reading activities and the introduction of student writing portfolios. P.D. (Professional Development) will be provided to teachers who are unfamiliar with this assessment tool by other teachers on staff who have used writing portfolios. More work needs to be done on how to do running records- our three trained *Reading Recovery* teachers can assist in this training as required…
>
> There will also be in-house P.D. for teachers on how to use assessment tools to screen and detect reading and writing weaknesses in students as part of our Literacy project. Teachers have requested more development on creating student centers and how to use the project approach more effectively.
>
> Our school improvement grant will take a small team of teachers from K and cycles 1 and 2 to study a balanced approach to reading. We will be visiting 3 schools in Edmonton who are trained in this…
>
> Our two PDIG (Professional Development Improvement Grant) proposals if accepted will have teachers from cycles 1, 2 and 3 doing action research in literacy…
>
> One of our cycle three teachers is representing our Board at the provincial table to establish the criteria and the content of the grade six English épreuves (government exams).
>
> Another of our cycle 3 teachers is working on a PDIG proposal if accepted to work with other teachers in our Board to establish English writing exemplars.
>
> Our resource teacher is working at the Board level in developing areas of special education support. *(Submitted to the school board by: Marian Lothian Principal October 2001)*

With this level of productivity, our joint efforts led me to believe that I was working more closely with the staff, and that a sense of team was slowly evolving. However, all of my enthusiasm was soon dashed by a province-wide work-to-rule action, because all of our funded initiatives were interpreted as work falling outside of the teachers' contract.

4.3.2 The Introduction of Literacy Assessment

With the assistance of Fran Halliday, a member of the Ministry's provincial school improvement team, I nevertheless set out to implement our literacy plan in the uneasy climate of greater accountability and teachers' labour unrest. Fran had been independently researching literacy delivery models and had assisted me in the fall, when I had applied for a Partnership for School Improvement Teacher/Administrator Scholarship Programme (PSI) grant. The proposal covered the key elements and would successfully engage teachers, as teacher action researchers, in examining their own literacy practices while also learning about balanced literacy.

> …in December, Fran and I presented our school stats to the teachers and stressed the importance of dealing with this information to enhance learning. Our teachers were not pleased by the news and felt as if their classrooms have been invaded. The idea of big brother watching loomed heavily in the background. It was not the greatest of meetings but the message was delivered and the sense of urgency to change what and how we teach…One walks a fine line between stirring the teachers to take action and in overly discouraging them… This is my challenge as principal. It will not be an easy task. Some teachers are quite set in their ways while others are brand new and struggling…Others are feeling very threatened by all of the accountability issues. *(Excerpt from journal entry December 2001)*

> …The last few days I have been working with Fran on DWA and the teachers are saying that writing is composed of two areas…Fran and I have been working on breaking down the scores into the two components being content and conventions. Hopefully this will give us a more accurate picture of our students as writers…

> Yesterday, I had a staff meeting when much of this work and the rationale as to why was shared with staff. Fran was there to be involved in the work with

the teachers. Teachers were very defensive and concerned. They did not like being under a microscope but they were told that we all were and that we had no choice but to improve. What Fran and I are concerned about is that teachers do not make up excuses for why the kids are doing poorly and believe that if only we had more reading materials in the school etc…that our scores would automatically go up. If only it were that easy. Yes, we need more reading materials and this will help but the teachers must also realize that they will have to in some cases radically change how and what they teach in the classroom…real change and improvement will not come easily or quickly to some classrooms. *(Excerpt from journal entry December 11/01)*

Although our literacy plan needed to include valid and reliable literacy assessment tools to guide our learning as educators as well as that of the students (Stiggins, 2004, 2005), the manner by which these assessment tools had been introduced was hardly conducive to my efforts in introducing collaborative planning. In this context of provincial reform with its mandate to collect data and to critically review it, a new and unavoidable tension now existed for me as the school's principal (Earl & Fullan, 2003).

Of equal concern was that, by being actively encouraged to focus on using such a narrow range of literacy assessment tools as the DRA and DWA, we abandoned our efforts as a staff to develop what Booth and Rowsell (2002) describe as a repertoire of assessment tools. Building a repertoire of literacy assessment tools enables teachers to examine all areas of students' progress from their strengths to their weaknesses. In doing so, teachers become better equipped to design learning programs tailored to meet the individual learning needs of their students (Booth & Rowsell, 2002). In the previous year, I had hired a trained *Reading Recovery* (Bourque, et al., 2006) teacher with vast reading expertise, and she had started to show our teachers how to do running records, record miscues for analysis, use Dolch (1948) sight word lists to record students' sight word vocabulary and use the Slosson Oral Reading Test (Slosson & Nicholson, 1990) to determine students' reading levels. We were at the very emergent stage of developing an array of strategies to assess our students' literacy but now

with the introduction of the DRA and the DWA as mandatory literacy assessment instruments, all of our previous assessment strategies were abandoned.

The timing of these two independent provincial movements – the Government's accountability plan and the teachers' association's work–to-rule, could not have coincided at a worse time. The pace of change had quickened at the same time as we were learning together how to use and interpret the DRA and DWA. Teacher morale was low, and although principals were directed to introduce accountability measures and school success plans simultaneously and quickly, we were unsure how to proceed. My confidence as a principal had been shaken considerably by these directives. My working relationship with my teachers was already very fragile and I had decided that it was best to slow down the momentum of change a little and take time to re-group, but my timing as a change agent had been seized. All of this upheaval did little to assist my literacy agenda in the school because there was continuous uncertainty as to what the teachers would agree to do as they interpreted what fell within their assigned workload:

> This week was a better week, I engaged in meaningful conversations about the DRA...After long discussions I felt encouraged that we were discussing literacy on a professional basis and that even though teachers are supporting work disruption…five of them stayed in my office after school one night for two hours voluntarily. The topic of discussion was reading scores had to include comprehension because reading without comprehension was not really reading but decoding. As a result of these conversations our school board has re-thought how they are collecting data and will now include comprehension scores. *(Excerpt from journal entry December 11/02)*

4.3.3 Introducing Balanced Literacy

My goal had been to introduce a curriculum framework to enhance the teaching of literacy. From my many discussions with Fran, I had decided that a balanced literacy program would provide both sound teaching practices and a structured approach for the teachers' literacy

instruction. Balanced literacy is a framework that according to Booth and Rowsell (2002) "…promotes reading skills and literacy among school-age children based on the characteristics of reading stages…emphasizes speaking, listening, presenting, writing, reading and viewing" (p.50-51). Through scheduled blocks of time devoted to literacy, daily instruction in reading, writing, and working with words through shared, guided and independent activities is provided by the teacher to meet the students' different literacy levels (Booth & Rowsell, 2002).

> The possibility of a grant provided our school with an opportunity to grow professionally …It also provided a climate for teachers to discuss literacy. I had one meeting with all interested teachers to…explore…our…using a balanced literacy approach…Teachers had several questions and were genuinely keen…This meeting was followed up with general information about…balanced literacy…that I downloaded from the Internet and supplied to…teachers.
>
> In November, we had a morning workshop on balanced literacy for interested teachers to discuss…what it might mean in our school…It was generally decided that we might like to focus this year on enhancing our guided reading with students and to exploring student/project centers… to provide time for the teacher to have guided reading times…. At this time various materials for professional reading were also shown and recommended to staff. It should be noted that several teachers attended the QPAT (Québec Provincial Association of Teachers) Convention out of town and were not present for this workshop as there was a call for a teachers' rally to protest the position taken by the Government. Some had expressed disappointment about not being able to attend both. *(Excerpt from course work for Introduction to Action Research, Bishop's University November 2001)*
>
> My goal as principal will be to support teachers' growth in these literacy initiatives and to create an educational team at the school level to improve our student's literacy success rate. *(Excerpt from action plan 2001-2002)*

However, work-to-rule had cancelled the teachers' visit to Edmonton schools leaving me feeling very unsure about how to proceed effectively. These immovable roadblocks challenged the very core of my leadership and forced me, as an action researcher practitioner, to continuously reflect and re-direct my actions.

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…I am questioning my leadership in this school. I tend to look at things from the big picture perspective and I fear that I am not very good at looking at things on a smaller scale. I have worked hard to turn this school around and have done a fair amount but I have not successfully connected with the teachers. I have connected with most of the parents quite well on our Governing Board…but I do not experience this with the teachers…as an elementary principal – all of one year and three months…I am still on a learning curve... I also wonder if teachers sense how joyless I find this school…

…I fear that as long as teachers do not have ownership and are not more actively engaged in exploring ways to improve literacy… we will not progress…

I need to re-think this project and to attack it from another angle…Teachers need to be encouraged and I need to make them feel that it is easy and they can do it...I will need to explore how to bring in P.D. about 'Balanced Literacy" to the teachers… *(Excerpt from journal entry December 1/01)*

With the teachers withdrawing support…I feel that I am floundering minus a team and an action plan that was based originally (on having) more teacher involvement. The question now becomes how to salvage my action research plan…

I have met individually with all but one teacher whom will be re-scheduled...With the teachers, I discussed their weakest students. It was evident that few if any modifications were being done to assist students who are struggling. The teachers need help in how to manage the needs of different learners and to use centers more effectively to manage groups of students… (my) notes/concerns were shared with our spec. ed. consultant. *(Excerpt from journal entry January 3/02)*

I am still going to visit Edmonton schools…and plan to bring back as much information as possible. I recognize that bringing back second hand information…is not as effective as first hand information but under the circumstances this is the best that I can do. The challenge will be for me to make this information meaningful and relevant for my staff. Due to the…unwillingness of teachers…to freely use their time after school to meet pedagogically, I have decided to re-structure staff meetings.

Future staff meetings will include…staff discussion about using a balanced literacy approach…This is timely I think as most of our teachers are now finished their Pearson DRA and DWA testing and are disappointed with the results of their students…I am planning…to schedule staff meetings by cycles. This will allow more in-depth discussion and analysis. This will mean for me three staff meetings a month but…I would have scheduled ad hoc cycle meetings to accomplish the same tasks. What…would normally have

been handled at a staff meeting will have to take a different form and that will mean an increase in my workload but manageable if done…through memos and surveys.

I have also created a…survey for teachers…in early January…The purpose of this survey is to keep the momentum going for change in classroom instruction in literacy and to earnestly inquire what I as principal can do to help…I also plan to meet with each teacher…to discuss his or her literacy initiatives and...I believe that these discussions will provide me with an insight as to where the teachers need support.

Some time will have to be found for training in…balanced literacy…We have some…P.D. days in February. I plan to make this time compulsory in-house P.D…I will need to have this approved by our School Council…Perhaps it may be possible to join up with another school or schools within our Board who are also working on literacy improvement initiatives.

I am going to ask that every teacher keep a student portfolio for each student in reading and writing...to assist teachers in knowing as the year progresses whether or not their students are making sufficient progress in order for our students to reach the goals stated in our accountability plan. *(Excerpt from Bishop's course work January7/02)*

As principal, I am under pressure to improve our literacy assessment results. I have invested a lot of time in researching literacy practices during January and February so that I could be more knowledgeable about effective literacy practice…the sole voice bringing forward ideas for changes…is mine. This makes the task harder to say the least.

I have chosen to move the staff forward…and to push hard for change. I recognize that this course of action is not easy. I believe that unless we drastically change the way we teach we will not drastically improve our results. I have shared this with staff to try to create a sense of urgency that will drive the need for change. After a recent meeting in which I tried to create this mood of urgency, I shared a proposal for a balanced literacy program for our school. One member of staff who often assumes the unofficial role of speaking for staff informed me the next day that I had demoralized staff. At first upon hearing this I was angry and then reflected. Whether or not this is true for all staff is irrelevant as some staff feel this way. I have to address this sentiment.

….Not all teachers have to change their practices to a great extent as some teachers have excellent literacy training. I have three trained *Reading Recovery* teachers in the school and one other with some training in balanced literacy. These teachers are definitely keener and supportive of a more balanced literacy approach in our school. *(Excerpt from Bishop's course work March 5/02)*

With other Québec colleagues (two language arts consultants from other English school boards and an elementary principal from my board) and Fran Halliday, I visited schools in Edmonton in January 2002, to see their balanced literacy program. After much discussion when I came back we decided as a school to implement balanced literacy. I timetabled ninety minutes of uninterrupted time to facilitate literacy instruction so that teachers had time to teach, model and to provide practice time for students to develop reading, writing and oral language competencies.

My embodied values of believing in doing 'the right thing' for the students was regularly called into action and fuelled my energy to continue seeking change in adversarial times. I hoped that my efforts would eventually result in some greater good for our students. This is what Fullan (2001) refers to as moral purpose. As he expands: "…moral purpose…must be accompanied by strategies for realizing it, and those strategies are the leadership actions that energize people to pursue a desired goal" (p.19). In hindsight, I believe that if it had not been for Fran Halliday's continuous support and mentoring, I would not have been successful in achieving this important goal that marked a turning point in the teachers' literacy-teaching practices.

4.3.4 Introducing Literacy Changes in the French Immersion Program

I was anxious to have French and English teachers work together to adopt a common methodology on literacy initiatives. They participated in selecting a series of books for the different levels of student readers, including – with more difficulty – appropriate French texts.

> Since half of our students spend half of their day…using French reading and writing skills, it is imperative that the teachers of English and French come together in a more unified literacy approach.

> We have to ask ourselves if our students are scoring lower because of our strong 50/50 Immersion program. This topic is extremely sensitive as it is a flagship program for our school…and draws students from other schools. I have shared this with staff and they are very apprehensive…as many of them can only teach in one language and more importantly it rocks the very foundation of the school.
>
> ...I have also asked teachers to think about how we could work more closely (in) English and French language arts…to make the acquisition of these skills easier for students…In our last two meetings I have observed an increase in the French teachers' participation…A sense of team has to extend across the two programs. *(Excerpt from Bishop's course work March 5/02)*

My mantra in the school became that it is hard enough to teach young children to read and write in two languages without increasing the challenge by using two totally different teaching methods. To facilitate the cohesiveness of our literacy teams in our English and French Immersion Program, a number of interventions were put into practice. All cycle team meetings consisted of English and French colleagues working together to jointly develop three common themes during the school year so that teachers could share methodologies. French teachers were also introduced to a French literacy assessment tool (Trousse d'évaluation en lecture GB+ pour le préscolaire et le primaire (Nelley & Smith, 2002)) which is comparable to the English DRA. I assumed that if our literacy teachers used comparable assessment tools then they would be in a better position to develop common teaching strategies. Our teachers also attended the same professional development activities when the focus was on literacy.

Aligning our two balanced literacy programs took time and patience but these interventions made a difference. New teachers frequently commented on how well our teachers worked together, that they felt supported by the other teachers and that this had not been their experience in other schools. In her first year in our school one Immersion teacher shared with me: "I have taught French in other provinces but it was not like it is here with

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English and French teachers working together." These comments showed that our teachers were beginning to work as a team.

4.3.5 Literacy Accountability

Accountability is a major recurring theme that runs throughout this narrative. As accountability became a more significant component of Québec's educational reform, it had a profound effect on the work that I conducted in the school. Not only did it change the course of events that I had planned for the staff and shaped to a large extent the literacy initiatives that took place, but it also transformed my leadership. I was held accountable for what was happening at our school in terms of our students' rate of success and our teachers' state of professionalism and performance. Society entrusts the care of its children's education to principals and expects high ethical standards of its school leaders (Fullan, 2003b; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). However, the natural state of moral responsibility for principals is enormously heightened in a time of reform changes. The accountability report required by the school board and reproduced in Appendix A indicates the degree to which I was held accountable as a principal.

I share this to describe the ontological pressure I faced continuously and that I could not ethically share with my teachers. My role was to carry out directives to the best of my ability, sometimes being caught in crossfire coming from both staff and senior management. Our school board applied great pressure to improve students' results. Performing in this tension-filled context transformed my practice, supporting Fullan's (Fullan, 1993, 2001; 2003a) contention that without tension meaningful change does not occur.

I deeply believed that the teachers and I needed a time to heal from doing battle during most of our first year together. I was far from abandoning my quest to change teaching

practices to improve instruction but to achieve more solidarity I was prepared to wait a little while for this process to unfold. But accountability allowed little time for us to jointly strategize and implement a course of action to improve teaching practices. Schools were now required to produce immediate and demonstrable improvement in students' results, whether teachers were ready or not.

> At this point of time, many things have changed and reflection is necessary. I have come to more fully appreciate that setting a learning climate…is even more challenging than I originally had imagined…I am…having to move staff pedagogically quite quickly as we are catching up to other schools in which their staffs practice more up-to-date teaching techniques…Staff that is 'au courant' is more ready to change and be more flexible as they are asked to meet new challenges, I think. I have to balance this quick pace motion forward with the need to have teachers buy in so that the change can penetrate through resistance and take hold so that it can be sustainable over time. Yet buying in takes time and that we cannot afford at present due to accountability demands. *(Excerpt from Bishop's course work March 5/02)*

As principal, I found myself in the grey zone that I discussed in Chapter 2. On one hand, I was being directed by my school board to develop a school success plan according to Ministry directives as quickly as possible with my staff, while on the other hand, I believed that this work was too much and too soon for our school. I worried that my working relationship with staff would be strained to the point that I might never be able to form a true learning community. I was being stretched in my ethical leadership and taken out of my zone of proximity (Wink & Putney, 2002). I found myself living my contradictions as Whitehead describes:

I experience a concern when some of my educational values are denied in my

practice; I imagine a solution to that concern; I act in the direction of the

imagined solution; I evaluate the outcome of the solution; I modify my

practice, plans and ideas in the light of the evaluation. The 'I' exists as a

living contradiction in the sense that values which we hold are not being lived

fully in our practice. (Whitehead, 1989a, p. 48).

4.4 Shared Leadership and Critical Friends Who Fostered Literacy

Although year two began with hope as I felt that I was beginning to work in closer harmony

with the teachers, the road blocks that surfaced over the year played havoc with my plans. I

needed guidance about my role; how I could achieve what I was being directed to do while at

the same time achieving what I believed was needed to improve practices. I was not certain

that these two objectives were complementary because I feared that our school success plan

could negate most of the literacy gains we had made. Until I encountered these challenges, I

had been comfortable with my own decision-making in my leadership role but this dilemma

led me to open up my leadership and to share it with other educators to seek their counsel. As

a researcher practitioner, I was often too close to problems to be objective and to see

solutions close at hand, so as Mills (2003) suggests, I sought critical friends to help me

clarify situations. It was not just their advice that I sought but I actually opened up my

leadership role and shared it with them. I was sharing my leadership, not with teachers but

with outside professional colleagues – a profound change in my practice and I grew

professionally.

My critical friends fall into the description provided by Smith and Sturge-Sparkes (1999)

who state that, "'Critical friends' are people who will help you get through the exercise. They

are close enough to provide the support you need. At the same time, they are 'outsiders' in a sense, so that they can remain objective about what you are doing. Their feedback can keep you on track…" (p.2). Fortunately, I had the benefit of having the three members of the Ministry of Education's Professional School Improvement (PSI) team, Fran Halliday, Jean Fillatre and Carolyn Sturge-Sparkes to act as my mentors during this time of unrest. Since the PSI team members were working in our school on a regular basis, they were able to offer me advice appropriate to our context.

I met the PSI team in the spring of 2001, when the school board's Director General had arranged to have them visit our school. Their mandate was to support the implementation of the QEP and to assist schools in the formation of non-denominational schools. I was directed to inquire what supports could be offered to me as principal and to seek assistance in areas in which I needed help. The team was very encouraging and supportive of the work that I had accomplished in my first year, but recognizing the huge tasks that still lay ahead, they agreed to work with me the following year (2001-2002).

Each member of the team supported me differently. Fran quickly recognized my limited literacy background and assisted me in seeking appropriate professional development. I thank her for arranging for me to visit schools in Edmonton because this experience provided me with a pedagogical literacy base that gave me the confidence and knowledge to effectively lead the changes that I sought. She also introduced me to action research as a way to make sense of the work that I was trying to accomplish with the staff and to find effective solutions to the problems I encountered as principal. She acted as my professional coach and literacy mentor, as reflected here in one of her emails:

Marian,

I have begun a plan that might work for (your school) - begins with a complete needs assessment accomplished by teacher teams. This will allow teachers to provide any evidence they have regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the children in their classes and be part of a literacy team - building on Helen's idea of working together. For PD, what about if I worked with Susan, Helen, Carole, yourself and we built up a plan and shared the leadership. I think we need to address the notion of balancing the 4 blocks - 1. Reading and Writing to (by the teacher), 2. Reading and Writing with - Shared (between students and teacher, students and students), 3. Guided reading and writing - students read at their instructional level, reading & writing strategies taught, 4. Independent reading and writing (95% accuracy rate). As we look at this I think we can see ways to include most of what a teacher is already doing - and work at enriching it. This would provide everyone with the opportunity to be part of the team - and establish a balanced curriculum for your school.

Perhaps there could be a possibility to team up with (another school) for PD. Is there a way to dismiss early one day a week? Is there a way to have an alternate programme one half day a week which uses only half of the staff and other community persons? What kind of solutions might the staff come up with?

We will have to think about using presence time. What is in place in cycles 1 and 2 is the curriculum, not reform. A strong literacy programme is the responsibility of each teacher - and so is professional development as per the 1997 document on PD. Jean will come to a staff meeting to discuss some of these issues if you need her to do so - she can take some of the heat off of you…

Fran *(email from Fran Halliday 16/12/01) Please note that the names of the staff have been changed to provide anonymity.*

Fran's monitoring of our students' literacy assessments guided my work with the staff.

More in-depth analysis of the Pearson DRA and DWA testing is required in order for us to effectively target the areas in which we must focus our teaching to maximize improvement in our students' scores. This will help to create an understanding of each student's literacy profile. A critical colleague (Fran) has suggested a small team of teachers…who are trained in *Reading Recovery* …assist with this work. This is an excellent idea… *(Excerpt from Bishop's course work January '02)*

Jean and Fran worked together with the staff and sometimes they met only with me to

strategize. In this process, Jean became my personal mentor who helped me to reflect on my

goals as principal, to focus only on what really mattered, and to keep initiatives as simple as possible. From our conversations, I learned how to analyze what was at the heart of nagging questions and I worked on developing an action plan that had been tweaked by her probing questions. Our on-going professional conversations provided me with a fresh perspective to critically review my practice (Loughran, 2002) and become more objective in my approach. Carolyn invited the staff to work with her on deciding what school improvement initiatives they could undertake and how they could move forward collectively.

In their respective roles, each of these Québec women educators assisted me with my action research. They gave me both wisdom and courage to continue to push for change when roadblocks seemed insurmountable. When their team was disbanded in 2002, each of them continued to be a critical friend. Without their support, I do not believe that I would have tackled some of the things that I did nor would I have been as successful at changing literacy-teaching practices. It was very important for me to have professional mentoring because the role of principal is an isolated position within the school, especially when there is no vice principal. It is even more important in times of adversity as the 2001-2002 school year proved to be. My practice was enriched by our exchanges and they helped me to open up my practice (Loughran, 2007; Russell, 2007) in ways that I had not done before.

4.5 The Conclusion of Year Two

Administrative factors interfered with the smooth progress of my research. The already overcrowded school received more students, resulting in on-going changes to staffing and teaching assignments. Space also became a prime factor that caused the school board to consider moving G.E.C. to another building.

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As I reflect further I…had never before really considered the real level of change going on in the classroom itself almost daily. My view of change focused more on the school level and not on the classroom level. It was only as I talked out my problems, concerns, and doubts...with the group (critical friends) did it occur to me that a critical element had been virtually overlooked.

…there is so much disruption going on with the constant movement of students and changes being made to…teaching assignment(s)…This critical moment of revelation was confirmed for me when Fran said that although she has been in the school several times that she too had never considered this before but obviously this was an important factor. In only the last few weeks, I have added three new teachers…this marks about the fifth major change in teaching assignments this year. Very few teachers have not been affected by these changes. There is also the student movement in and out of the class that occurs some weeks daily…obviously teachers are reeling from these changes over which we have no control.

What I now ask myself is to what extent has my action research been hampered by my need to manage change rather than lead change as an educational leader? As I reflect on my work activities over the past three weeks, I log a great deal of time spent in…hiring staff, the changes that have to be made to the timetable and supervision schedule, the letters that need to be sent to parents to keep them informed, the help required from me to set up the new staff (buying furniture to accommodate them, finding a work space in an over crowded school etc…)

Additionally, we have the announcement of the new school…I have attended a four-hour Board meeting…I have had meetings with staff…the Governing Board chair and the Director General to discuss the…possible implications for our school. All this work took place since (spring) break in the last three weeks in addition to the daily work that running a school requires of a principal! I think that I can say that perhaps I am also reeling from these changes and that this does this impact on my action research. *(Excerpt from journal entry March 29/02)*

Our new school site was being used as a junior high school that now also required re-location. We were seen as school poachers, making a visit to our new school very difficult to arrange and this created great stress and concern amongst our parents, staff and students. We all relied heavily on support from our board to help us get through this massive move. Attention to the move consumed all of us during the last months of the school year. Our work

just halted abruptly and was left suspended until we could once again have time to move forward professionally. As for me…

> The move took a great toll on my energy and work schedule and I feel that school in the normal sense has been suspended from May (2002) through to Christmas break (2002). So much time was consumed by attending to extra details arising from the move from street safety, working with the city to how and where to load students for buses,…to installing more security in the daycare and the list goes on. Since Christmas break I have been playing catch up so that I have now just recently finished teacher evaluations that were suspended from the announcement of our move, to January. I am beginning to find time to do the usual principal tasks like budget, attendance, overdue school fees etc…
>
> It is therefore safe to say that pedagogy has largely not been on my front burner and we have progressed rather slowly so far this year. But I sense that the staff is content in our new space. People…comment that our school feels warm and inviting…Apart from being very tired as all staff hit the decks in August running very hard, I sense that our overall school atmosphere is good. Students are friendly when I walk down the halls and often are engaged in one project or another. The staff room comes alive briefly at lunch and teachers appear to be getting along well with each other. So I feel our environment is good – very good. *(Journal excerpt March 10/03)*

4.6 Professional Growth in Literacy - the Continuing Challenge in Year 3

In spring 2003, our school quickly volunteered to participate in a literacy project that our board had initiated. All the Kindergarten and cycle one French and English teachers and I were scheduled to attend literacy workshops throughout the year. For this project, each school received additional staffing to create a literacy facilitator and we decided to split the position to have a part-time facilitator for each of our English and French Immersion Programs. Our facilitators worked very well in tandem and enhanced concepts taught in the training sessions. Our literacy teachers were able to practice new methods, and then shared their experiences as they experimented with literacy instruction. Literacy had become the common thread that tied all of our work together and this project moved us forward as a staff.

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Most notably, the Kindergarten and cycle 1 teachers started to close some of the distance that had existed between them.

Regrettably budget cuts a year later led to the cancellation of this board-wide literacy initiative, affecting our literacy progress in a number of ways. Teachers who had grown to be more supportive of our school board became cynically distrusting again, and those who were still working on mastering new teaching strategies felt abandoned. We carried on as well as we could by using time after school, led by our resource teachers, to develop better literacy-teaching practices but the wind that had been taken out of our sails was never truly replaced. We continued to make progress but it took us more time and effort. I had also lost Fran as my professional coach as she passed away shortly after we moved into our new school building. I had therefore come to depend on the board's literacy program to help move us forward so I too was very disappointed as I was once again left to my own leadership devices.

We needed to re-think practices and move expeditiously towards realizing our literacy goals, but as Sergiovanni (1996) cautions we needed to be careful of 'quick fix pressure' for 'easy answers'. These approaches would not bring about meaningful change. Our teachers required additional time to foster real growth and development in their teaching of literacy. Several teachers were still not very familiar with effective literacy practices and so I continued to encourage them to change how they taught literacy skills, so that we could see significant progress in our students. I fostered changes to teaching practices by supplying professional articles about literacy and engaging in conversations with individual teachers about their literacy teaching practices. For this order of change, our teachers needed to accept their role in the change process and that we needed to change not only classroom literacy instruction but also our school's approach to literacy. With the introduction of balanced

literacy, a lot of change occurred and much of it was good. However, we still struggled with finding effective teaching strategies for our ESL (English Second Language), special education, and Immersion students. Teachers experienced their greatest difficulty in effectively meeting the broad and diverse learning needs of their students.

The board-wide literacy training that our Kindergarten and cycle 1 teachers received was very helpful as it enabled teachers to provide our primary students with some degree of consistency. However, as this training had been terminated before reaching our cycle 2 and 3 teachers, a common school-wide literacy approach was still lacking. This was a topic of discussion at several of our staff meetings. Common literacy assessment tools tracked our students' progress and provided a comparison of our results with the board's average, but we had not achieved a uniform literacy delivery across cycles. To try to address this need, our board offered literacy training to our resource teachers who were then expected to share their learning with other teachers, but other critically important tasks meant that they were not always available to share their knowledge on a regular basis.

Overall, I believe that our literacy practices changed due to a number of interventions: continuous professional development, stocking good instructional reading materials, matching literacy instruction to expected literacy outcomes, and frequently engaging in dialogue about how to improve literacy. Our student population growth enabled me to hire new teachers with skills and knowledge that had been absent in our staff. These elements forged a healthy literacy culture in our school that enabled change to occur.

4.7 Forming a Professional Learning Community

On-going professional discussions about how to improve our students' literacy scores led teachers to see the merits of forming a professional learning community. In spring 2003, we

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had settled in our new site and our staff was exploring ways to continue our literacy

initiatives without the board's literacy program. The timing seemed right to raise the topic of

professional learning communities (PLCs) at a staff meeting and the concept was well

received by teachers. Additionally, our resource teacher had also been researching PLCs and

was very keen to pursue this idea. She and I discussed the notion of trying a mentoring

program for the coming year to extend support to our literacy teachers and we applied for a

grant that was later approved. This funding provided for a mentoring team (consisting of a

principal on leave of absence, my former resource teacher who now was a school board

consultant, and myself) to meet regularly with teachers; opportunities for teachers to visit

neighbouring literacy programs; and some coaching of literacy teachers.

Time is a very critical component of the change process (Fullan, 1995) and needs to be

scheduled. Our work was done at weekly cycle team and mentoring meetings that took place

after school. These meetings were built into our teachers' workload as part of their

contractual in-school presence time and were approved by staff. This time enabled us to

examine the literacy targets in our school success plan and to brainstorm solutions to improve

students' results. It is important to note that our mentoring program[6] involved teachers to a

greater degree in the analysis of scores and acquired competencies and therefore for the first

time in year three, teachers set our school success targets.

For the cycle team meetings, teachers selected the items to be discussed and they gave

me minutes of their meetings. To facilitate these meetings, to keep our focus on literacy, and

to aim for consistency across cycles, I met weekly with my two resource teachers. We

reviewed which students and teachers needed support, how we could best support them, and

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[6] See Appendix C: for a visual presentation of our mentoring program model.

how we were progressing with our literacy initiatives. The resource teachers took these ideas to the team meetings and often the focus of the meeting arose from our conversations. I created a way for me to give input and feedback while at the same time nurturing teacher-shared leadership. Each cycle team had a cycle leader whose responsibility was to set the agenda, have the minutes recorded, and bring forward cycle concerns to me or to the resource teachers. I found this structure to be useful as I had previously tried to attend cycle meetings but too often found myself unable to attend or pulled away to address issues demanding my immediate attention.

These discussions provided a context for our teaching staff to examine their teaching practices (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) and in our mentoring meetings teachers were encouraged to ask relevant questions such as: What do my students need to know? How will I know if my students have mastered necessary skills? What do I need to know as a teacher so I can teach these skills more effectively? These questions encouraged them to become action researchers and to formulate a shared vision about what our students need to learn. This shared understanding gave us a clearer vision of what needed to change (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 1995). I knew that my teachers had not yet truly seized our school's learning agenda which is why I endeavoured to transfer much of the decision-making surrounding pedagogy to teachers and to foster their creation of a professional learning community.

> … I was feeling very positive about the school year and looking forward to great things happening with the mentoring and the formation of a professional learning community. Teachers were excited about analyzing where to go from here. We had looked at our results and had graphed the DRA from last spring. The French teachers were beginning to do running records in French and I felt that things were beginning to move along and that teachers were having good discussions about reading... *(Extract from journal entry November 5/03)*

4.8 Literacy Mentors

The action research that I have conducted for my doctoral studies has focused on my professional practice as a principal, and therefore this story is told in first person and centers on my involvement in the school. However, I would not want to leave the impression that all of the work and the change process were done exclusively by me. I had the strong support of several parents; particularly those involved on our Governing Board, and some members of my staff, in particular my former resource teacher, our literacy resource teacher and mentors from the educational community who lent their support to initiatives to move our school forward and to strengthen the quality of our work. My former resource teacher, now a special education and literacy consultant, was invaluable in years two and three by providing teachers with weekly professional development in literacy. She was a well-respected mentor, for while she was on staff, she had formed professional relationships with each of them and developed trust. She and I continued to have in-depth conversations about instructional practices, and she too has become a critical friend to my research.

Teachers learned to say that they needed help and to come to me for assistance. I took these requests as an indication of the professional trust that had developed between us. I believe that this trust was forged from the foundation work conducted in the early years of my principalship that is shared in this chapter. As my study progressed it shaped my practice to become more supportive of teachers, and, in later years as I evolved in my role, I had regular conversations with the many new and inexperienced teachers on staff about instruction. Frequently they would tell me that other teachers had told them to share their professional needs with me and that I would find ways to help them. I brought in other educators to work with them on specific areas of literacy. It was good to know that staff had

come to appreciate this level of support and that they had faith in my leadership to guide their professional learning.

4.9 Action research Cycle 3

Unfortunately in the fall of 2005, teachers grew very concerned about the lack of a provincial teacher contract and consequently, teaching workloads were carefully reviewed by the provincial teachers' association. This concern filtered down to both local school boards and teacher associations that led to a grievance being filed by my teachers about the professional use of their time after classes ended. This action forced me to immediately re-direct our work that was being done after school to create our own literacy-based professional learning community *(think)*. Since there were provincial changes in assessment and student reporting taking place and we had already begun some work in literacy assessment, I made the decision to focus my work with teachers on literacy assessment during this period of unrest *(act)*. This decision moved my study into its third action research cycle and the one that proved to be the most difficult *(reflect)*. I will discuss the pedagogical actions undertaken to further develop literacy assessment practices in this chapter but I will leave the challenges arising from my third action research cycle to be fully reviewed in Chapters Five and Six.

4.9.1 Assessment for Learning

In December 2005, MELS amended the Québec Education Act so that other assessment practices could replace a report card for one reporting period in each year of the cycle. This change introduced major changes to our assessment practices and led us to conduct research on how to effectively use student-led conferencing accompanied with student portfolios to replace a report card.

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Concurrent with all this work, as a lead school, we continued to develop authentic assessment practices. We continued to learn about how to measure whether literacy was improving. For the purpose of this thesis, I will describe only those elements that directly relate to literacy. As we began student-led conferencing and teachers began to work with students to collect samples of their work as evidence of their progress, our teachers began important exchanges about how to demonstrate growth in reading and writing. What samples of students' work should be kept and shared with parents? How could we best share evidence of growth or non-growth? Teachers worked in their cycle teams to answer these questions. These meetings generated very valuable pedagogical discussions not only about what evidence students should share but also about how each teacher framed their literacy program. As teachers discussed these issues at cycle meetings, they began to compare how literacy was actually being taught in different classrooms within the cycle, and so, in a non-threatening manner, they began comparing their practices. This exercise strengthened their literacy-teaching as they began to incorporate 'best practices' into their classroom.

Our work was supported by a Québec Government grant that provided funding for teachers and administrators to visit other schools to study 'best practices'. With the assistance of Dr. Anne Davies, whom we met in an assessment conference, we arranged to visit Hawaiian schools that are working with Dr. Davies on authentic student assessment, progress folios and student-led conferencing. This research was invaluable in helping our understanding of authentic assessment and how to take subject domains and to break down the competencies into student-friendly rubrics. We also learned to how to develop student exemplars. We began to model these practices in our April 2007 student-led conferences and these two photos, taken in April 2007, are evidence of our learning.

These photos show that our teachers were beginning to deconstruct literacy competencies and through this deconstruction they began to develop a greater professional comprehension about the stages of literacy development. When I visited classes and began to see these charts appearing on their classroom walls, I became very excited. Although these charts appear in a crude format as shown in the photos, they marked for me the turning point that teachers were digging deeper with students into the many facets of literacy and were developing both teacher's and students' understanding of authentic literacy assessment. This raw data provided me with tangible evidence about the profound literacy changes taking place in the teachers' practices – teachers were both learning and assimilating what we were talking about in our PLC sessions into their teaching.

In keeping with action research, I include this evidence to substantiate that literacy-teaching practices in the school were changing and I believe that this evidence cannot be adequately captured by my written explanations alone. I am quite passionate about these pictures because of all of the work and progress they represent as I know how hard we all worked to arrive at this stage of professional development. This knowledge enabled our teachers to construct teaching strategies that were more precise and specific to the individual needs of students. Students were now provided with opportunities at their level of development to develop each skill required to master the provincial literacy competencies.
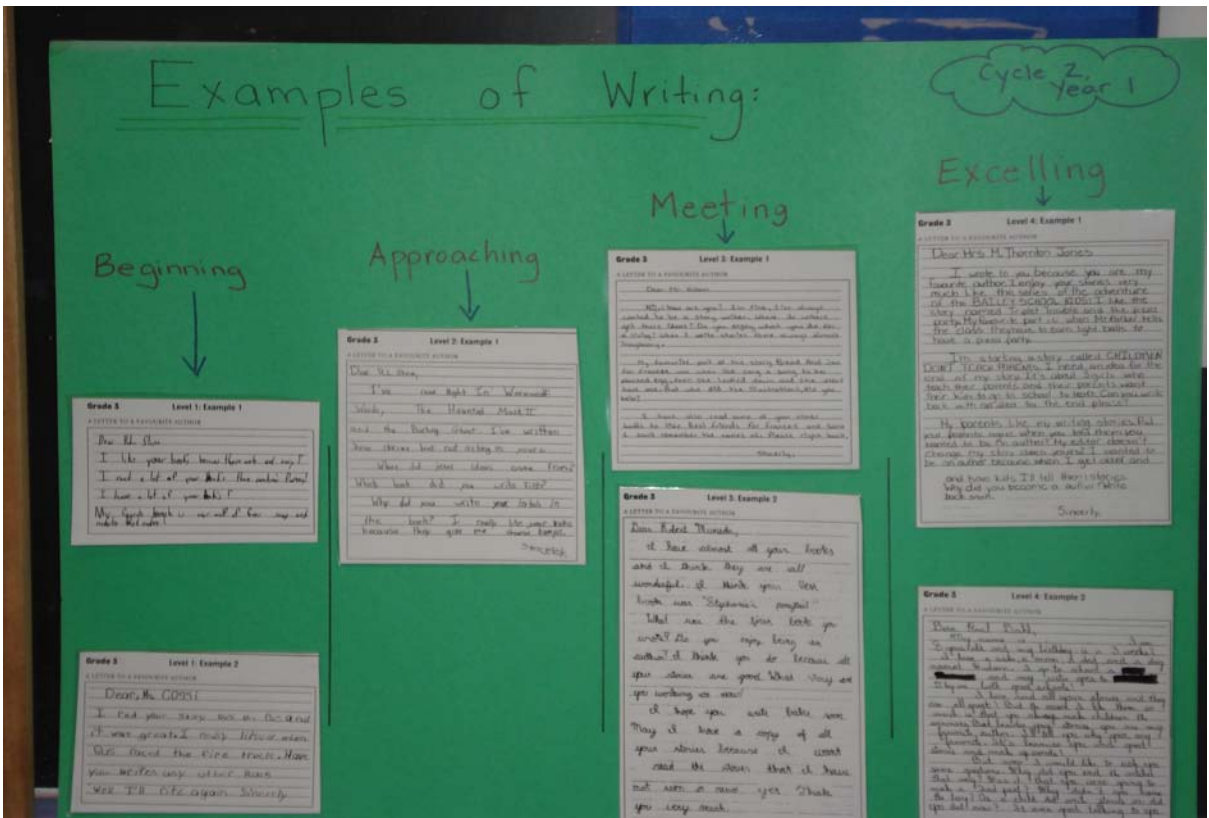
Plate 1:

Teachers' Exemplars of Attainment Levels in Writing Competency - Example 1
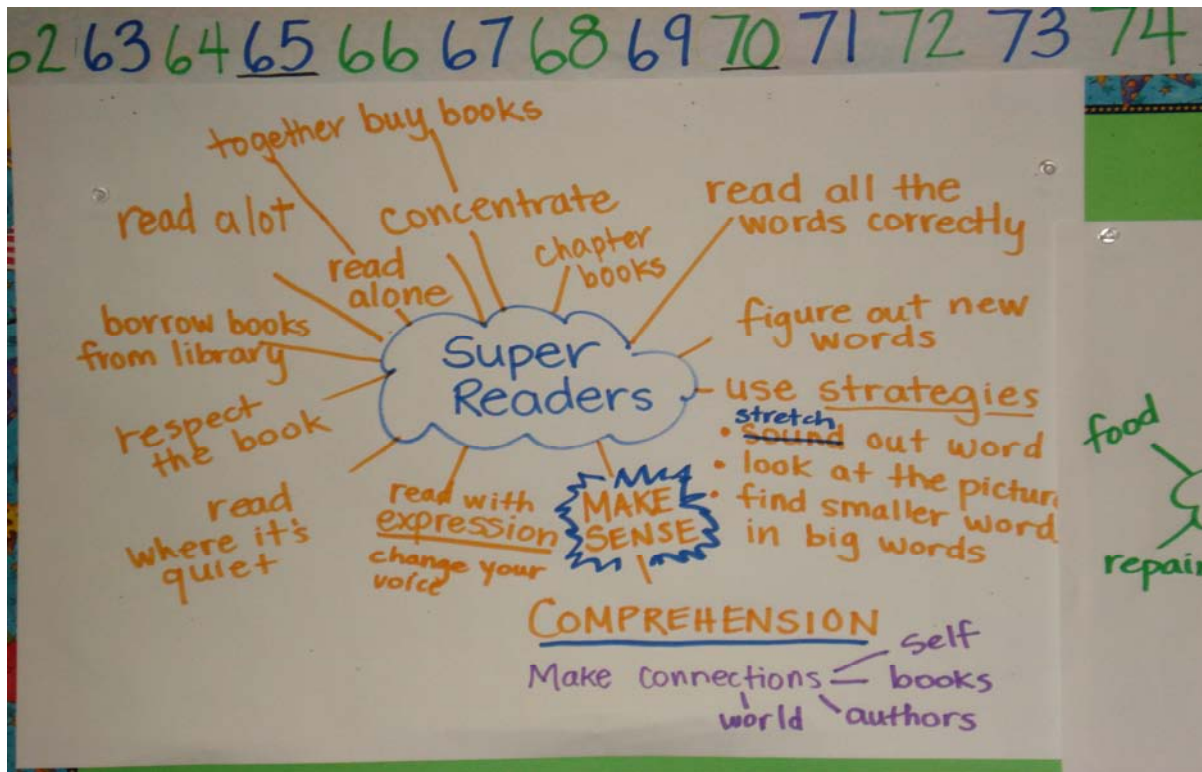
Plate 2:

Teachers' Descriptors of High Attaining - Example 2

Thus the need for assessment and the new form of assessment promoted important pedagogical discussions (Noonan & Renihan, 2006) and allowed me to provide an alternative form of professional development for the teachers. It also engendered pride in what they were doing when I presented our work to other schools at a provincial conference. Had my appointment to the school been longer I would have encouraged the teachers to further develop this work and to refine it over time.

4.10 Summary of Reflective Analysis

> I think that after…. moving big and often controversial changes forward, the key to my success in the sense that the staff still talk to me and work with me is that for every perceived negative change, I have tried to provide a bit of silver lining. I believe that change does not have to be negative and can be positive with up sides to it. I search for up sides and try to balance perceptions as we proceed. *(Excerpt from Bishop's course work March 5/02)*

As I review this work, I begin to realize that literacy practices in our school changed and that I was the change agent. In my professional crisis as a principal struggling to make sense of my work and being accountable for my actions and for those of my staff, I sought several forms of help. Thanks to Fran, I grew as an educator with knowledge that made me a more effective principal and I discovered action research. Its methodology gave me a structure to develop 'think-act-reflect' cycles. In this study there are three action-reflection cycles that evolved and each action phase was accompanied by a grant to initiate change: 1) The first action research cycle explored a balanced literacy delivery model and was supported by a grant (2001-2002) to visit schools in Edmonton 2) The second action research cycle introduced a balanced literacy-based professional learning community and was supported by a grant (2003-2004) to have mentors work with the staff to explore the work of Eaker, Dufour & Dufour and 3) the third action research cycle introduced authentic student assessment for literacy and was supported by a grant (2005-2007) to visit schools in Hawaii to view the work of Dr. Anne Davies.

As a school community we worked on implementing each action phase. We put into place a balanced literacy program and we worked in cycle teams as a professional learning community to refine our school's balanced literacy delivery. In the (2007-2008) school year, Cycle One staff participated in a project led by our former resource teacher to implement literacy methods detailed in the book, *The Daily Five Fostering Literacy Independence In The Elementary Grades* (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Our PLC was still experiencing growing pains and took a major step back in 2006-2007 when a third of our teaching staff were new teachers who required a lot of individual mentoring and coaching. In supporting these teachers, our PLC reviewed ground already covered to consolidate everyone's understanding

of literacy instruction. Our authentic student assessment practices further evolved as Cycles

Two and Three worked on developing literacy exemplars to explain the learning continuum

in a clearer and more precise fashion for students, parents and teachers.

4.11 Summary

> …the fact that we are asking questions about school success and student
> achievement tells us that we are moving forward and it is encouraging…
> *(Carolyn Sturge-Sparkes' professional notes from cycle 2 meeting May 22/02)*

My action research was based on changing literacy practices, and because there is little

documented work on this topic (Booth & Rowsell, 2002), I have described some of the

complexities I faced: my initial struggle in getting teachers to focus on developing literacy

instruction and on improving their own practice; the many competing interests and

challenges principals face daily as pedagogical leaders; how well thought out plans can be

derailed by outside forces beyond the school's control. Nevertheless, our school's literacy

journey did proceed and I have outlined how our response to reform and accountability issues

created a culture of learning that fostered a professional learning community. Teachers began

to examine deeper levels of change as they grew more knowledgeable about literacy-teaching

practices, subject matter, and student learning; all important elements resulting from

professional learning opportunities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Most importantly, I have shown how my practice evolved and how my leadership

adapted to the circumstances surrounding me. But more than being a chameleon with

leadership skills, I underwent change that in turn transformed my practice from an

authoritative principal relying solely on my knowledge and research to being a practitioner

action researcher who began to use reflection to guide my work through the reflective cycles

of action research. Through the support of critical colleagues, I came to share leadership and to foster cycle teams and project leaders.

In Chapter Four I have documented in detail the multi-faceted approach I adopted to improve literacy-teaching so that the role of the principal in this process is fully exposed. My actions over time evolved into literacy themes that will be discussed and examined in the following chapter. Chapter Five will also describe the data I collected to examine whether there is evidence that I was able, by applying these initiatives, to improve literacy-teaching practices and thereby to improve student literacy.

CHAPTER FIVE
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Framing the Results

Using action research as a tool allowed me to make on-going changes to the way I facilitated literacy-teaching in my school. As I alluded to in earlier chapters, everything I heard from teachers, parents, and my superiors reassured me that I had been successful. But was I hearing representative and unbiased opinions? Or were people telling me what they thought I wanted to hear? Were the positive comments an artefact of all the many other changes that we had made in the school? Or were the children's literacy test scores really affected by my literacy initiatives? To answer these questions as honestly as I could, I decided to collect data from a variety of sources, as objectively as possible, and then to analyze these data as rigorously as possible. I decided in my final reflective action research cycle that only an objective and rigorous analysis would take the research beyond a self study to help develop a strategy for my own professional development as a principal, and might inform other principals looking for answers to the same kind of question. The rigor I sought is best supported by the work of T. D. Jick, (1983),

> …the effectiveness of a leader may be studied by interviewing the leader, observing his or her behaviour, and evaluating performance records. The focus always remains that of the leader's effectiveness but the mode of data collection varies. Multiple and independent measures, if they reach the same conclusions, provide a more certain portrayal of the leadership phenomenon. (p. 136)

While I was organizing this body of data for analysis, I recognized many similarities with ethnographic research and drew on the work of LeCompte and Schensul (1999) for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

5.2 Data Collection

In this section, I will describe the various types of data I collected to answer my research question "How do I as a principal improve my practice to enhance the teaching of literacy?" These data comprised reflective journal entries, course assignments, email correspondence, the results of a questionnaire given to informed respondents and the students' literacy scores. Because I was inviting examination and comment on my practice from people with whom I was in a power relationship, I needed to take account of ethical considerations and I will describe the steps I took to do so. I will then analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, and end the chapter with a chart that shows how I triangulated my claims. My final chapter will discuss the differences in my perceptions about my work and what I was doing to enhance literacy as compared to those of the respondents in how they viewed my practice and my effectiveness in changing how we delivered literacy to students.

5.2.1 The Qualitative Data

I collected 213 pages of action research field notes that were written as reflective journal entries during the time of my principalship in the school. They include my views about conversations and interviews with critical friends. My journal entries mostly consist of head notes and scratch notes. Borrowing from the work of Sanjek, LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe head notes as, "…memories or mental notes kept … until such time as it is possible to actually write things down" (p. 31), while scratch notes are jottings written right after an event when it is inappropriate to write during the event. My journal entries have been

preserved in their raw form without any revision and included as vignettes that appear throughout the earlier chapters. They describe in ontological context what events were taking place in the school, provide an account of my challenges as I saw them and detail my inner struggle as to how I could improve my practice.

My field notes include approximately 100 pages of action research graduate course work that I took while conducting my study and provide rich clips of what was happening during these periods. Of all my field notes, this work is the most richly detailed as my experiences, values, and personal insights benefited from the additional reflection that resulted from my course assignments. My assignments constructed and refined the action research lens for my study and also detailed the evolution of topical areas that I pursued as my research evolved.

Another source of data is a collection of emails over a six-year period containing correspondence between me, my teaching staff, senior administration and my critical friends, capturing relevant points about literacy such as: the planning of professional development; the promotion of upcoming workshops and conferences; the organization of cycle team meetings; the school's assessment practices; the required supports for our harder-to-serve students; and the citing of research articles and websites.

5.2.2 The Quantitative Data

These data consist of a two part questionnaire – questionnaire (Part A) and anecdotal questions (Part B), and grade two students' reading scores. The collection of this information provided for a more objective analysis of my practice and the literacy improvements that occurred during my term as principal.

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5.2.2.1 The Questionnaire

The final pieces of my data were collected as my study drew to a close when I searched for a way to answer the question: Did I make a contribution to enhance the teaching of literacy and if so, how effective was I in my role? To acquire the answer to this critical question, I decided to formulate an on-line questionnaire given in Appendix D.4 and ask the professionals working with me and the parents of my Governing Board directly about my literacy initiatives in the school. The purpose of the questionnaire was not only to gather evidence whether I had improved literacy-teaching but also to learn how I could further improve my practice. I therefore needed to know which of the literacy interventions were most effective and to be able to rank them. I also wanted to be able to report what strategies were most effective and thereby offer some insights for future literacy researchers. Finally, my findings had to be trustworthy to contribute new knowledge about improving the practice of a literacy principal.

To obtain meaningful feedback, I required questions that would not be leading but would be relevant to my work. Additionally, I needed to exercise caution to safeguard against biases (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; McNiff, et al., 1996, 2003; Mills, 2003; Zeni, 2001). I had already found Booth and Rowsell's (2002) work to be useful and I was now drawn to examine what strategies they believed that a literacy principal must consider when promoting effective school-wide literacy. From their list (Booth & Rowsell, 2002, p.76-78), I developed 31 questions for an on-line questionnaire. In doing so, I was not pre-determining the questions to ask and would be reducing the influence of my personal biases. For the purpose of my study, the focus of these questions was on the role of the principal and as such the teachers' roles were not examined. This stance does not negate the important role that teachers played in the literacy delivery and increasing student success.

In constructing the questionnaire, I chose a five point Likert scale in Part A in order to capture everyone's views by offering respondents a wide choice of options and thereby encourage a greater rate of response. Its second section (Part B) consisted of six open-ended anecdotal questions that had expandable boxes so that respondents could give as much input as they chose. A small group of researchers (critical friends) reviewed my questionnaire and led me to make some revisions for clarity and to ensure that each point on the Likert scale would be a distinct ordinal measure.

The 31 questions related to nine specific literacy interventions that were initiated within the school and whose genesis will be described later in this chapter. Each question evaluated my effectiveness in implementing one of these interventions. The order of the questions was meaningless within each of the three broad categories provided to the respondents and the respondents were not given any information on how the questions related to specific interventions. Appendix F lists the nine applied literacy interventions and the specific questions associated with the intervention.

I sent the questionnaire to three distinct groups who were in a position to observe the literacy interventions that I had initiated and fostered, and to give them voice: 1) all teaching staff (current and those who had recently departed), 2) all senior school board administrators who oversaw my work, and 3) all the parent Governing Board chairpersons during my term as the school's principal. I believed that the general parent population were not in a position to fully comprehend the extent of our literacy initiatives and be able to answer the detailed questions. However, the Governing Board chairs worked closely with me in previewing and discussing our students' reading levels and our school's literacy success statistics as we planned future Governing Board meetings and topics for discussion.

After obtaining ethical approval, an electronic package consisting of an invitation letter, the participant's consent form and the questionnaire was sent to 65 potential respondents (39 teachers, 8 parents and 18 administrators). In the letter shown in Appendix D.1 they were invited to complete the questionnaire, and I also explained the process put into place to protect everyone's anonymity. Respondents were informed that they could respond in either English or French and were asked to return their responses either electronically or by mail within 12 days. After 12 days I sent an email reminder shown in Appendix D.3 to all the potential respondents thanking those who had responded, and encouraging those who hadn't responded to do so. Some respondents chose to mail their responses instead of using email, so this phase of the data collection period was extended to one month.

Given my relationship to the people receiving the questionnaire, specific steps were taken to encourage respondents to respond openly and honestly without any concern about potential conflict and to eliminate any perception of power or manipulation. To achieve this, the questionnaire was sent in an electronic format and all responses were returned by email or by post to an independent party (a fellow doctoral student) who removed all personal information that might identify a respondent. A confidential list of respondents was kept for future referencing if necessary but only identified to me by group and number (e.g. teacher 1 became T1, administrator 1 became A1 and parent 1 became P1). The resulting sets of anonymous responses were tabulated by a second doctoral colleague before the typed results were sent to me for analysis. These steps were taken to protect respondents' anonymity, to encourage their participation, and to promote the validity of their responses.

5.2.2.2 Students' Literacy Scores

Also contained in my data set are the school's students' *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA)[7] (Beaver, 2006) results collected over a reporting period of five years and used with the permission of my school board. The DRA measured both students' reading and comprehension levels and as the DRA is standardized, there are grade text levels benchmarked for grades 1 to 8. As part of our school board's literacy plan, all elementary schools were instructed to use the DRA each fall and spring for our cycle 1, year 2 students (grade 2) and to forward these scores to our school board. Our board had chosen to track grade 2 students because the board was interested in the early identification of at-risk literacy students. Schools' results were compared to the board's average and these comparative data were given to each school twice a year. Our school used these data as part of our school improvement statistics in our school success plan. Although our French Immersion students' reading was also assessed using the GB+ as discussed in Chapter Four, these results were not part of the school board's data collection; because of the diversity of French Immersion delivery across the board no common benchmarks could be set. Therefore I did not use the French Immersion scores for my data collection or analysis.

5.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis rigorously examines both the qualitative and quantitative data that I collected in this study and adheres to action research methodology. In this section I will draw evidence from both qualitative and quantitative data.

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[7] See Table 16.

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5.3.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Chapter Four has provided a detailed account and analysis of the data collected over the duration of this study derived from my journals, correspondence and course work. In this analytical review of my field notes, course work and emails some salient points become apparent: 1) I grew professionally as a principal gaining new literacy knowledge throughout my study; 2) my practice evolved as my leadership became more collaborative by promoting shared leadership with literacy resource teachers; and 3) I introduced several literacy initiatives that evolved into themes over the study period. These points were discovered after many re-reads of all of my qualitative data while I searched for re-occurring themes that I highlighted as I went along. I paid particular attention to my graduate course work that had refined my focus at different points in time during my study. I also very carefully reviewed plans that I had drafted to examine their focus and to look for evidence of change in my practice over the course of the study. By reviewing this material until I was able to make sense of it, through reflecting on what I had recorded, and concentrating on why I thought what I had written at the time was important; I was finally able to identify three key features about my practice from my analytical review. Once these areas were identified, I went over the material again to confirm my findings. This work required time to sort the material, to organize it in a chronological format, to analyze it, to identify my findings, and to re-confirm my claims.

From this review, I made one additional and important observation and that was in the years in which I had taken graduate courses and documented my work as part of my coursework, I found that I had made the greatest gains in my practice. I believe that this finding results from the fact that my graduate studies directed me to take additional time to document and to reflect. My course work yielded rich and thick descriptions of the events

unfolding in my study and during these periods I created more detailed action plans. Additional reflection led me to take more informed action and this led me to grow my practice more effectively.

5.3.1.1 My professional growth

I began this study as a novice elementary principal with little knowledge about effective literacy practices and now at the end of my study by steadily improving my practice and developing my literacy awareness, my practice has evolved into one matching Booth & Rowsell's (2002, p.15) description of a literacy principal. Borrowing from Booth & Rowsell's work, I define a literacy principal as a principal who has jointly developed with staff a successful literacy program by focussing on setting a literacy agenda that supports teachers, accesses resources and builds capacity for on-going literacy growth in effective teaching practices.

My professional growth is evident in the many vignettes provided in the earlier chapters and my success in becoming a literacy principal is substantiated by the following statements from respondents in my questionnaire[8]:

> A-4: She has extensive knowledge on literacy and constantly seeks out new materials, workshops and research….

> T-8: Marian's knowledge of Balanced Literacy and literacy best practices enabled her to question, guide and converse with her teachers in a manner that promoted the development of understanding and implementation of the above….

> P-2: She spends a considerable amount of time researching best practices, exploring new opportunities, and working with the teaching staff and parents to enhance the learning experience for all students.

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[8]The full transcript of the respondents' anecdotal comments can be found in Appendix E.2.

Although I have selected just a few representative statements to support this claim, further evidence can be found in additional respondents' statements in Appendix E.2. A few respondents, mostly teachers, express that they may not have always liked how I initiated literacy practices and state that they felt at times overwhelmed by all of the literacy activities undertaken making comments such as,

> sometimes…. we feel pulled in too many directions as a result and end up doing many things in mediocre ways as opposed to doing a few things really, really well *(T12's response #5)*.

But almost all cite positive views about the literacy growth of staff and students that occurred in the school. This feedback confirms for me that I successfully developed into an elementary literacy principal who was knowledgeable about literacy-teaching practices that enabled me to engage in useful literacy exchanges with staff. These exchanges helped to refine our work and increase our effectiveness in delivering a more successful literacy program.

5.3.1.2 Promoting Shared Leadership

My practice was forever shifting throughout my study because of my on-going reflection. As I review the evolution of my practice, I note that how I viewed my role and my work with teachers changed significantly over time. I found signs of this transition in three places: by examining the evolution of my main research question; by reviewing how I directed my study; and from analyzing the evolution of a learning community within the school.

My earliest research questions focussed on what I could do to influence teachers' literacy practices but as my study progressed, I began to shift the focus to my practice – what I could do to enhance literacy. My metamorphosis from practicing an autocratic leadership

style that is very evident at the onset of this study to developing one that is more democratic and inclusive is succinctly shown in the progression of my lead research question:

- How do I as a school principal influence the culture of learning in the school in a way that helps to enhance the education of students and the professional development of staff? (year 2001)

- How do I as a principal influence the teaching of literacy skills in my school in a way that helps to improve the literacy levels of our students and develops teachers professionally to be more proficient in their teaching of literacy skills? (year 2002)

- How can I improve my practice as an elementary school principal by focusing on improving the teaching of literacy and create my own living educational theory? (year 2004)

- How do I as a principal improve my practice to enhance the teaching of literacy? (year 2007)

As I view the 2001 lead question, it is clear to me that not only does it not focus on literacy; it also is a very principal-directed statement that implies that the principal will change the school's culture to improve learning and teaching. In 2002, there remains a very strongly worded principal-directed statement that is now however, literacy-based. But in 2004, the statement has shifted from my directing change outwards (external change) to my focusing on inward change (internal change) with the focus now being on improving my practice while keeping literacy instruction at the forefront. In keeping with action research practices, my action research cycles reviewed my current practice, identified an aspect that I wished to improve and then sought solutions that were tried in practice and re-evaluated (McNiff, et al., 2001).

As my study unfolded and my literacy knowledge base expanded, I no longer viewed my work as being that of a conductor directing the actions of others but I came to comprehend that change must first come from within my own practice. I could not guide effective

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literacy-teaching practices if I did not fully understand them and, to become more effective in my work, I had to immerse myself in effective literacy-teaching practices. I could not expect teachers to change their practices if I were unwilling to change mine. Moreover, I alone could not improve students' literacy success and this growing awareness is reflected in the evolution of my lead research question. The changes made to my key question show that I acknowledged that improvement to literacy practices had to be shared between me and the teachers within our school's learning community, and this inevitably affected the evolution of my study.

This shift is also clearly evidenced by the contrast in the two reflections from 2002 and 2004 respectively as my research focus was being refined by reflective practice. During 2002, in preparing for an action research presentation (Lothian, 2002) a number of reflective questions were raised:

- How do I get teachers to recognize the need to change teaching practices to enhance students' literacy learning?

- How do I nurture collaborative planning while maintaining the momentum of change so inertia doesn't set in or the tendency to retreat to old practices?

- How do I manage perceived necessary changes that must be principal guided or otherwise they won't occur? *(Lothian, 2002)*

 By the 2004 school year, I reflected on what I had learned as I worked on addressing the questions raised in 2002:

> The more modeling and teacher mentoring that can occur – the more changes to teaching practices take place
>
> Sustainable changes to teaching practices are more likely to occur when pedagogical professional development is done in larger groupings over time i.e. by cycle or by school – creating on-going professional dialogue, support and momentum for groups of teachers

A caring and safe learning climate for teachers must exist within the school – they have to be able to say I need help or I don't know how to do this and still feel professionally secure

The principal must timetable weekly teacher cycle meeting times – these must be largely teacher directed

The principal must be approachable and easily accessible as much as possible on a daily basis to hear directly from teachers their concerns and needs

Sustainable change is a we and not an I thing, I have to grow with the teachers
(Journal excerpt June 2004)

These excerpts demonstrate that my thinking evolved as I carefully examined the steps that I would need to take to grow my practice to effectively guide literacy initiatives. Over the course of my study as I strove to improve my practice and reflected on my leadership style, I began to take on a more shared leadership approach. My field notes succinctly describe how my leadership underwent change, became more inclusive, and this growth is substantiated by the comments made by administrators and teachers in my survey:

A1: The teachers involved in the lead school initiatives have taken on responsibility and leadership roles within the school, and their expertise is benefiting both students and staff. What was, by all accounts, a mediocre elementary school before Marian, has become one to be emulated.

A2: She has brought in experts to mentor the new teachers; she has encouraged cycle meetings so the teachers can work as a group to share the methods for teaching literacy.

A10: Beginning with the end in mind, the school readjusted its focus to properly assess and evaluate the students. As a result their teaching practices changed and improved. With team meetings, focused P.D. and an encouragement to share what they learned, the students benefited immeasurably.

T2: While Marian does not always come to us with the ideas on how to effectively structure a reading block, she does always support ideas/input from staff members when they are offered.

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T4: Actively listens to teachers recommendations regarding materials, approaches…. Teachers are setting smart goals for themselves and students

T9: Time set aside for planning and reviewing new practices…. these initiatives allowed us to support each other in our learning…. As the practices became common amongst the teachers, we were able to plan together and support each other as well.

As for my practice, I would hope that I would have had more practice in sharing leadership and would have grown even more in this area had there existed a more harmonious period in the last third of my study as we developed as a professional learning community.

The evolution of change in my leadership is further evidenced in one of my graduate research papers (2003) entitled: *An Action Research Study of a Principal's Role in Shaping a School's Learning Culture.* My focus remained on improving literacy but I sought a more collaborative approach by engaging in the creation of a professional learning community as a means to grow effective literacy-teaching practices. This initiative is indicated in this abstract written for the paper:

> The study examines the setting of literacy targets for all students….done at weekly teacher cycle team meetings and mentoring meetings that take place after school. The teaching staff …is working towards creating a professional learning community to assist them in making changes to their teaching practices to enhance student learning. It is the on-going professional dialogues about how to improve the students' literacy scores that forms the basis for this study and provides a context for the principal to explore her role in shaping teaching practices. (*Excerpt from graduate course work, November 2003*)

Our school's professional learning community had a few starts and abrupt stops as it was riddled with labour unrest, which lasted for a two and a half year period during this study. This played havoc with the birthing of our school's professional learning community and it was hard to share school leadership with the teachers' association although initially we had

made great gains. The staff was genuinely interested in exploring and developing the concept of forming a professional learning community as described in my earlier field notes shared in Chapter Four. In Chapter Six I expand on this point when I share my study's final reflection and my closing thoughts.

5.3.1.3 Literacy Initiatives

My third finding focuses on the literacy initiatives that underwent several stages of development resulting from the "think-act-reflect" cycles over the course of my research. In my early years as principal, the literacy initiatives began as notions which developed into broad areas by the mid-point of my study. As my literacy knowledge became more informed, the broad areas evolved into ten literacy themes in the final phase of my study. With input from critical friends in the final analysis of my questionnaire findings, the ten themes were reduced to nine literacy interventions for the purposes of analysis to measure my effectiveness in enhancing literacy-teaching. This evolution of my study's literacy initiatives is shared in the following excerpts taken from my field notes.

5.3.1.3.1 Emerging Notions about Literacy

Possible solutions – (Year 2001 – 2002):

- The hiring of new staff with a base or interest in literacy

- The creation of opportunities for resident literacy master teachers to work with teachers on staff and do P.D.

- The use of a team approach to buy new learning materials

- Bringing in publishers to demonstrate new materials

- Encouragement of staff to attend P.D. workshops both in and out of the school to develop new ideas and more effective teaching strategies

- Involvement of some teachers to sit on board and provincial curriculum planning committees

- Supplying teachers regularly with current professional articles to read

- Creation of a teacher resource library of professional books

- The encouragement of staff to visit schools/classrooms where effective teaching is taking place *(Excerpt from presentation to International Conference of Teacher Research – Montréal, Québec, April 2002)*

5.3.1.3.2 Broad Areas of Literacy Focus

As my study underwent a second reflective cycle (discussed in Chapter Four), I re-examined

the areas of interest that had originated in my first reflective cycle (discussed in Chapter

One). With my continued efforts to refine my practice and to improve the teaching of

literacy, these notions had now grown into broad areas of literacy focus:

Variables to be considered in developing literacy initiatives (Year 2003 – 2004):

- Availability of literacy-teaching materials (resources)

- Financial resources to acquire needed literacy-teaching materials (resources)

- Teachers' knowledge about effective literacy-teaching practices (learning culture)

- Teachers' awareness of the need to change literacy-teaching practices (learning culture)

- Teachers' willingness to participate in professional development in effective literacy-teaching techniques (learning culture)

- Financial resources to provide literacy professional development (resources)

- My knowledge of effective literacy-teaching practices (leadership)

- My ability to create a learning culture in the school to promote effective literacy-teaching practices (leadership)

- My ability to promote an enhanced team approach to improve students' literacy score (leadership)

- Level of parental involvement in student literacy attainment (learning culture)

- Large ESL student population (30%) (student profile) that impact on school's scores

- Large special education student population (25%) (student profile) that impact on school's scores

- Inner city school elements (poverty, abuse, student transience, high absenteeism) - (student profile) that impact on school's score

- Dual track programs – Regular English Program & French Immersion Program (50/50 Immersion) – (program delivery)

- Tracking of students' literacy results and setting of realistic literacy goals for our school (shared leadership)

- School Success (provincial mandate)

- School Success Accountability (provincial mandate)

- QEP (Québec Education Program) – (provincial mandate) *(Excerpt taken from reflection July, 2004)*

5.3.1.3.3 Ten Literacy Themes

These broad areas later developed into literacy themes by using a spiral approach in my study – building on my newly gained knowledge in the field while continuing to enhance my learning about literacy and improving my practice by building on my newly gained knowledge. These themes were shaped by the "think-act-reflect" cycles that directed my practice. This work has been documented in Chapter Four through the use of vignettes to explain the evolution of the broad areas of my study into specific literacy themes. These themes were consolidated from carefully and repeatedly filtering through my notes and looking for evidence to match to the conditions cited by Booth and Rowsell (2002) as "…necessary for providing support to teachers…" (p. 79). From the actions that comprised my efforts to improve literacy-teaching, these ten literacy themes emerged:

1. building a literacy-based school culture;

2. ensuring a literacy curriculum framework with instructional methods and models;

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3. acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials and resources;

4. promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction;

5. providing literacy-based coaching and mentoring;

6. establishing a literacy-teaching block for instruction;

7. creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction;

8. implementing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students;

9. introducing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices;

10. engaging in literacy research

5.3.1.3.4 Identification of Nine Literacy Interventions

The reflective cycles in my thinking on literacy interventions influenced how I viewed my measurement tool – the questionnaire. Each reflective cycle sharpened my focus. When I first began to analyze the responses from the 31 questions on the questionnaire; I had started with the ten literacy themes and then added an eleventh. One of the strategies I had tried was to remove distracters from teachers to try to free up teacher time and to give staff direct support. Examples of this are: responding to their more difficult emails from parents, minimizing announcements during literacy-teaching blocks, etc... But as no questions lined up with 'removes distracters' it was eliminated, leaving the original ten themes to be matched to the 31 questions. When my group of critical friends independently reviewed the 31 questions (Part A) of the questionnaire and matched them with the ten literacy themes, they recommended that two themes (numbers 1 and 10) be collapsed into one – building a

literacy-based school culture and engaging in literacy research. The 31 questions were then matched to the resulting nine themes.

For the analysis of my questionnaire, borrowing from Lecompte et al (1999), I will use the term literacy interventions to keep these distinct from the themes that emerged earlier in my study. I define a literacy intervention not as a single action but as a categorization of actions centered on a broader concept which educators have come to commonly define in widely accepted professional terms. For example, hosting family literacy evenings, creating a school library, establishing cross-cycle reading buddies, having book fairs, etc… are actions that collectively build a literacy-based school culture. Building a literacy-based school culture is a literacy intervention that is professionally commonly accepted. It is understood that it is derived from a number of identified and accepted literacy practices.

5.3.1.3.5 Early Evidence of Nine Literacy Interventions

My literacy interventions have been identified from analyzing my research field notes and from reflections, and are rooted in my earliest reflections dating back to December 2000 (report to the school board on our school's needs), October 2001 (in our literacy plan), June 2002 (staff meeting), and August 2003 (staff meeting). Excerpts from this data trace the early stages of the emerging interventions:

- "We need reading materials for each cycle – Cycle 1 -$2,500 for reading box libraries to provide the main reading materials and the same for Cycles 2 and 3- total cost $7,500" Intervention #2 acquiring appropriate teaching materials (year 2000-2001)

- "Our school….will take a small team….to study a balanced approach to reading. We will be visiting 3 schools in Edmonton…." Interventions # 4 ensuring a literacy curriculum and intervention #1 promoting professional development (year 2001-2002)

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- "P.D. will be provided to teachers who are unfamiliar with….how to do running records-our three trained *Reading Recovery (Bourque, et al., 2006)* teachers can assist in this training as required…." <u>Intervention # 7 opportunities for literacy coaching and mentoring (year 2001-2002)</u>

- "….in-house P.D. for teachers on how to use assessment tools to screen and detect reading and writing weaknesses in students as part of our Literacy project…." <u>Intervention # 5 developing literacy assessment tools (year 2001-2002)</u>

- "Another of our cycle 3 teachers is working on a PDIG (grant) proposal if accepted to work with other teachers in our Board to establish English writing exemplars." <u>Intervention # 9 fostering a literacy-based school culture (year 2001-2002)</u>

- "Our resource teacher is working at the Board level in developing areas of special education support." <u>Intervention # 6 supports for at-risk literacy students (year 2001-2002)</u>

- "Teachers' schedules in August 2002 will change to a six day teaching cycle that will also contain 90 minute literacy-teaching blocks." <u>Intervention # 8 establishing a teaching block for literacy (year 2002-2003)</u>

- "Teachers' schedules in August 2003 will include scheduled common cycle meeting times as part of their workload." <u>Intervention # 3 establishing time for teachers to work together (year 2003-2004)</u>

As illustrated, even in the early stages of my research there is strong evidence linking my action plans to initiatives that would develop into the nine interventions, although I have only been able to identify and trace the origins as a result of my involvement in action research.

These interventions were then used to analyze the responses from the three groups of respondents (administrators, teachers and parents) to the questionnaire.

Interestingly, my literacy interventions very closely resemble the nine areas of content knowledge that were determined by "The Children's Literacy Initiatives" essential to successful literacy principals and cited in Booth's and Rowsell (2007). Their critical areas of literacy content knowledge are: 1) School Culture, 2) What the Experts Say, 3) Children's Literature, 4) Current Instructional Models, 5) Curriculum, 6), Learning Time and Space, 7) Assessment Practices, 8) Support for Struggling Readers and 9) Research (Booth & Rowsell, 2007, p. 30-32). There are however, distinct differences in the critical areas of literacy content knowledge; namely, professional development, mentoring and coaching; and joint planning is not identified but I believe, as a result of my study, these are critical areas. As for omissions in my nine interventions, I argue that what experts have to say is embedded under research and that this is an integral component of the school's learning culture. I have also joined curriculum and instructional models in what I refer to as intervention #4. I believe that although there are great similarities to "The Children's Literacy Initiatives", my nine interventions are more comprehensive and better accommodate the needs of literacy principals.

These nine intervention strategies became a fundamental dimension in my analysis of the questionnaires. The other dimension was group type: teacher, parent, and administrator. The correspondence between the nine interventions and the 31 questions of the questionnaire[9] are given in Table 1.

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[9] For more details see Appendix F.

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Table 1:

The Correspondence between the Nine Interventions and the 31 Questions of the Questionnaire

Nine Literacy Interventions	Questions
1. Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	2, 23, 27
2. Acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials, space and resources	8, 9
3. Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	4
4. Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	14, 15, 16, 18, 28
5. Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices	7, 10, 30
6. Providing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students	19, 20
7. Supplying opportunities for literacy-based mentoring and coaching	5, 22, 26
8. Scheduling a literacy-teaching block for literacy instruction	6, 11, 12, 13, 17
9. Fostering a literacy-based school culture and promoting literacy research	1, 3, 21, 24, 25, 29, 31

5.3.2 Quantitative Analysis

The continuous refinement of my applied literacy actions derived from on-going reflective practice led me to view literacy interventions in a very structured fashion. This knowledge resulted in the creation of nine specific literacy interventions and from my qualitative analysis of the evolution of these literacy interventions, I began to realize that I had created a means by which literacy interventions could be ranked. Thus I began to question not only my effectiveness but also the degree of my effectiveness in each of the literary interventions.

This line of thought began to raise important questions in the final stages of my analysis that I struggled to answer: Which of the nine interventions was I most effective in applying as part of my practice as a literacy principal? How could I rank my interventions? To answer these questions, I realized that I needed to assign ordered number values to the questionnaire responses and I needed to introduce statistical tests to evaluate the results. Thus my qualitative study was leading me to consider using a quantitative analysis.

On reading more deeply, I discovered that using quantitative data analysis techniques may be very helpful in a qualitative study (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and that certain research questions can only be answered by using both analytical approaches. Brighton (2009) further adds that at times to analyze data and to draw conclusions it is necessary to "Use whatever analytic methods are appropriate to the research question(s) – both qualitative and quantitative – to interpret data. This step may require additional collaboration with….others….who have expertise" (p.43). This blending of analytical applications is also supported by Jick (1983) for rigorous triangulation:

> Triangulation….can also capture a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study. That is, beyond the analysis of overlapping variance, the use of multiple measures may also uncover some unique variance which otherwise may have been neglected by single methods. ….Perhaps the most prevalent attempts to use triangulation have been reflected in efforts to integrate fieldwork and survey methods (Jick, 1983,p.138).

This final point made by Jick (1983) accurately captured what I was trying to do with my data.

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My quest to find appropriate analytical tools for my action research study spanned several months, many in-depth conversations with a federal government statistician and additional reading to determine my best course of action. My sample of responses from my questionnaire and of my DRA scores was small; therefore I had to exercise caution that the methods I chose to apply would be valid and reliable. By now I had fully entered into the field of quantitative data analysis which had never been a part of my original plans but my research question and its resulting sub-questions had brought me to this interesting dilemma.

To rank the interventions meant that I would need to establish "... a process of entering data, naming and defining variables, making sure that the entry process is quality controlled, and cleaning the data to prepare for data analysis" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p.119). Upon the advice of a critical friend who is a statistician and because it has been used in qualitative studies (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), I chose the statistical package Statistical Analysis Survey[10] (SAS). I gave the statistician the reformatted, anonymous, data as well as the DRA scores and we thoroughly discussed the questions I wanted to answer and why these answers were important to my study. He then entered the data and ran the analysis.

5.3.2.1 Analysis of the Questionnaire Results – Part "A"

To measure my effectiveness as a literacy principle in implementing the nine interventions, in total, 68 questionnaires were sent to the three groups of observers. The response rate was 43%, with the group response rates given in Table 2.

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[10] SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC

Table 2:

Questionnaire Response by Group

	Teachers		Parents		Administrators		Total
Questionnaires sent	39		8		18		65
Response received (%)	13	(33)	3	(38)	12	(67)	28 (43)

5.3.2.1.1 Measuring Effectiveness

In Part "A", the respondents were asked 31 Likert type questions with the five possible

choices given in Table 3. Note that the five choices are not strictly a Likert or ordinal scale

because of choice 5 (don't know). If I interpret choice 5 as a missing response (a non-

response) then Table 3 represents a Likert scale with four response categories.

Table 3:

Possible choices to the questions in Part "A"

Choices		Interpretation
1	Most of the time	Positive – effective
2	Sometimes	Neutral
3	Rarely	Negative – not effective
4	Never	Extremely negative – not effective
5	Don't know	None

I have interpreted "most of the time" as a positive response indicating that I, as a school

principal, have been effective in implementing the initiative. The choice "sometimes" is an

ambivalent phrase and therefore it was viewed as a neutral response. "Rarely" and "Never"

were viewed as negative evaluations of my effectiveness in implementing the intervention. In

setting up the Likert choices in this particular order, the choices remain ordinal but are

weighted towards negative responses. Additionally, the choices "sometimes" and "rarely"

were placed in the middle of the range of score choices. This interpretation of the scale

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consistently biases the results towards the negative to help reduce any potential bias

associated with giving an extreme negative evaluation of someone the respondents knew

personally, and to ensure that any evidence of "effectiveness" is incontrovertible.

Most of the returned survey questionnaires contained partial non-responses answered

with "don't know" or left blank. In total, 137 (16%) of the questions went unanswered,

summarized in Table 4 provides an over-all response rate of 36.3%.

Table 4:
Questionnaire Partial Non-response Rate by Group

	Teachers		Parents		Administrators		Total	
Total Questions	403		93		372		868	
Unanswered (%)	10	(2)	20	(22)	107	(29)	137	(16)

Figure 3 summarizes the valid responses for all of the responses that were received and

also show that no observers chose a response of "never".
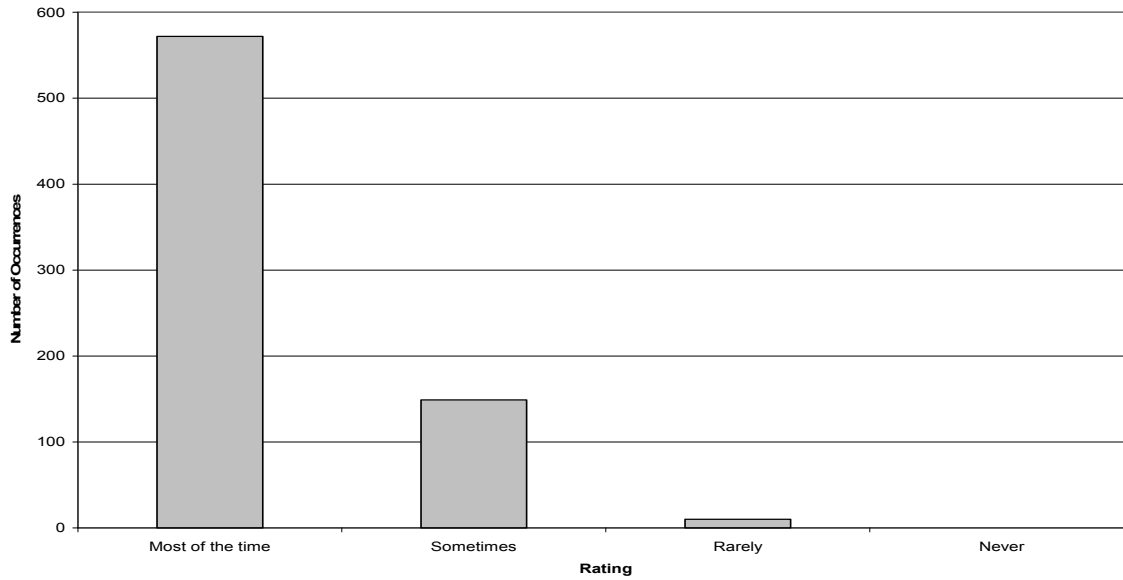
Figure 3:

Distribution of Responses for all Groups and all Interventions

Given these results, the choices "rarely" and "most of the time" are antonyms and thus can be thought of as being equally distant from neutrality or zero which is represented as "sometimes". This simple interpretation of these ordinal categories (i.e. positive, neutral, negative) leads to a natural rescaling to become interval data (+1, 0, -1) and allows for more precise statistical testing. Table 5 summarizes the interval transformation of the Likert scores.

Table 5:

Transformation of Choices to the Questions in Section A

	Choices	Interpretation	Interval score
1	Most of the time	Effective implementation	+1
2	Sometimes	Neutral evaluation	0
3	Rarely	Ineffective implementation	-1
4	Never	Unobserved - dropped from analysis	
5	Don't know	Missing value – dropped from analysis	
6	"blank"	Missing value – dropped from analysis	

Once the values were determined and the questions matched to one of the nine interventions, it was decided to run two sub-tests with SAS given the small sampling, the need to rank the interventions, and the unusual clustering of responses. The Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test (Tomkins, 2006) tests to see if the median score of the observations is definitively on the positive or negative side of a "neutral evaluation". If there is a high probability that the median is in the positive area then the claim can be made with a high degree of certainty that the majority of the respondent group in question believed that I was effective in implementing that intervention. Results of the Wilcoxen Test are given in Table 6.

Table 6:

The Wilcoxon Sign Rank Statistic and the Associated Probability (P) for all Interventions and Respondent Groups

Literacy Intervention		Administrators	Teachers	Parents	All Groups
Fostering a literacy based school culture and promoting literacy research	Score	0.91	0.77	0.89	0.84
	Observations	34	39	9	82
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	248 (0.0%)	248 (0.0%)	18 (0.8%)	1242 (0.0%)
Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	Score	0.78	0.65	0.83	0.72
	Observations	18	26	6	50
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	53 (0.0%)	85 (0.0%)	8 (6.3%)	351 (0.0%)
Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment	Score	0.78	0.62	1.00	0.71
	Observations	9	13	2	24
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	14 (1.6%)	22 (2.2%)	2 (50.0%)	85 (0.0%)
Providing appropriate supports for "at risk" literacy students	Score	0.79	0.61	0.67	0.67
	Observations	33	59	9	101
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	176 (0.0%)	369 (0.0%)	11 (3.1%)	1241 (0.0%)
Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	Score	0.97	0.82	0.88	0.88
	Observations	30	39	8	77
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	218 (0.0%)	264 (0.0%)	14 (1.6%)	1173 (0.0%)
Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy teaching block for literacy instruction	Score	0.82	0.81	0.60	0.79
	Observations	17	26	5	48
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	53 (0.0%)	116 (0.0%)	3 (25.0%)	371 (0.0%)
Acquiring appropriate literacy teaching and learning materials, space and resources	Score	0.68	0.51	0.29	0.56
	Observations	25	39	7	71
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	86 (0.0%)	115 (0.0%)	4 (68.8%)	407 (0.0%)
Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	Score	0.91	0.66	0.33	0.71
	Observations	32	62	9	103
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	176 (0.0%)	431 (0.0%)	6 (45.3%)	1424 (0.0%)
Supplying opportunities for literacy based mentoring and coaching	Score	0.91	0.86	0.83	0.87
	Observations	67	90	18	175
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	946 (0.0%)	1502 (0.0%)	60 (0.0%)	5890 (0.0%)
All Interventions	Score	0.86	0.72	0.70	0.77
	Observations	265	393	73	731
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon Test (P)	13168 (0.0%)	20798 (0.0%)	765 (0.0%)	81912 (0.0%)

Despite the fact that the threshold for acceptance was set high (99% level), the results overwhelmingly support the hypothesis that all the groups evaluated my application of the literacy interventions as "effective". In every group's evaluation of each intervention, the majority of respondents rated me as "effective". This is verified by the fact that in every cell of Table 6 the median is "one". In addition, in 31 of the 40 cells, there is a greater than 99% probability that the hypothesis is true. In these cells the declaration that I was effective in implementing the intervention will be correct 99 times out of 100. Of the nine cells that "fail"

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the test, four "pass" at the 95% level and one passes at the 90% level. The remaining four "failures" are all in the parent category where the number of observation is too small to make definitive statistical declarations. The results shown in the bottom line (all interventions) in Table 6, unequivocally state that as principal I was judged by all three groups as effective in implementing the nine literacy interventions.

While the results in Table 6 consistently rate me as being effective, they also show considerable variability, ranging between 0.29 and 1.00 (the maximum). These differences led to the question of whether the observed variations between groups and between interventions are due to chance or are due to genuine differences between the categories. To test the hypothesis that different groups evaluated me differently, a second sub test was used – the Kruskal-Wallis Test. This is a non-parametric test that is appropriate for ordinal data and it is the multi-group extension of the Wilcoxon Test. Table 7 shows the results of this test when it is applied to the responses of the three groups.

Table 7:
The Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences between the Observer Groups

	Teachers	Parents	Administrators	Chi-Square	Probability
Average Score	0.718	0.699	0.864		
Kruskal-Wallis Statistic				17.0	0.02%

Table 7 is unequivocal; it shows that there is significant statistical difference in the groups' average scores. There is a 1 in 5000 chance that the observed differences in the average group scores are due to random chance. Thus while the three groups rate me as effective; administrators rated my effectiveness significantly higher than teachers who in turn

rated my effectiveness higher than parents did. The Kruskal-Wallis Test was also applied to

the intervention categories and the results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8:

The Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences between Interventions

Literacy Interventions	Responses	Score
Fostering a literacy-based school culture and promoting literacy research	82	0.841
Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	50	0.72
Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices	24	0.708
Providing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students	101	0.673
Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	77	0.883
Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy-teaching block for literacy instruction	48	0.792
Acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials, space and resources	71	0.563
Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	103	0.709
Supplying opportunities for literacy-based mentoring and coaching	175	0.874
Kruskal-Wallis Chi-square Statistic	37	
Kruskal-Wallis Probability	<0.0001	

Table 8 indicates that while I was effective at implementing all nine interventions, I was

effective at implementing some more than others. The Kruskal-Wallis Test affirms that

statistically meaningful differences exist and my effectiveness varied across the

interventions.
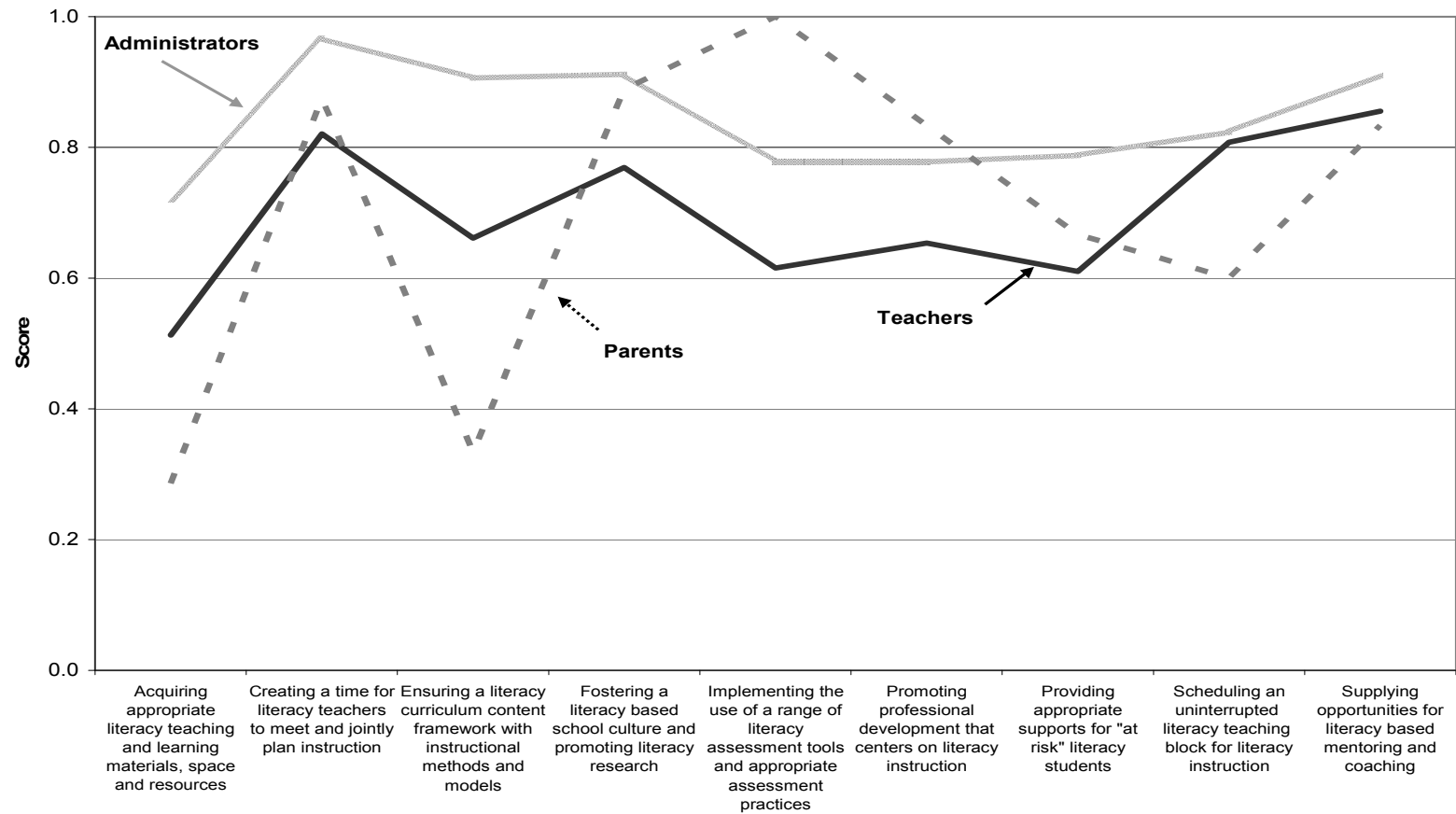
Figure 4:

Scores by Groups and Intervention

Figure 4 presents a summary of the average scores by group and intervention. The chart shows that teachers and administrators had similar patterns in their scoring except the administrators consistently scored me 0.15 points above the teachers in all interventions. Parent responses were not consistent with either the teachers or the administrator responses. Figure 4 also shows that there are two distinct effects (group and intervention) in the data and they are intermingled. The shifting balance of group participants across the interventions is biasing the average scores for each intervention and the shifting balance of intervention responses between the groups is also affecting the average group scores. To estimate the true unmingled effects, another assumption had to be made that the data derive from an interval measurement scale.

The General Linear Model procedure in SAS 9.1 was applied, since it is an appropriate mechanism for separating the two effects. Table 9 summarizes the results for the three groups and Table 10 summarizes the results for the nine interventions. Note that the "true" score is always below the observed average. The imbalanced number of responses matched with the nine interventions causes this effect. The responses to the intervention "supplying opportunities for literacy-based mentoring and coaching" were more numerous than for any other intervention and because all three groups perceived this intervention very positively, this intervention biased the estimates upwards.

Table 9:
Summary of the Average Scores by Groups

	Teachers	Parents	Administrators
Average score of all responses	0.718	0.699	0.864
Least square means from SAS GLM	0.705	0.677	0.841

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Table 10:

Summary of the Average Scores by Interventions

Literacy Intervention	Average score	Least square means
Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	0.883	0.869
Supplying opportunities for literacy-based mentoring and coaching	0.874	0.861
Fostering a literacy-based school culture and promoting literacy research	0.841	0.824
Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy-teaching block for literacy instruction	0.792	0.782
Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	0.720	0.710
Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	0.709	0.705
Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices	0.708	0.696
Providing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students	0.673	0.667
Acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials, space and resources	0.563	0.554

The ranks, values and the differences between the least-square means in Table 9 and Table 10 are statistically meaningful. Thus looking at Table 10, one can see grouping of the relative effectiveness of the nine interventions. Because it should be noted that an average score as low as 0.55 indicates that I was effective in implementing the intervention, but I was significantly less effective than the top interventions, but Table 10 suggests that if I wish to improve my effectiveness, I need to concentrate on improving the last two interventions.

5.3.2.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire Anecdotal Questions Parts A and B

In total, 22 of the 28 respondents replied to the anecdotal questions. The response rates are shown in Table 11.

Table 11:
Responses to Anecdotal Questions

	Teachers		Parents		Administrators		Total	
Respondents	13		3		12		28	
Anecdotal Responses (%)	12	(92)	3	(100)	7	(58)	22	(79)

Table 12 shows the seven anecdotal questions that were asked of each respondent. All the questions were optional and open ended. Question B1 limited respondents to positive indicators of effectiveness while questions B2 and B3 limited respondents to negative indicators. The remaining questions allowed respondents to include positive or negative indicators of effectiveness.

Table 12:
Anecdotal Questions

Number	Question
A1	Do you have any other comments that you would like to add about the teaching of literacy in the school, or about this study?
B1	What initiatives do you think have been most effective in improving literacy-teaching practices in the school?
B2	What initiatives did not enhance literacy-teaching practices or may even have deterred students' literacy progress?
B3	What literacy initiatives would you have liked to have seen implemented and believe would have been successful in enhancing literacy in the school?
B4	During the time that Marian has been principal have you witnessed any changes to the school's culture and learning environment that have affected the teaching of literacy?
B5	Do you think that, overall, Marian has had a positive or negative influence on literacy-teaching practices?
B6	Please add any other comments that you may have about this study or about literacy-teaching practices.

Each anecdotal response was analyzed and matched to an intervention and then reviewed to see if the respondents made a positive or negative evaluation of the implementation of one of the nine interventions as shown in Appendix: G. If a negative evaluation was received a score of -1 was allocated to that intervention and if a positive evaluation was given a score of 1 was allocated to that intervention. In total, 28 negative evaluations and 142 positive evaluations were received. The same methodology used for analyzing Part A of the questionnaire was used for Part B. This ensures that comparable measures are used for both sections of the questionnaire. As in the analysis for Part A the aggregate score for Part B will then be the average excess of positive evaluations over negative evaluations. The Wilcoxon Test was used to assess whether the positive evaluations exceed the negative evaluations in a statistically significant manner and the results are given in Table 13.

Table 13:

The Wilcoxon Sign Rank Statistic and the Associated Probability (P) for All Interventions and Observer Groups

Intervention		Administrators	Teachers	Parents	All Groups
Fostering a literacy based school culture and promoting literacy research	Score	0.86	0.71	0.33	0.68
	N	14	21	9	44
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	45 (0.2%)	83 (0.0%)	8 (50.8%)	338 (0.0%)
Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	Score	0.71	1.00	-1.00	0.83
	N	7	15	1	23
	Median	1	1	-1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	10 (12.5%)	60 (0.0%)	-1 (100.0%)	114 (0.0%)
Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices	Score	0.67	0.14	0.00	0.33
	N	6	7	2	15
	Median	1	1	0	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	7 (21.9%)	2 (1.0000)	0 (100.0%)	20 (30.2%)
Providing appropriate supports for support for "at risk" literacy students	Score	0.20	0.71	-0.50	0.39
	N	5	14	4	23
	Median	1	1	-1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	2 (100.0%)	38 (0.0129)	-3 (62.5%)	54 (5.9%)
Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	Score	0.33	1.00	1.00	0.82
	N	3	7	1	11
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	1 (100.0%)	14 (0.0156)	1 (100.0%)	27 (1.2%)
Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy teaching block for literacy instruction	Score	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.60
	N	2	2	1	5
	Median	1	0	1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	2 (50.0%)	0 (1.0000)	1 (100.0%)	5 (37.5%)
Acquiring appropriate literacy teaching and learning materials, space and resources	Score	0.75	0.83	1.00	0.84
	N	8	12	5	25
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	14 (7.0%)	33 (0.0063)	8 (6.3%)	137 (0.0%)
Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	Score	1.00	0.43	-1.00	0.40
	N	2	7	1	10
	Median	1	1	-1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	2 (50.0%)	6 (0.4531)	-1 (100.0%)	11 (0.3438)
Supplying opportunities for literacy based mentoring and coaching	Score	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	N	3	10	1	14
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	3 (25.0%)	28 (0.0020)	1 (100.0%)	53 (0.0%)
All Interventions	Score	0.720	0.747	0.280	0.67
	N	50	95	25	170
	Median	1	1	1	1
	Wilcoxon test (P)	459 (0.0%)	1704 (0.0%)	46 (16.6%)	4874 (0.0%)

The results are not as overwhelmingly positive as those in Table 6. At the aggregate group and intervention level 84% of the evaluations are positive and the result is significant at the 99% level. Unfortunately, the number of responses is too small to establish statistically significant results for all group and intervention possibilities. Only 15 of 40 cells are statistically significant at the 95% level and in 5 cases the median is negative 1. Thus while the overall results support the hypothesis that I was effective at implementing the literacy interventions, at the individual intervention and group levels the results are not statistically significant.

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The results from applying the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test to the groups and interventions are also inconclusive. But if it is assumed that the observations are from a ratio measurements scale rather than an ordinal scale (Stevens, 1946, 1951) then more conclusive results can be achieved. Applying the SAS General Linear Model (GLM) procedure to the data to eliminate the mixing of the two dimensions gives a significant linear fit to the effects. Table 14 summarizes the results for the groups and Table 15 summarizes the results for the nine interventions.

Table 14:
Summary of the Average Scores by Observation Groups

	Teachers	Parents	Administrators
Average score of all responses	0.747	0.280	0.720
Least square means from SAS GLM	0.723	0.269	0.698

Table 15:

Summary of the Average Scores by Interventions

Literacy Intervention	Average score	Least square means
Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	0.818	0.716
Supplying opportunities for literacy-based mentoring and coaching	1.000	0.878
Fostering a literacy-based school culture and promoting literacy research	0.682	0.623
Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy-teaching block for literacy instruction	0.600	0.541
Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	0.826	0.694
Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	0.400	0.291
Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices	0.333	0.244
Providing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students	0.391	0.316
Acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials, space and resources	0.840	0.779

Overall, the two dimensions "literacy intervention" and "group" explain a substantial portion of the variation in the data yet most of this explained variation is coming from the responses of the parent group which are quite markedly different from the teacher and administrator groups. While there are significant differences in the intervention scores these differences are again not statistically significant at the 1% level. Figure 5 compares the interventions scores for Part A and the anecdotal questions. There is a consistency between the two sets of scores. Both sets of scores are showing a significant positive evaluation and the trends in the two sets of scores are similar. Thus while the differences in the average

literacy intervention scores for the anecdotal questions are not statistically significant they are consistent with the differences in the scores for Part A which is statistically significant.
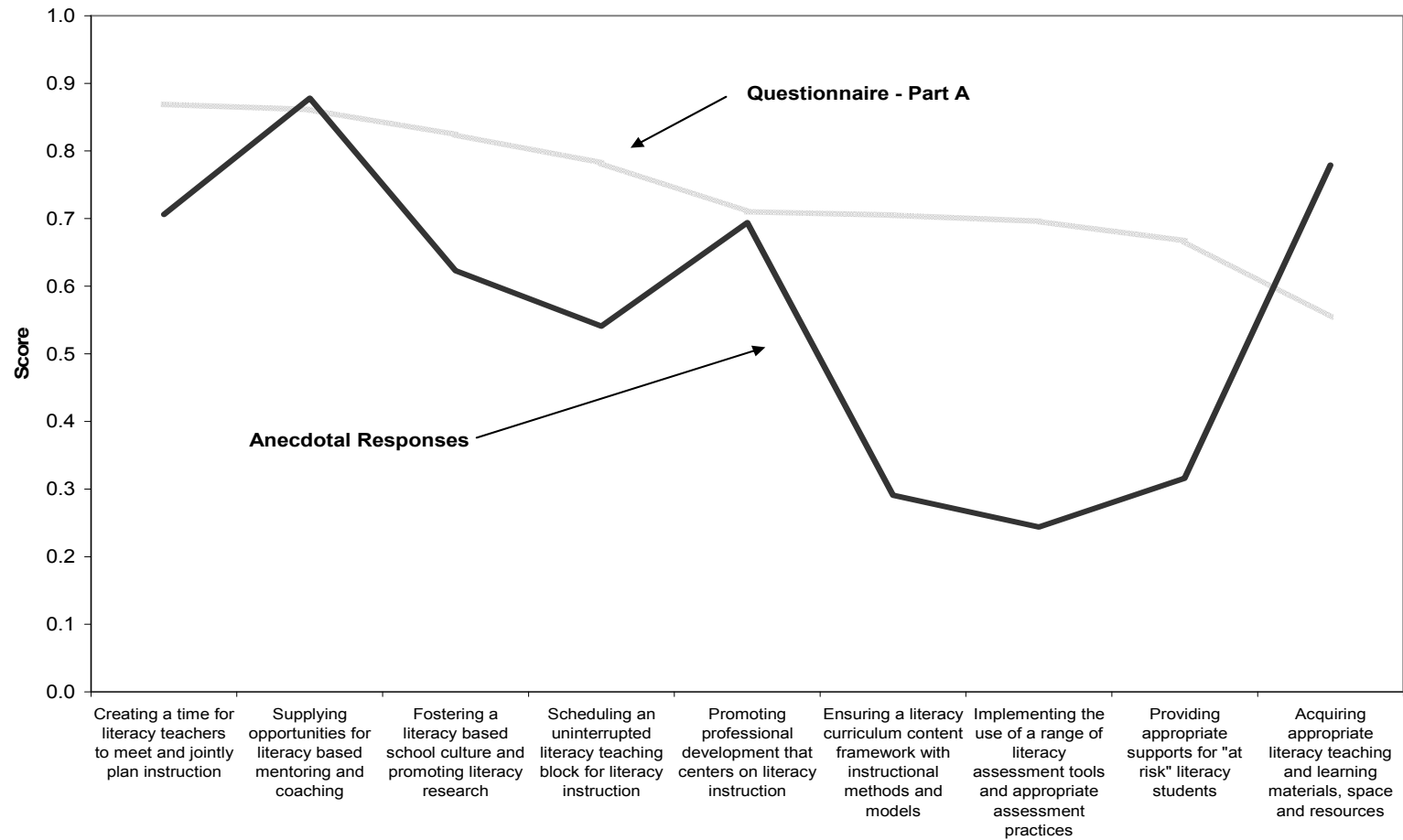
Figure 5:

Least-square Mean Intervention Score: Questionnaire versus Anecdotal

All of the respondents' responses and written comments from the questionnaire and survey are found in Appendix E.

5.3.2.3 Analysis of the Students' DRA Scores

Our school board has not used a consistent format for reporting the comparison of its individual school's *Development Reading Assessment* (DRA) results with board-wide DRA results. This made it difficult to analyze DRA scores. Table 16 contains our students' DRA average scores, the board's average scores and the DRA benchmarks and suggests that the scores are trending upwards during the period. It should be noted that the 2006 data could not be used as some of the data was irretrievably lost at the board level due to a system crash.

Table 16:
DRA Scores: Grade 2

		2002	2003	2004	2005
	School Score	11.09	15.74	15.32	16.21
Fall	Board Average Score	12.89	16.12	16.50	15.69
	Provincial Benchmark	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
	School Score	19.60	23.22	29.55	26.03
Spring	Board Average Score	21.02	26.10	26.83	25.47
	Provincial Benchmark	28.00	28.00	28.00	28.00

Four data points are not sufficient for identifying a statistical trend but by applying a simple transformation the spring and fall scores can be standardized and thus double the size of the observation set. Instead of using the raw scores, the scores were standardized by dividing them by the benchmark. Thus the revised scores represent the percent of the DRA benchmark obtained. The transformed observations plus the linear trend model fitted to these transformed data points is shown in Figure 6.
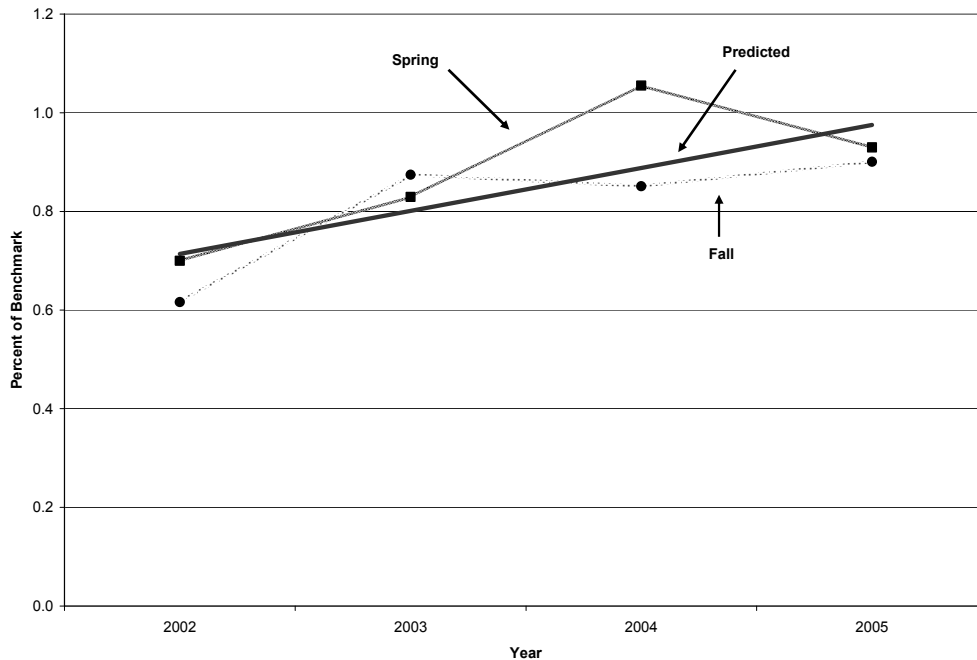
Figure 6:

Percent of DRA Benchmark Achieved by Year

The transformation standardizes the two datasets and the resulting points follow an

upward trend line. Table 17 contains summary statistics for the trend line in Figure 6.

Table 17:

Summary Statistics for Fitting a Linear Trend Line to the DRA Scores

	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Adjusted R Square	F-value	Probability
Regression	1	0.076	0.52	8.6	2.6%
Residual	6	0.053			
Total	7	0.129			

The results are surprising given that only 8 data observations were available. The

summary shows that there is a greater than 95% probability that an upward trend exists in the

data. The adjusted R-squared value suggests that 52% of changes in the DRA score are due

to a consistent upward trend during the 4 observation years. For the annual growth over the 4

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year period, the estimated parameter is 0.16 and translates to a 2.9 point annual growth in the Fall DRA score and 4.5 point annual growth in the Spring DRA.

From Figure 7 and Figure 8, it can be seen that the school improved vis-à-vis the school board average. While a linear regression fit to the data shows an upward trend versus the school board average, it is not statistically significant at the 10% level.
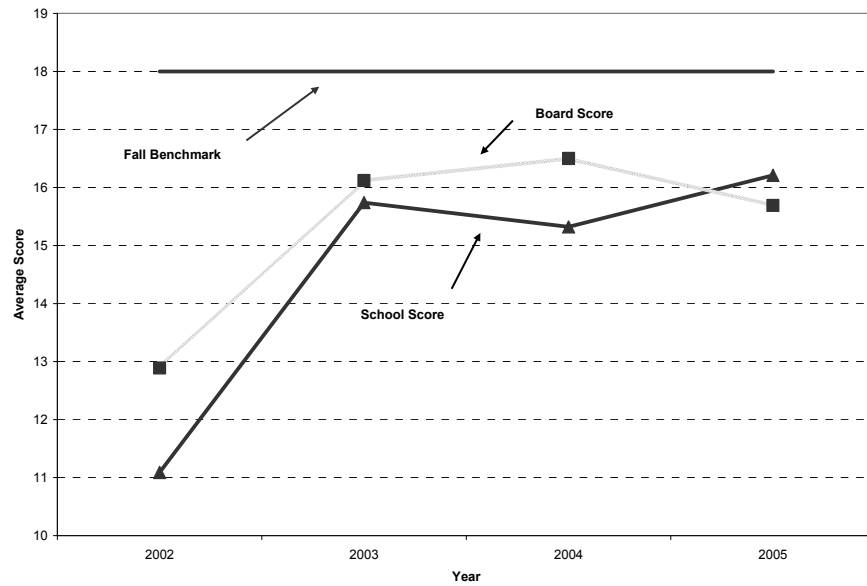

Figure 7:

Fall DRA Scores: Board versus School: Grade 2 Students' Scores
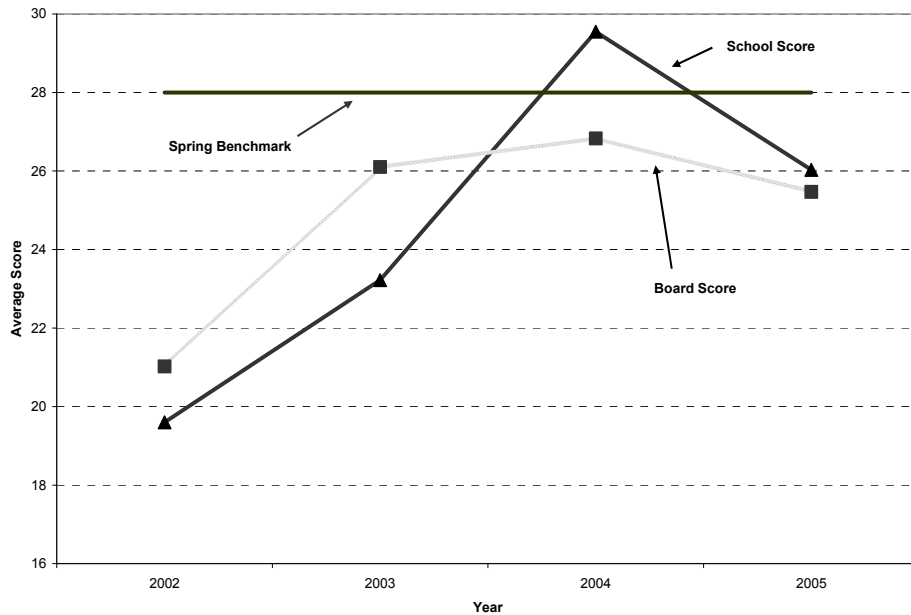
Figure 8:

Spring DRA Scores: Board versus School: Grade 2 Students' Scores

These results show that during the literacy intervention period, our cycle 1, year 2 students made significant progress towards attaining the DRA benchmarks; suggesting that the literacy interventions were effective. Considering that these students were performing at 2/3rd of the DRA benchmark when the interventions were initiated, this is a significant improvement. Additionally, given the fact that our student population became more diversified and harder-to-serve over the period of the study as is discussed in Chapter Four, this upward trend in DRA scores suggests that changes to literacy-teaching practices were taking place that improved students' literacy. This claim is not only supported by the quantitative data analysis of the DRA scores shown in Tables 4, 5 and 6 but also by the qualitative data analysis of the written responses to the questionnaire shown here:

A10: <u>Response #1</u>
> ….the school readjusted its focus to properly assess and evaluate the students. As a result their teaching practices changed and improved. With team meetings, focused P.D. and an encouragement to share what they learned the students benefited immeasurably.

T2: <u>Comments (A)</u>
> Marian places a great deal of emphasis on literacy in our school. She is diligent in reminding her staff to strive to create a very literate group. The population at GECS does not lend itself to high literacy scores; however.

T6: <u>Response #1</u>
> DRA. Marian introduced formal reading evaluation of all students twice a year. This has enabled teachers to closely look at each student individually. Teacher's practice has changed based upon the knowledge gleamed from this tool.

The analysis of these data found that there is both quantitative and qualitative evidence to support that the success of the interventions that I implemented as part of improving my practice had a positive impact on students' literacy scores and enhanced literacy-teaching practices.

5.4 Summary of Results

Throughout this chapter, I have given evidence for my "claim to know (my) own educational development" Whitehead (2009, p. 176). The data analysis gives reliable evidence that my study effected changes to my practice and that in my role I enhanced the teaching of literacy. Table 18 shows the methods of triangulation undertaken in my analysis to ensure that my claims are trustworthy.

Table 18:
Methods of Triangulation Applied to Key Research Questions

Research Questions	Field Notes & Own Reflections	Questionnaire Part A & B	DRA Scores
Did I develop as a literacy principal?	X Many examples & conclusive	X All 3 respondent groups confirm	X Indirect evidence to support
Was I successful as a literacy principal in implementing literacy interventions?	X Many examples & conclusive	X All 3 respondent groups confirm	X Indirect evidence to support
Did my practice enhance the teaching of literacy?	X Many examples & conclusive	X All 3 respondent groups confirm	X Indirect evidence to support
Did my practice become more collaborative and inclusive?	X Many examples show significant growth in this area	X Some evidence but not conclusive	Not applicable
Did I help to form a literacy-based professional learning community?	Some evidence but not conclusive	Some evidence but not conclusive	Not applicable

The three sets of data show remarkably consistent results. All three sets of data statistically confirm (at the 5% level) that I was effective in positively influencing literacy in the school. Parents, teachers and administrators were unanimous in their positive evaluation and the literacy DRA scores within the school showed a statistically significant upward trend during the period of the interventions.

While the results from all three respondent groups and for all interventions supported my claim of effectiveness there were differences between the various categories. In particular, parents tended to rate my effectiveness significantly lower than both the teachers and administrators. The teacher and administrator groups had remarkably consistent ratings with the administrator group giving slightly higher scores. The results of the questionnaires' anecdotal questions also suggest that all nine literacy interventions were effective and demonstrate the same trends in the respondent groups' responses. As principal, I was least effective at implementing the following two interventions: 1) acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials, space and resources and 2) providing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students.

This analysis validates my own assessment of the improvements made to my practice as a literacy principal and to our literacy results. However, the statistical ranking of the interventions were a great surprise to me. Respondents did not always agree with my assessment of the interventions where I believed I had been most effective, or where I had focussed most effort. This leads me to reflect on these findings and forms my study's final reflection that will be covered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
MAKING SENSE OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Staging the Final Reflection

My analysis of the research findings forms the basis of this chapter and also shapes my final reflection that concludes this action research study. Upon examination, the DRA and questionnaire results indicate that the nine literacy interventions contributed to improving the teaching of literacy and provide evidence that I had grown to become an effective literacy principal and as such, answer my lead research question "How can I improve my practice to enhance the teaching of literacy?" But there are also new critical questions that arise from the study. Why were the respondents' opinions different from mine? What other questions do my findings raise? I will begin to address these questions by commenting on why I think the differences in the rankings of the literacy interventions occurred and then examine the open ended questions that became apparent from the analysis.

In the second part of this chapter I will critically review my study's primary merits, its limitations, and its salient issues that warrant further consideration. In doing so I will explore the following questions: Did I accomplish what I set out to do? What were the greatest unforeseen challenges? What did I learn about my practice and how will my findings assist me? Are my findings relevant to other principals? What new knowledge will I contribute to living educational theory about the role of elementary principals in developing effective literacy-teaching practices?

The final reflection is an important element in drawing this study to its conclusion. Although my research focus was about improving my practice as a literacy principal, also

embodied in this study was my interest in the underlying question of what legacy I would leave the staff in terms of their literacy practices. Did my literacy development benefit teachers' literacy practices? Is there any evidence to support whether I had created with teachers a lasting professional literacy-based learning culture that would continue to grow teachers' practices after my departure? As a reflective practitioner, it is critical that I also address these final questions because I believe that some degree of my success in improving my practice can only be measured by my legacy and the sustainability of the improvements that took place.

6.2 Ranking the Interventions

From the outset, I realized that improving literacy on a school-wide scale was going to be a complex process and that no single literacy improvement formula existed. Because the school required growth in the many areas that I documented in Chapters One and Four, I determined that every possible avenue of literacy development would be actively pursued. As a novice, I did not know what strategies would prove to be successful so implementing a plethora of tactics to help guarantee improvement appeared to be a logical approach. Throughout the study, I did not question whether the literacy initiatives that I was promoting had any merit because the evidence from our bi-annual DRA results indicated consistent improvement. I interpreted this upward trend as an indicator that the literacy-teaching changes taking place were benefiting our students, although I did frequently question how through my practice, I could further improve students' literacy. What other things I could do to achieve better results. My steep learning curve to develop effective literacy-teaching strategies was further challenged by the ever-growing numbers of our ESL (English Second Language) and students with special education needs. To be effective, our literacy strategies

had expanded to include how to diversify literacy instruction for special education learners who presented a multitude of learning profiles.

However, despite the school's taxing environment, our literacy results continued to improve, as shown in Table 16. The gains were noticed by the school board's literacy team who suggested that my interventions were effective and wondered why other schools with less challenging populations were not as successful. We were implementing so many initiatives that we could not identify the specific effective ones, so the ranking of the nine literacy interventions (detailed in Chapter Five) became critical to provide some answers. But the rankings also raised new questions.

6.2.1 Analysis of the Differences in Intervention Rankings

I fully recognize that of all the respondents I am the least unbiased and I have striven to be as objective as possible in reviewing data. Table 19 shows how I ranked the interventions compared with both the teachers' and respondents' rankings.

Table 19:
Ranked Effectiveness of Literacy Interventions: Respondents' and Teachers' Versus My Rankings

Literacy Intervention	Ranking All Groups	Teachers' Ranking	My Ranking
Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction	1	2	7
Supplying opportunities for literacy-based mentoring and coaching	2	1	7
Fostering a literacy-based school culture and promoting literacy research	3	4	3
Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy-teaching block for literacy instruction	4	3	9
Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	5	6	3
Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models	6	5	5
Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices	7	7	1
Providing appropriate supports for at-risk literacy students	8	8	2
Acquiring appropriate literacy-teaching and learning materials, space and resources	9	9	6

I have ranked my leading effective interventions in descending order by the degree of importance and effort that I assigned to them: literacy assessment practices; supporting at-risk readers; and creating a literacy-based school culture tied with promoting professional development. I understand that my attaching a degree of importance and effort to these interventions does not necessarily equate to the degree of my effectiveness as perceived by the respondents. However, in the areas in which I worked the hardest to introduce changes, I did expect to see some recognition of my work illustrated by a higher ranking of my effectiveness by the respondents. From my list of the top three interventions, the only intervention in which my work is universally recognized as being highly effective is the school culture intervention which was ranked near the top third by all respondents. This is a

satisfying result as the literature states that a culture of learning must exist in the school before change can occur (Brill, 2008; Fullan, 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Guskey, 2000; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1995, 2000). My findings detailed in Chapter Five confirm that I had successfully changed the culture by creating a literacy-based learning environment that was conducive to improving instruction and enhancing student learning. While the overall rankings of some of the interventions closely resemble mine, there were some larger discrepancies that surprised me. What sense can I make of the interventions where the rankings were quite different from my expectations? Here I am left to reflect deeply on my professional practice to ascertain why these differences occurred.

6.2.2 Creating Time for Teachers to Meet and Plan

Overall, the respondents deemed that my most effectively applied strategy was *creating time for teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction* followed very closely by providing teachers with *literacy-based mentoring and coaching*. From my perspective however, the implementation of these interventions had been gruelling due to the challenges arising from the teachers' grievance that left me feeling insecure and questioning my own effectiveness.

During this time, I desperately wanted to preserve the work we had accomplished in growing our professional learning community (PLC) that had been predicated on our ability to work collaboratively after school. But the teachers' grievance cited that their assigned workload was in violation of their contract as I had created three one-hour blocks for meetings after school for cycle teams and for in-house professional development. Therefore to mitigate malaise that could later prevent us from salvaging our efforts centered on the formation of a PLC, I purposely halted all work after school. This decision I believe was necessary because shared leadership can only grow in a context that has been re-shaped to

provide neutrality (Harris & Lambert, 2003) and the climate in the school during the grievance period was hardly neutral.

To my great dismay, the dispute took nearly two years to be resolved – a length of time that both extended and deepened the controversy, thereby seriously interfering with our emergent professional learning. When the original assigned workload was eventually upheld by the provincially appointed arbitrator, we resumed our after school cycle meetings and professional development sessions. Over time, we slowly evolved to reach the stage of evolution described by Mohr and Dichter (2001) as the "messy stage" (p.745) or as Lambert (2005) describes as the "transitional phase" (p.64) but the two-year delay prevented us from fully reaching our initial goals or what I had envisioned. I had hoped that teachers would not only participate in forming a community of practice but would also assume roles of ever increasing ownership and leadership that are indicators of the "high leadership capacity stage" (Lambert, 2005, p.65). I had also wanted teachers to take more of a lead role in mentoring and coaching because we had successfully grown some very competent literacy teachers as supported by T2's comment:

> As a staff, we should be teaching each other more. There is quite a lot of expertise within our own school and we need to mentor each other more.

In spite of our renewed efforts we never seemed to re-gain our former momentum or level of enthusiasm and we fell short of reaching higher levels of shared leadership in our literacy-based community of practice. Nevertheless, having common time to meet and plan, although ranked first by the average response of the three respondent groups, is supported by the teachers as my second most effective literacy intervention (refer to Table 19 that shows teachers' rankings). Even though teachers were not assigned specific after school activities

during the grievance, many still chose to use the scheduled time that remained in place to meet informally. I believe that this factor influenced their ranking.

6.2.3 Mentoring and Coaching

In spite of the problems raised by after school activities, teachers ranked mentoring and coaching as my most effective strategy (refer to Table 19 that shows teachers' rankings) which is again different from the overall ranking of the three respondent groups. This is echoed in these two teachers' reflections written anonymously at the end of our mentoring and coaching school year (year 4) that was facilitated by the research grant, when the teachers were invited by their PLC coaches to write a reflection about their work together:

> Phrases/Words that stick in my head now mainly as a result of our Professional Learning Community meetings:
>
> - Accountability
>
> - Results – really learning from them
>
> - Switch from "teaching" – to making sure students are learning
>
> ….I feel that we work well together and that this experience has really opened our eyes to the work we still want to do together….

And:

> I feel that I am a part of a cycle team that is working together in the interest of creating a meaningful learning environment for our…students. We meet as a team weekly and we meet with our teaching partners more frequently. This team approach is much more effective for programming and learning than working in isolation. Creative problem solving for different situations also occurs. I believe we are "well on the way" to creating a meaningful learning environment. *(Excerpts from teachers' reflection notes submitted to PLC coaches, May, 2004)*

As I give consideration to the teachers' rankings of these two interventions, I take them to mean that although the teachers did not like being assigned specific professional activities as part of their workload, voicing concerns that this reduced their professional autonomy,

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they did reap benefits from having weekly assigned time to plan instruction, share practices, and engage in mentoring and coaching. These professional activities buoyed their literacy practices as evidenced by T9's comment:

> Time set aside for planning and reviewing new practices in grade groupings, common, school-wide professional development, having an outstanding resource teacher to provide in-services – these initiatives allowed us to support each other in our learning and make sure that we incorporated the new practices into our daily planning and teaching.

Given more time, we would probably have broken through the next two developmental stages to ultimately reach the "mature-group stage" (p.746) in which a learning community is born (Mohr & Dichter, 2001). I make this claim because the teachers ranked my effectiveness in these two interventions very highly, and it is very encouraging that they strongly supported the concept of developing a community of literacy practice and recognized the professional gains to be reaped from such collaborative endeavours. However, the long pauses due to the grievance and our move to a new school site that are detailed in Chapter Four detracted us from fully developing our PLC.

The rancour and the delays surrounding the implementation of these two interventions led me to rank my effectiveness in these areas in the bottom third of my list because I believe that I failed the teachers. If I had been more effective, less demanding, and more receptive to the teachers' need to have more professional autonomy in deciding how to plan time to grow our PLC, there may not have been a grievance. Due to my inability to more effectively implement and scaffold these literacy interventions, I was unable to bring to fruition with the teachers our shared vision of becoming a successful literacy-based PLC and I am accountable for my professional shortcomings as the school principal. At the end of this study what resonates with me is that we did not achieve the level of collaborative professionalism we

could have achieved and that I initially envisioned. Perhaps I set the standard of judgment too high for our school team given that there were just so many competing interests for our time and focus in a learning climate that was oftentimes very difficult and riddled with tension.

6.2.4 Appropriate Assessment Practices

To achieve what Fullan (2006) defines as "precision teaching" (p.17-18), I invested the greatest amount of my time in addressing literacy assessment and evaluation practices to guide teaching and learning. I began by being very enthusiastic about introducing teachers to new literacy assessment strategies because I had been receiving on-going professional development in assessment and reporting practices for three years as a member of our school board's report card committee. The timing of the committee's final report coincided with the period of labour unrest in which I had put other literacy initiatives on hold, and so I began investing in the development of reflective assessment practices through anecdotal reporting and authentic assessment. I believed that this approach would allow us to continue developing literacy-teaching practices on more neutral ground as evaluation is an undisputed part of the teachers' workload. Our efforts in these areas became the underpinning of our provincial Lead School profile which is detailed in Chapter Four. But although this intervention was my prime focus in the school and our assessment efforts achieved some provincial recognition, it was ranked near the bottom by both teachers and administrators. The parents, however, ranked this intervention as their first choice suggesting a very divergent range of opinion existed around this topic. Why did this occur?

My decision to shift our focus to assessment practices was undoubtedly influenced by the grievance. Due to the resulting tension, there were few conversations about how to best explore literacy assessment or opportunities to seek staff input. This lack of shared leadership

I believe accounts for why teachers did not rank this intervention very highly. It may also explain why some teachers felt, as demonstrated in their written comments, that we had started too many literacy interventions and that I had not allowed them sufficient time to acquire mastery of one before moving on to another.

Undoubtedly, the teachers were stretched in many areas by the constant increase in classroom challenges thereby limiting their available time to adopt new practices and therefore literacy assessment was viewed by many teachers as a burden, an add-on that was not an integral component of literacy development. Some of the teachers also felt that assessment took away from their teaching because of the amount of time it took to administer the DRA which is also expressed in their written comments. I had also struggled with how to reconcile teachers' assessment practices and integrate the DRA assessment tool with on-going in-class assessments. This reconciliation would have allowed for more precise literacy-teaching strategies to evolve from regular assessment practices and would have further enhanced daily learning (Noonan & Renihan, 2006).

When their feedback was requested, staff aired with senior administrators their concerns about using reading and writing assessment tools. As senior administration heard from a number of disgruntled teachers on the topic of literacy assessment, mostly during the grievance period, I am therefore not surprised that they viewed my effectiveness in introducing this intervention as less effective than other interventions. The parents on the other hand wanted more information about their children's literacy development. Parents therefore appreciated the information that teachers were now able to supply through the detailed anecdotal reporting about their children's progress that had been added to term

reports. I believe that this explains why parents' views about literacy assessment were markedly different from those of the teaching staff and senior administrators.

In light of all of this, I still maintain that changes in teachers' assessment practices that included detailed anecdotal reporting, the continued use of and reporting of students' DRA scores, did effectively promote overall changes to literacy-teaching practices. This notion is well captured in T6's comment:

> Marian has worked hard pushing us to write increasingly detailed report cards. This has resulted in us being forced to develop reflective practices. Over the past 3 years, I have observed both myself and my colleagues becoming more informed about individual students' literary strengths and weaknesses. We have become better at determining what the next step is for each individual. I believe our literacy-teaching practice has grown because of the increased awareness of the individual learners' needs.

In reviewing this teacher's comment, I am reminded of how much I wanted teachers to use data to become reflective practitioners and I believe that I achieved this to a degree. As a school community of learners, we did make gains and were recognized provincially as being on the cutting edge of assessment practices – being featured in two editions of the Government's regular pedagogical publication *Schoolscapes* (Katz, 2006; Krakow, 2004).

6.2.5 Instructional Materials and Resources

Another surprise occurred in the ranking of *acquiring appropriate instructional materials* intervention which I ranked near my top third of interventions. During the seven years covered by this study, close to $70,000 was invested in classroom reading materials and the same amount was also spent on library books from the school's annual operating budget of approximately $35,000 per year plus the addition of any surplus money from our annual daycare budget. There is plenty of tangible evidence throughout the school of the increase in learning materials as the school went from having virtually no reading materials and no

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library to having fairly well stocked English and French literacy book rooms and as many visitors expressed, "one of the nicest elementary libraries in the school board." Also our move to a larger school site allowed us to have rooms allocated exclusively for literacy materials. But unanimously all three groups of respondents ranked this intervention lowest. How can this be when so much time and money was invested in purchasing books, in setting up book rooms, and in creating a well stocked library? Even more puzzling is the fact that in their written comments, all three respondents' groups rank this intervention highly.

When I discussed this surprising outcome with critical friends, a thought emerged that there were so many resources in the school that many teachers had come to take them for granted. Over the seven years there were many staff changes with new teachers joining at different times and only seven original teachers remaining from years one and two, who knew how very poorly equipped the school had once been. Perhaps newer teachers did not give me credit for supplying these materials because they did not know the full extent of the efforts I had made to re-stock the school with quality instructional materials as I described in Chapter One. My findings indicate that I needed to improve my effectiveness in this area but I honestly do not know given the available resources, what else I could have done.

6.2.6 Support for Students with Special Education Needs

When I examined the intervention of providing *literacy supports for students with special education needs* another interesting variation occurs. Both parents and administrators rank this intervention in the middle of their rankings while teachers rank it second to last. Despite the many efforts made by school and board personnel to assist teachers, staff felt that there was never enough support for our student population with special education needs. As our numbers grew, the teachers, especially the less experienced ones, became increasingly

overwhelmed by the daily challenges of integration as the ratio of students with special

education needs increased in every classroom. This view is particularly well documented in

T6's comment:

> We are working with an increasing diversity of students. Many of these students have special learning needs, or behaviour and emotional challenges. The English stream classes at the upper grades are approaching 50% coded. This has resulted in many difficult teaching assignments. The mix of the class has affected the teachers' ability to provide a rich fast paced learning environment. Although many manage to involve students daily in a rich environment, there are many interruptions. Many students are pulled from class. Many students are regularly absent. Interruptions, absenteeism, discord in the school yard which is carried into the classroom, take away from the learning environment and learning opportunities hence compromise the literacy attainment of too many of the children.

Our student population with special education needs also took a lot of my time and

energy. Much of my time was spent working with outside service agencies, meeting with

families in crisis and working directly with students in need. The resource team and I made

considerable effort to provide services and support for struggling students, yet the teachers

did not see this as an effectively applied intervention. With the school's available resources

for students with special education needs, there were no interventions that could have more

effectively eased teaching loads. I believe that it was not a question of teachers gauging my

effectiveness in supporting learners with special education needs but one of rating resources

perceived to be inadequate given their daily realities. However, the parents and the

administrators did see the efforts that were made to address this challenge and hence I

venture to say that this is why they ranked it higher. In terms of my investment of time as a

principal I ranked this intervention second.

6.3 Summary

This review of the marked differences in some rankings confirms for me that there is some degree of subjectivity that entered into the rankings affecting how respondent groups responded. Stewart (2006) also raises this point when referring to the work of Evers and Lakomski (2000) that examines the extent of reliability of data derived from surveys, as people have distorted views of reality based on their subjectivity. This concept is further evident when I examine the written comments (shown in Appendix E.2) and their clusters (shown in Appendix G). Even though the data set is too small to be statistically meaningful, interesting trends appear. The three respondent groups' written comments generally support the ranking of the nine interventions in Table 10 but there are some notable differences. It is interesting that administrators' comments gave high importance to the curriculum intervention while the other two groups ranked it in the middle. Teachers' comments ranked professional development very highly while the other two groups ranked this intervention in the middle. I interpret these outcomes as containing some elements of personal perspective that are directly linked to the work, expertise and viewpoints of each of the respondent groups.

Therefore as a researcher, I had to be very careful in interpreting data to capture a true understanding of the responses. To foster trustworthiness I analyzed all questionnaire data as rigorously as possible, as discussed in Chapter Five. Moreover, to safeguard against subjectivity from skewing the results of the questionnaire, the questions were derived from an outside independent source and I had chosen to send my questionnaire to and analyze the rankings from three distinct respondent groups to mitigate any possible distortion. I believe

that I have effectively addressed the concerns raised by Evers and Lakomski (2000) about the reliability of data derived from a questionnaire.

6.4 The Choice of Action Research

With the multitude of critical issues requiring prompt attention to improve student learning, it became evident in the first year of my study that I would need to develop reflective practice, as only informed practice would effect the needed changes in the school. The only research methodology that allowed me to conduct this work was action research and now that my study is over, I carefully examine the benefits this method afforded my practice. In my final reflection, my initial reasons for selecting this method still resonate with me.

Action research enabled me: to conduct ontological research that embodied reflective practice (praxis); to enhance my accountability with input from critical colleagues; to document the evolution of my experiences into my epistemology; and to set rigorous standards of judgment that encapsulated my values. Action research permitted me to examine my work as an elementary principal in context and to improve my practice to enhance literacy. At the core of my research my intent was to fully expose the role of the principal while improving my practice, which I have described in Chapter Four. What I accomplished in this study was to take school leadership (theoretically documented in Chapter Two) and to expose its ontological applications in the field by documenting my daily work as literacy principal in my own voice through the use of vignettes taken from my journals. To my voice, others' have also been added so that my account has been cross-referenced in an attempt to ensure validity.

My study had two main foci: the prime focus was to improve my practice as a literacy principal, leading to the secondary one, to improve students' literacy. As my study

progressed it was often difficult to separate the foci as the two are complexly intertwined and were viewed collectively when I was planning how to implement informed action (praxis). I also had to recognize the co-dependence of principal and teacher roles as school educators, which led me to also focus on improving teachers' literacy practices, because I could not improve students' literacy alone. In coming to terms with these intricately interwoven components of my practice I came to more deeply comprehend the complexity of my practice as a school principal. This knowledge led me to truly become a lead learner in a community of learners and this awareness now fuelled my interest in professional learning communities. My views are best explained by Lomax (1990) in McNiff et al (2001),

> …action research is a way of defining and implementing relevant professional development. It is able to harness forms of collaboration and participation that are part of our professional rhetoric but are rarely effective in practice… (it) …starts small with a single committed person focusing on his/her practice. It gains momentum through the involvement of others as collaborators. It spreads as individuals reflect on the nature of their participation, and the principle of shared ownership of practice is established. It can result in the formation of a self-critical community: extended professionals in the best sense of the term. (p11)

Would I have come to such realizations about my practice by any other research model? I do not believe so because it was the very tenets of action research that fully opened and exposed my practice for such critical scrutiny that enabled me to reach this depth of knowledge to examine application models of school leadership.

6.4.1 Benefit of Reflective Practice

For me as a practitioner researcher, the greatest value added from applying an action research model was undoubtedly my ability to develop reflective practice. As I now review my data collection, it is abundantly clear that the years where the biggest gains were made were the years in which I invested the most time in reflection. My studies assisted me in systematically regulating reflective practice and this shaped and most importantly guided my practice in a way that I do not believe would have been possible through any other research method.

Our school, with its great need of fundamental changes to improve learning, had challenged and tested my leadership capabilities to the greatest extent possible. My practice developed with each of the three reflective action cycles of this study that contained an intervention plan: the first reflective cycle (about a year and a half into the study – year 2001-2002) had focused on literacy with a view to learn more about effective literacy practices and to find an effective literacy delivery model that included a research trip to view Edmonton schools' balanced literacy program; the second reflective cycle (about year four of the study – year 2003-2004) had focused on exploring a literacy-based professional learning community in search of a model to support teachers and their principal as learners and researchers in finding ways to support our challenging student population and included a grant to work with teachers to investigate this model (PLC); the third reflective cycle (about year six of the study – year 2005-2006) had focused on literacy assessment practices and literacy goal setting in student-led conferencing to find a model in which students would become more active participants in their learning and assessment and included a research trip to view Hawaiian schools' authentic assessment practices.

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These think-act-reflect cycles provided me with a clearer vision of my role in improving student's literacy and enabled me to better identify the right things to do and to proceed more effectively with the teaching staff to reach identified goals. Teachers noted in informal conversations that I had a vision to improve student success and I found that reflection not only generated informed practice but also gave credibility to my work, and allowed me to share in instructional methodologies at the teacher level.

6.4.2 How Assessment Helped to Shape Reflective Practice

One of the significant contributing factors that increased my literacy knowledge was my increased awareness of how assessment affects teaching practices. As shown in the rankings, assessment was a more important focus for me than for the staff. Perhaps this is not so surprising because as expressed by Noonan et al, (2006) assessment is a powerful support for principals,

> ....the existence of an enabling and visible system policy on assessment (preferably expressed as an integral element of the system's vision) is a fundamental source of support for principals. Well conceived and logically framed, it can provide valuable parameters for the actions of in-school leaders;…it can provide a rational basis for principal interventions regarding assessment practices in classrooms;…it can reinforce expectations for classroom professionals regarding assessment; and it can provide irrefutable proof that the work of principals in relation to assessment is informed and transparent, rather than capricious and arbitrary (p. 15).

My practice benefited from improving my knowledge of assessment practices. It helped to validate my work and to support the stance that I had adopted during the grievance period.

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Moreover it provided me with another lens to examine literacy-teaching practices as I began

reflecting on and examining the developmental stages of how students acquire literacy skills.

I began to question what teaching strategies would move students from one stage to the next.

I raised probing questions with teachers such as "What sense did you make of the scores

where students scored very well on decoding but whose comprehension scores are weak?"

"How will your class DRA data assist you in establishing your guided reading groups?"

"What do you think you can do to further assist struggling readers in your class whose

literacy scores have not significantly moved in a year?"

As teachers began to address these questions they delved into reflective practice and the

deeper I probed into our school's literacy assessment, the more I became an advocate for

teachers to adopt reflective practice. For some teachers this challenge was viewed as positive

as expressed in the following excerpt from a written note I received from a teacher who was

leaving the school to work on a Master's degree fulltime:

> ….G.E.C. is a vibrant, progressive school because you challenge us professionally to step out of our comfort zone and try new things (guided reading, student-led conferences). It has been great working at G.E.C. these last 3 ½ years….

New teachers benefited as well as illustrated in an end of the year written note:

> Thank you for your support and strength, .giving me room to grow, and being there when things became difficult….for challenging me professionally (reports, assessment, IEP's, goal setting, student-leds….) and providing a strong pedagogical and academic foundation for me as a new teacher….

There is no denying that the teachers worked very hard in this area and were often taken

out of their comfort zones during periods of assessment and reporting, further adding to their

already heavy workloads. This is captured succinctly in one teacher's reflection:

> We are so tired. It is a busy time….. *(Excerpt from teachers' reflection notes submitted to PLC coaches, May, 2004)*

But to improve schools some of these measures are necessary as best summarized by Harris & Lambert (2003), "Building leadership capacity asks those within schools to step out of the 'comfort zone' and do things differently" (p. 130). Once the grievance was resolved, I engaged in many professional conversations about our student literacy assessment practices with the staff, cycle teams and individual teachers, but unfortunately there was not a collective spirit of collaborative learning centered on assessment. Several teachers did however, grow significantly in their literacy assessment practices and became assessment leaders on staff and within our school board as well as recognized provincially for their contributions at provincial conferences.

6.5 Leadership

As I discussed in Chapter Two, school leadership has many facets and, over the course of my study, my leadership underwent change as I used various approaches to meet the school's many demands and challenges. Each leadership frame that I adopted offered me new insights, extended my practice and added to my overall development as a literacy principal.

6.5.1 Situational Leadership

In the final review of my leadership, the work of Bolman and Deal (1991) in *Reframing Organizations Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* still resonates with me. At the outset of my principalship, I had set out to construct a leadership style that had elements of their four leadership frames (structural, human resource, political and symbolic) and deployed elements from each to fit different situations. I had assumed in my dialectic fashion a multi-frame leadership approach (Bolman & Deal, 1991, 2002) as no single leadership model would effectively address all the work that lay ahead of me. In doing so, I had adopted a form of

situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1975) but as my study developed and I began to define my own contextual leadership requirements, the four leadership frames no longer seemed to suit all of my needs. I began to search for other frames to add as I came to more fully comprehend the complexities of my role, confirming for me that my initial beliefs about school leadership requiring multiple frames were correct.

Chapter Four revealed that there is no one leadership frame to create an effective literacy school. To borrow from Hulley and Dier (2009), the reality is that if principals strive to be effective school leaders, they do whatever it takes to create an effective school. I add, from my experiences that in doing so, effective principals adopt situational leadership. I have provided evidence that effective literacy leadership requires flexibility, creativity, instructional knowledge, perseverance, vision, moral, and ethical conduct. For school leaders to stay the course, leadership is always context bound (Foster, 1989) and therefore no single leadership model – instructional, transformational, democratic, or other will suffice in the field. I have shown how principals carry out their complex instructional leadership role and how school leadership needs to extend beyond the four frames set out by Bolman and Deal (1991).

6.5.2 Instructional Leadership within Shared Leadership

In providing information about my work as a principal to affect student learning, my study also addresses some of the questions raised by Marzano, Walters and McNaulty (2005) about how principals contribute to student achievement. Although research demonstrates that shared leadership is effective in school improvement (Fullan, 2001, 2005a, 2005b) and the many facets of school leadership with its competing demands necessitate that it be shared, nevertheless there is an instructional leadership role that only the principal is given. "In spite

of the problems that may arise from giving so much responsibility to one person, principals continue to be the key to school improvement" (Lambert, 2005, p.65).

From my study I learned that principals must use their role to actively pursue shared leadership, to oversee its continued development, and to sustain its academic focus in order to improve student learning. Every team requires a group leader to ensure the team is on task and this is the role of the principal in the schoolhouse (Sergiovanni, 2000). Creating a PLC builds a social formation that frames the school team's efforts through the provision of a nurturing environment to keep the team focused on developing and sharing best practices. In this social formation, it is the role of the principal to ensure the promotion of effective practices leading to enhanced student learning and school improvement. The principal adopts the role of encourager, re-enforcer and vision guider.

Chapter Four showed that the notion of focusing our school improvement efforts on literacy came from the teaching staff and in doing so they set the vision. But in meeting the daily demands of the school, I found that it was easy to lose sight of the overarching vision that we had set and one that I was refining as principal. The heavy demands made of me on a daily basis in a large inner city school often took my vision on many side trips that slowed our literacy improvement. I often told staff that my work on a daily basis was always unknown and the only given was that each day I would have one child, one family, and one staff member in crisis. I never knew who it would be nor the degree of the crisis but it was a given that it would always unfold and it did, and usually at the most inopportune time in the day. In between these events I would use the remaining time to foster and to support the implementation of literacy interventions. In our inner school environment, the constant for me was the vision of what we were working towards and I had to work hard to keep it in the

forefront. Principals need to steadfastly keep the vision in sight for I have learned from my study that the principal is also the vision keeper. The vision can easily get lost in the pressing urgencies of daily demands and so keeping the vision becomes a critical role in school change and this role belongs to the principal.

My fundamental beliefs about sharing leadership to build leadership capacity; developing sustainable improvement initiatives (Fullan, 2005a, 2005b; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Senge, 1990); building a collaborative practice; promoting effective professional practices to enhance student learning (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Eaker, et al., 2002; Fullan, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; Williams, 2006) were all tested in my study. Living out these theories in the field proved at times to be daunting as my practical application of the theoretical framing of my action plans was not a clean, direct, or a timed process. I found my work to be extremely messy and complicated by the realities of the workplace and progress came at a much slower rate than I had originally anticipated. The staff was ever changing so each year brought new team members who required an induction and the partnerships formed one year were gone the next. The human dynamics of our teachers, our students and our families all intertwined to form the literacy interventions that grew in our school and uniquely assumed shape within our environment confirming for me that change has to fit within the school's context and learning culture and to be shared amongst all the stakeholders if it is to flourish.

6.5.3 Sharing Leadership

However, sharing in methodological instruction is not sharing leadership. As I now carefully re-examine the concept of shared leadership, I have come to recognize its complexity as I learned to make the distinction that sharing leadership is a very different concept from consultation or collaboration. Shared leadership is the ability to take joint ownership to

identify future directions and jointly make decisions to achieve pre-determined goals. But in our literacy development, most teachers on staff were beginners in literacy-teaching practices and although I had worked hard to learn as much as I could about literacy, I too was an emerging practitioner. The teachers and I were not proficient in literacy-teaching practices and consequently, not in a position to share literacy leadership. Collectively we had to work with others more skilled until we were sufficiently informed to become more involved in leading a literacy-based PLC and sharing this leadership.

As my practice evolved and I began to see an increased need for sharing leadership, I began to work more closely with those who had both the literacy training and experience to guide us more effectively, namely our resource teachers. They were all trained *Reading Recovery* (Bourque, et al., 2006) specialists who worked closely with our board's literacy consultants and with me to support our literacy students with special education needs. In doing so, I had formed an ad hoc literacy team for our school that evolved into a leadership team as we met frequently to brainstorm strategies and engage in professional dialogues about literacy development and PLCs. During our exchanges, I listened and gave input but our decisions were collectively taken – this resulted in the literacy team having full autonomy to conduct staff sessions as they determined.

I believe that it was through these conversations that I shared school leadership with the literacy team that extended beyond distributed leadership within a hierarchical structure as Woods (2004) describes with the principal directing the whole process. I did not direct the decisions made by the literacy leadership team but actively participated in joint decision-making. I saw its members as being equal participants in sharing knowledge, experience and decision-making to the fullest degree. I now recognize that my notion of shared leadership

did not truly evolve with all members of the staff and I make the distinction that I chose instead to work closely with all of the school's leading literacy experts on staff. My intent was not to distribute leadership but to share leadership as I have defined it. My leadership evolved from working alone in the school to working very closely with a team of literacy trained teachers. Over time this leadership team included other educators who became critical friends who worked with staff to improve the teaching of literacy.

6.5.3.1 Teachers' Perception of My Shared Leadership

As I review the teachers' written comments in the questionnaire it is clear that they viewed literacy changes as being positive and that my leadership role played an important part in the school's literacy evolution. It is evident that the teachers approached mentoring and coaching with deep appreciation and it was professionally very enriching for them. There are numerous references made in their responses that attest to the strong support of our lead resource teacher in leading many of these after school sessions. What the staff was not always aware of was the extent to which the resource teacher and I had conversations about how to grow literacy leadership amongst the staff. It is not surprising therefore that in their comments there is no mention of my sharing leadership with them as I had shared literacy leadership with the literacy resource teachers and literacy specialists at the board but not with teachers directly.

In time I believe that as a staff that we would have evolved into a community of practice that fully shared literacy leadership as we became more proficient and required less support. I say this because while the staff did not fully embrace a literacy-based learning community in the manner that I had initially envisioned, collectively we did engage in professional conversations and did seek solutions to enhance the teaching of literacy in the school. The

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students' DRA results that showed continued improvement further suggest that our teachers were becoming more effective in their literacy-teaching and were receptive to incorporating changes into their teaching derived from our early PLC discussions that focussed on effective literacy practices.

6.5.4 Grey Zone Leadership

In carrying out the board's directive to assign specific activities to teachers' presence time, I and the other principals entered into a grey zone as I have defined it in Chapter Two. By the nature of my position, I could not ethically say that I was only following board directives and not necessarily in full agreement, so as principal I took the brunt of the attack. Adding complexity, the teachers interpreted my sphere of influence as being far greater than the hierarchical structure allowed. The tensions on staff heightened because the points raised in the grievance ran counter to our previously and mutually agreed upon goals and operational procedures, and furthermore were in direct conflict with my moral beliefs and what I believed was best educationally for our students (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Given the constraints of my principal's power, I could not perform miracles (Clay, 2001) to resolve the dissension expeditiously.

Operating in the grey zone caused me to encounter my greatest moral dilemmas as the school's principal. During this period I encountered extreme isolation in my position – more than I had ever before experienced. When settlement came, the fire was hard to re-kindle as our collaborative "mindset" (Senge, 1990) had been tainted. I privately identified the lingering resistance on the part of the teachers as betrayal after all that I had invested in supporting teachers at all levels. Therefore it was also very hard for me to re-gather the threads of our emergent professional learning community and to move forward

collaboratively with staff. To proceed with this initiative, I had to reach deeply into my moral convictions and draw from my inner bank of entrenched values to rise above my emotional stance which was directing me to distance myself. The strength that I needed to move forward with the teachers stemmed from my values and beliefs that the inherent nature of my leadership role dictated that I lead and rise above our differences.

The tensions between my emotional intelligence and my ethical intelligence presented my biggest hurdles in this study and no epiphanies emerged from any amount of reflection. The literature on school leadership does not prepare principals for such episodes and from my experience, I found that it is during these tumultuous times that principals have no recourse other than to seek guidance from moral leadership to identify the critical and ethical components that are necessary to form a supportive environment to achieve desired goals (Foster, 1989). Based on this experience I espouse that moral leadership is imperative when there is conflict.

6.5.4.1 Benefit of Building Trust

Over time, trusting relationships were formed that enabled us to overcome the many challenges we faced, especially those arising from the periods of labour unrest. To encourage and assist teachers, I frequently supplemented their professional development funds for additional training opportunities and paid for learning materials previewed at conferences. Such support was appreciated by the staff and viewed as one of my positive principal's traits as the staff learned that as long as they could pedagogically defend their choices and indicate a willingness to share newly gained knowledge with others, I would always find a way to fund their requests. Knowing this, senior teachers often encouraged new teachers to seek my support for training to develop necessary skills. Through this corroboration, I endeavoured to

soften my rough edges, to build trust and to gain teachers' support which proved to be an effective strategy.

Although it had been strained by the grievance, our established culture of trust withstood the stress and this enabled me to work with teachers on other initiatives. I believe that it was my recognition of this fact that ultimately motivated me to move beyond my sense of betrayal and to proceed with staff in re-starting our work to form a literacy-based community of practice. The fact that we did eventually return to our collaborative efforts after school albeit with a slower momentum and reduced enthusiasm confirms for me that I had successfully built trust with my teaching colleagues. Trust, an important component of my practice, had been thoroughly tested.

6.5.5 The Need for Professional Values and Ethical Practice

In times of conflict, I learned that I had to be attentive to the 'mindscape' of the school (Sergiovanni, 2003) and not just its landscape as there were competing elements that required delicate balancing. I had to find a way to put student learning and school improvement first while respecting the needs of the teachers. As principal, I wanted to do the 'right' thing but was unable to satisfy everyone and so my professional values became very important in the re-shaping of our learning community during this period of unrest especially as a practitioner-researcher working with teaching colleagues (L. M. Smith, 1990). As a practitioner-researcher I worked from my own values to pursue educational goals that I believed would benefit our students but not undermine the teachers' convictions and further strain our working relationship. As the school's principal it was imperative that I drew on moral and ethical leadership to safeguard against incorporating any decisions that could be detrimental to either the students or teachers.

I was committed to making a difference on a school level so that all students and teachers would benefit and was cognizant that my direction needed to be morally driven and have a moral purpose. My approach is supported by Fullan's (2003b) work on moral leadership and adds "….that all other capacities (e.g. knowledge of the change process, building learning communities) should be in the service of moral purpose" (p.30). My action research study was about living my educational values while improving my educational practice (Lomax, et al., 1996) and the hegemonic aspect of my role implied improving both my practice and the literacy-teaching practices of my teaching colleagues. Thus the stance I took during this time of conflict to re-direct my work to focus on assessment practices had an underlying moral purpose to benefit students and teachers.

6.5.5.1 Moral Dilemmas

In my study I learned that issues arise that can derail the study or slow its process but to stay the course is critical and to do so requires moral leadership. My biggest unforeseen obstacle was, without question, the grievance and its effect on our team work. There is no one clear answer as to why our school was one of the three schools named in a grievance, as other principals had also followed board directives. It is possible that our outcome was influenced by the fact that the three schools had executive members of the association on staff. In hindsight, I may have been too zealous in carrying out board directives and not attentive enough to what my teachers were expressing. Whatever the contributing factors were, for the purpose of this study, the important thing is that it happened and it altered my study.

My third action research cycle became fragmented and took a circuitous route which had not been my original intent and there are layers to examine as to why this happened. Briefly, the introduction of the third action cycle did not result from the natural progression and

extension of where I and the staff had evolved and was a somewhat forced fit in light of the circumstances; the existing tensions during this period clouded our cooperative working relationship and limited our ability to fully explore and jointly develop deeper understanding in these areas; and the lingering need to resolve and complete unfinished business was more difficult in the aftermath of the grievance.

Focusing on my school leadership, I learned that there were some elements that I could not control and that when confronting difficult issues, I needed to demonstrate professional commitment, patience, understanding, and conduct my practice ethically but these goals were at times elusive and hard to achieve (Campbell, 1999). In certain circumstances, I had to seek more objective ethical approaches than those derived from my reflections alone. But first as Campbell (1999) cautions, I had to accept that I was faced with an ethical dilemma that would require objective solutions. During these times, I sought the counsel of critical friends to provide me with sound objective guidance.

I also learned that I had to model the attributes that I both expected and required from my teachers. My approach is reinforced by Hester's (2003) and Starratt's (1991) views that ethical leaders, through modeling and mentoring, build effective relationships that create a community of enhanced learning within an ethical multidimensional framework that fosters creativity, flexibility, and reflective practice.

My initial beliefs about my instructional leadership role were altered over the course of my study for I learned that I needed first to learn about literacy in order to lead changes to literacy-teaching practices. It was not effective enough that I simply implement provincial educational policies (Fullan, 2001) and at the same time also shape teachers' professional development (Leithwood, et al., 1992). I did this in my first year in the school but I quickly

realized that I also needed to guide classroom instruction and to do so meant that I needed to create a learning climate in the school (Guskey, 2000) and actively engage in it (Fullan, 2001). In order for me to establish a literacy-based learning community to affect changes in the classroom, I had to become a literacy principal (Booth & Rowsell, 2007) to effectively motivate and support teachers. My literacy development both enhanced my leadership role and brought improvements to my practice which together supported the necessary conditions to improve literacy delivery. My leadership practices were critical in this evolution of change at the school level (Louis, et al., 1996; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; W. Smith & Andrews, 1989).

6.5.6 Literacy Leadership

I learned that the elementary schoolhouse has myriad on-going demands that necessitate the full attention of its teachers and principal, and that changing instructional practices and promoting student success are complex issues that must be very carefully nurtured in a fertile environment in a culture of learning. I have come to fully comprehend that the early work that I did when first appointed (that I off-handedly refer to as "my housecleaning years") was in fact extremely important. The tasks I undertook in the early stages that are documented in Chapters One and Four built a literacy-based learning culture in the school (Sergiovanni, 1984, 1995, 2000) and if I had not done so, none of the literacy advancements would have been possible.

Reflective practice provided me with instructional awareness and this learning enabled me to engage in professionally rich dialogues with my teaching colleagues about how to assist them in improving their practices. The development of effective literacy-teaching practices in the school is well documented in Chapter Four. The analysis of my findings

shows that my work was effective in both changing teaching practices and improving student learning. My instructional leadership was shown to contribute to student success. But in order for me to lead literacy initiatives and then later to be able to share this instructional leadership with staff, I first had to be instructed in literacy-teaching practices. By doing so, I became the lead learner who modeled for teachers the importance of learning more about literacy. Chapter Five's analysis illustrates that my knowledge had evolved to synthesizing literacy information and then applying very effective literacy interventions which is supported by respondents' comments. My learning framed for teachers the importance of investing time in improving their own teaching practices and adopting new strategies.

As I now answer the critical question, "Did I accomplish what I set out to do in this study?" My simple answer is yes and there is evidence to substantiate this claim in a trustworthy manner as evidenced in Chapter Five. The results of the questionnaire and especially the written comments support my claim that my leadership role had been pivotal in improving literacy-teaching in the school. Our school community could have made greater gains but given the circumstances and especially considering the distance of the journey we had successfully travelled since my early days in the school, the results are very satisfying. In my role, I did improve students' literacy by enhancing literacy-teaching practices.

6.6 The Study

My action research study was shaped to a great degree by its context and by its contributors – the administrators, the teachers, the parents, and the students and, as such, its results are really the sum of the work of the collective whole. Enough cannot be said about how the many variables contained within this study impacted on my practice – some positively and

some negatively. As this study concludes, I can say with certainty, that the overall experience I gained and the changes made to my practice were extremely positive.

6.6.1 Limitations of the Study

While action research is set in the field with its reflection cycles directing changes, the activities within one's practice nevertheless unfold in the natural setting of its everyday context. Through reflection I had formulated a detailed action plan using the concept of professional learning communities (PLC) to frame our literacy improvement endeavours. It was a plan in which I had invested considerable time and effort. Teachers had been consulted and through their initiative we had received a grant to further explore this concept – initially one that was enthusiastically supported by staff. But due to a decision to file a grievance, my well thought out plan had to be abandoned as I suddenly found myself unable to work with teachers as I had previously done. Our efforts to grow a PLC in our school were suspended and because a ruling on the grievance had broad ramifications, its resolution took nearly two years. During this period, I found myself powerless and forced to re-route my activities to improve literacy and my study in mid-stream.

In the interim, I had to very carefully examine what direction I could take in regards to my study as my practice did not halt and nor did my research. I needed to seek an alternative course of action and assessment was a logical extension to the work we had been doing. In evaluation and reporting, the lines of responsibility are contractually very clearly drawn, which made it easier to move in this direction. However, faced with a restricted professional learning environment I was unable to foster a more collaborative approach to developing assessment practices for learning. The tragedy of our literacy assessment journey was that much of it transpired under duress and thereby our creative enthusiasm and progress was

limited. In retrospect, I should have been more sensitive to how to advance assessment practices in a less overwhelming fashion and made greater efforts to be more supportive of the staff who continuously juggled the many demands made of them daily as inner city teachers.

In a different context, I would not have introduced improvements to assessment practices in the manner that I did. I would have chosen to investigate this literacy intervention only when it arose as an area to be addressed from conversations within our literacy professional learning community. However, given my realities and our 'organizational barriers' (Harris & Lambert, 2003, p. xix) I did not feel that I had many other options to pursue with staff other than to continue working on improving literacy through changing assessment practices.

This period of labour unrest led to what I consider to be a significant limitation in my study as it was an uncontrolled variable that my real world research setting could not filter out. The inherent nature of action research did not permit me to get other subjects for my study or run other tests. The greatest strength of action research – being able to study one's practice in the natural setting of everyday context had proven in my study to be its greatest limitation. Undoubtedly, this action had a direct impact on my research findings and my study's outcome.

Did the benefit to our students outweigh the toll that assessment took on the staff and thereby justify the means? I find this question hard to answer because the questionnaire told me how the teachers really felt about assessment and my demands on them. I can say that in the context it seemed the right thing to do and the resulting reflective teaching practices that ensued from probing more deeply into assessment for learning did change how teachers taught literacy especially for students with special education needs.

6.6.1.1 Power Differential

Throughout the study I was keenly aware of the tensions arising from the dual nature of my work as researcher and practitioner; and adding further tension was the authority assigned to my role in the school. I had to downplay my authority (Clay, 2001; Zeni, 2001) in order to encourage teachers to take more active leadership roles in the creation of a PLC. There were many times that I wanted to direct this activity or to move it forward at a faster rate but to foster teacher leadership, I refrained from intervening. I found this tension to be another limitation in the study as it restricted my full participation in key aspects of my research. This became extremely problematic during the grievance period as I was cast as the outsider. As principal I could not ask the teachers to continue their after school discussions and to work on further developing our PLC; whereas had I been a teacher researcher I might have been able to strategize a different tactic and likely one that would have been viewed favourably by staff. I would have been able to play a more central role in this critical aspect of the study.

6.7 Contributions of the Study

There is so little known about how principals actually go about doing their work in schools that I have chosen to lay open my practice to everyone to see. In essence, how does a principal go about informing her practice? My contribution to living educational theory is my documented professional practice that details my literacy development and professional growth as a school leader. It extends beyond an ethnographic or autobiographical account of my role because I was testing a living educational theory as I sought to illustrate how the role of the principal actually affects the teaching of literacy. The driving force behind my action research study was not simply to improve my practice but to truly understand it – to understand why and how I do what I choose to do as a principal.

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I know that I started off knowing nothing about effective literacy-teaching practices and my study was predicated on the premise that if I could learn about literacy practices, then I could activate changes to teaching practices that would improve student literacy. From my reflective practice, the nine literacy interventions emerged and they were found to be effective in improving teachers' literacy-teaching skills and students' results. The interventions are not new interventions and are in fact common practices that all effective literacy teachers adopt. The questionnaire results indicate that I was an effective literacy principal and that the interventions adopted in the school resulted in changes that improved how teachers taught literacy. These changes impacted positively on student literacy achievement as evidenced in our DRA results.

The sum of these changes resulted in the formation of an effective school that is substantiated in a note at year end (2004) from a supervising senior administrator who makes reference to my school running like "a well-oiled machine" which is a statement about how well our school operated. The results of my study documented in Chapter Five support the findings of Chrisman (2005) who from examining school improvement in 430 Californian schools claims that, "….improved student achievement seems to be the product of how well a school operates and depends on the quality of leadership and the effectiveness of instructional programs and practices" (p. 17). My study therefore meets Chrisman's (2005) criteria for how schools improve student achievement and serves as a living example of how a principal can affect literacy improvement. The findings from my study also support those from Coburn's (2005) study that demonstrate student learning is enhanced when principals become more effective pedagogical leaders by engaging in informed practice. But my

research extends beyond Coburn's by illustrating what steps a principal can take to inform her own practice

These insights serve to encourage other school administrators to adopt reflective practice to strengthen both teacher and student learning through the "think-act-reflect" cycles of action research thereby offering significant contributions to the field. I accept that I am publicly accountable for my work, that it will be critiqued by my educator colleagues, and that my research needs to meet high standards of judgments. Without these rigorous standards of social judgment, my research is subjective and offers little to education.

6.7.1 Contributions to Practice

The final question to answer is, "Are my findings generalizable and how my study can help other principals?" This study can be used to guide other principals' work through its illustration of how and what strategies can be deployed to improve literacy results. I believe that colleagues in the field choosing to conduct similar work will relate to my work on improving my practice. The data analysis shown in Chapter Five ranked the literacy interventions and my effectiveness as a literacy principal. In conducting this analysis, an assessment tool was created that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of principals who are implementing strategies to improve literacy-teaching and learning. The work principals do to apply literacy interventions can now be measured and ranked in their order of effective application. This study's findings can be used by other principals to examine more intricately their practice and the strategies they are employing to improve student literacy. My living theory about the nine literacy interventions does not provide a rule for how other principals should conduct their literacy practices but my work does provide a framework for others to

use to construct what is relevant in their particular situations and then measure their own success.

The experiences I have shared, suggest that every principal has the potential to become an effective literacy principal as long as there is commitment to learn about literacy practices and to do whatever is required to change teaching practices to enhance student learning. While each school is unique, the fundamental issues are constant as all elementary school principals encounter many of the same challenges that I faced.

On a deeper level, and for those interested in school leadership, my study exposes the realities of the schoolhouse in action and offers some solutions and possibly what to avoid. To paraphrase Whitehead (2004), my study has evaluated new initiatives and developed a conceptual model that can be used as a resource within the broader community of practice (p.2). This point was verified when I was asked to be a presenter at an international *Solution Tree Conference* (Toronto, February, 2009) to share my leadership journey. My two sessions were largely attended by school administrators – many of whom individually and enthusiastically thanked me at the end of each session stating that my work resonated with them because so many of my 'issues' were also their 'issues' and they could relate to the solutions that I chose to use. Finally, my analysis of leadership styles and my attempts at sharing leadership should help principals to reflect on their own practice and develop procedures appropriate to their contexts.

6.7.2 Considerations for Future Research

From the findings some questions arise that relate to the patterns found in the questionnaire's responses. As shown in the previous chapter, administrators and teachers consistently ranked my effectiveness in comparable ways. If this study were to be duplicated as closely as

possible in other schools would the same pattern appear in the rankings? Would senior administrators demonstrate similar responses to those of the teaching staff but tend to rank the effectiveness of the principals' work consistently higher than teachers? Do parents always view these interventions quite differently from the professionals working in the field? If principals want to improve literacy then are these interventions the areas to pursue and should they be applied in their descending order of effectiveness as ranked in this study or not? The answers to these questions can only be achieved through additional and comparable studies that would study trends to determine if there is support for the findings that are evident in my research study. These patterns may be of interest and could be used to guide or shape future studies.

One last question comes to mind and not one directly arising from the study, but one that interests me as a researcher. Namely, as my study took place in an inner city elementary school, I question if teachers would view literacy interventions (my nine interventions) similarly in a non-inner city school? I raise this question because so much of my practice was tremendously influenced by its context and several of the teachers' written comments in the questionnaire confirm that working in such a fluid and unpredictable environment affected their teaching practice. This aspect of the study and its relevance to practitioners may also be of interest to researchers working in this field.

6.8 Final Thoughts

My reflective practice was informed by the think-act-reflect cycles (Schon, 1983) and strengthened by input from critical friends. In this manner, action research enabled me to comprehend the phenomenon of school leadership to improve my practice, to explore my hegemonic role in changing teaching practices, and to test effective literacy interventions.

Ethically it was essential that my praxis be informed so that my actions would promote successful literacy interventions to improve students' literacy.

Even though our school exuded the impression that it ran smoothly, from my perspective I did not always sense that such a smooth operation was underway in the building. Although I was organized and followed a vision to build literacy capacity and sought input from critical friends to refine my literacy vision for the school – my daily activity level was often racing and at times chaotic as I strove to meet the onslaught of the needs of students, their parents and those of the staff. Our school's road to school improvement was far from smooth and in fact I would suggest that my effectiveness stemmed from my inherent ability to quickly assess the situation, change direction as needed and provide appropriate interventions in a timely fashion. My actual work performed in implementing effective instructional programs and practices did not transpire as calmly or in as orderly a fashion as is illustrated in the many vignettes shared in this thesis. I came to fully comprehend that directing effective school change is a messy and at times a convoluted process.

I cannot take all of the credit for engineering the school's literacy success. There were many contributing elements to the school's change that were not directly related to my leadership and some of these elements became catalysts that helped shape the change process. I capitalized on these causal factors and used them as agents of change when I could – the prime one being the implementation of the new Québec Education Program (QEP). As we became a bigger school our finances grew proportionately, providing us with new quality learning materials that encouraged teachers to try new approaches. There was also the rapid growth in student population bringing several new teachers to join our school's teaching team that allowed me to hand pick teachers who had traits that were needed to complement

those of my existing staff. I deliberately selected experienced, confident, hard working and skilled literacy teachers. Where possible, teacher input and participation in these elements of the change process were strongly encouraged, and this engagement softened the winds of change a little.

As the staff grew more professionally confident, I grew more confident as their principal and over time there was less urgency on my part to make so many wide sweeping changes at such a furious rate. Fundamental changes had enabled the staff to move from updating teaching practices to be more current with those of other educators, to examining more closely what was needed for our school with its challenging student clientele. As teachers slowly developed into a professional community of practice, I moved from change agent to educational leader with a deeper sense of pedagogy now driving our professional learning community that encouraged teachers to become risk-takers to do whatever it takes to improve student learning.

The strong steps that I first took when arriving at the school did change the school's culture. Without first changing the learning climate within the school, there would have been no fertile ground to plant the seeds of second-order change (Fullan, 2005b). Over time, teachers truly evolved in their professional practices and the school became a different school because of our literacy efforts. I now find it hard to think back to the school's situation nine years ago. As one teacher who had also been a former student teacher in our school expressed in a year-end note:

> I have seen such change at this school since my student teaching….so many of them due to your positive influence and adventurous influence…. *(Excerpt for teacher's note – June, 2006).*

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If I had to do it all over again, there are not too many things that I would do differently other than the handling of the grievance period as my study's findings show that positive changes occurred. My practice has been enriched by my study as I grew professionally and became a literacy principal.

I continue to grow in my senior administrator position at the school board now overseeing literacy programs along with student assessment and reporting in all of our schools. I have to thank my former teachers for training me so well in literacy and for teaching me how to improve my leadership skills. The greatest flaw that my former teachers will probably identify is that I made high and at times unrealistic demands of them and did not give them enough encouragement and recognition for the fine work they did. They would be right, and in my practice, I still need to learn to smile more and to learn more about sharing leadership.

The legacy I left the school I hope was instilling professional pride in the teaching staff to always be the best teachers they can be, not to fear new ideas and changes to teaching practices and most importantly to continue growing professionally. I recently had the pleasure of attending a Leading School Network Conference (April 2009) as a member of the provincial committee that oversees this work. One of the Lead Schools was George Etienne Cartier and I was very pleased to see that, a year and a half later since my departure from the school, the teachers' presentation was about assessment practices – their creation of writing exemplars coupled with curriculum mapping that assessed expected writing outcomes over the three elementary cycles of learning as outlined by the QEP. Their work was an extension of the research we had conducted on authentic student assessment. I was so pleased to see that the teachers and their new principal were continuing this work. When I later showed

their work to a visiting Ministry level language arts consultant, she was very impressed and requested a copy to share provincially. I came away feeling so proud of my former teachers and now confident that I had left behind a successful community of practice centered on literacy. So in the end, my legacy to the school and its teachers was successful and my mission was accomplished.

Action research must be carried out in the real world, with real people, not in a laboratory, and the real world is a messy place and real people are unpredictable. But the rewards of an action research study are potentially greater, and the rewards of this study, both to myself on a professional level, as well as to a staff of teacher-professionals and – most important – to continuing cohorts of students have been proved in the preceding pages.

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APPENDIX A:

TENSIONS IN CREATING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY AND

SCHOOL SUCCESS TARGETS

Need to create and achieve goals by set deadlines Vs Need to create a professional atmosphere in which teachers set goals and time frames

School accountability Vs Teacher accountability

Principal as educational leader Vs Principal as educational coach

English Program Needs Vs French Immersion Program Needs

Regular student needs Vs Needs of students with special profiles

External needs Vs Internal needs

Common targets for all students in the cycle Vs Strand targets for different levels of learners

THE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

1.   What specifically have you done in your school towards supporting your Accountability Plan as we discussed last November?

- *I have been gathering information about effective schools and literacy initiatives that work by visiting schools in Edmonton with balanced literacy and attending conferences and workshops in Jan. and Feb. 2002*
- *I have shared DRA and DWA results as we compare to the rest of the Board with the staff on February 8th P.D. day.*
- *The staff responded to teacher input survey re: DRA and DWA assessment for [the Director of Education] on Feb. 8th*
- *Shared my observations/findings from my visit to Edmonton and Literacy Conference and overview given by [Edmonton School Board language Arts consultant] on Feb. 8th*
- *Shared presentation given to senior admin. on Feb. 12th with staff on Feb. 20th on balanced literacy*
- *As per attached notes I have re-organized staff meetings in Jan. and Feb. to be work sessions on literacy for teachers by cycle and will continue practice into March and assess our progress*

2.   Attach the dates/minutes and/or newsletters of staff/school board meetings, governing board meetings or other meetings in which it clearly shows that you have been discussing your accountability plan with your staffs and educational community.

- *Accountability plan shared with teachers & Governing Board members in October and November 2001*
- *Board results of DRA and DWA shared with teachers in Feb. 2002*
- *Accountability update to Governing Board Feb. 25th 2002*

Comments: Governing Board and teachers are very concerned about our results. Teachers are getting demoralized and need a definitive action plan to restore confidence. They are very defensive at present. Parents have a difficult time accepting that the supply of our literacy books is still so scarce even though we keep buying.
Note: Will not forward a copy of balanced literacy proposal as it has been shared on Feb. 12th with senior Administration, unless another copy is requested.

3.   You are now halfway through the school year, are you accomplishing the targets you set out for your school in your accountability plan? Explain your answer:

It is too early to tell if we will meet our goals as set out in accountability statement Dec. 2001. Teachers are aware of goals and working with students. We

are going to have some mock assessment after the March break to see if we are getting close to hitting targets – namely, our cycle 2/2 classes and cycle 3/2 classes.

4.   What support do you need to help you achieve your goals which you discussed with me last November?

I need help working with my staff. They need uplifting yet at the same time must in several cases improve/change teaching practices and several teachers need assistance in doing so. Some are feeling overwhelmed. We continue to need materials as we study/examine successful models we recognize that our literacy resources are still scant in the school. We are working on bringing a school that had no book resources up to speed as well as cope with constant growth in student population. We appreciate the financial support that we have received from the Board but we are still very much playing catch-up. I am working on creating the beginning of a literacy room as well as build up our library resources both for students and for teachers. The teachers need good and current professional reading resources to help them with developing their practice. Lastly, I would love to have a balanced literacy program in the school and I need help to do this.

5.   What are your specific plans to accomplish your accountability statement between now and June 2002?

- *I am setting times for teachers to talk about literacy practices and piggy back good ideas with one another.*
- *We are examining our results and I will be meeting with teachers one on one to discuss what they are specifically doing in helping the different groups that they have in their class after the March break.*
- *As previously discussed we are running some mock assessment exercises to see if we are hitting targets.*

Name: Marian Lothian
School/Centre: George Etienne Cartier Elementary School (GECES)
Date: Feb. 22, 2002
DF/ed

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VISUAL PRESENTATION OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM MODEL

Action

Mentoring
Meeting with
Teachers

Reflection

Action

Cycle
Meeting with
Teachers

Reflection

Action

Mentoring
Meeting with
Teachers
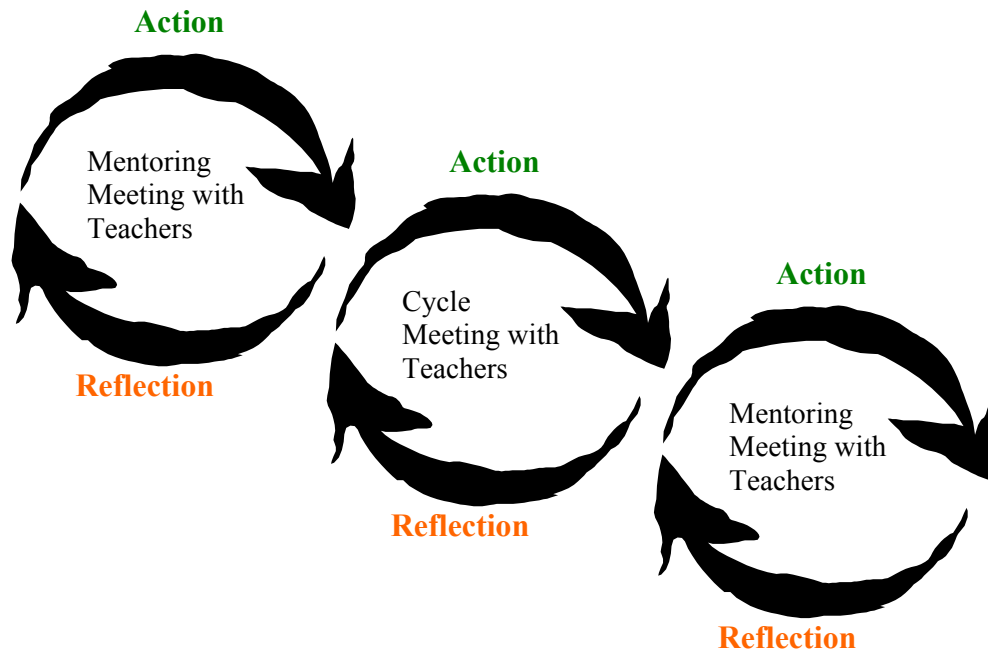
Reflection

Figure 9:

Action/Reflection Cycles of the Oct.-Nov. 2003 Study

- First cycle represents first meeting with teachers this fall to further explore the initial concept of working towards forming a professional learning community in our school (teachers at an earlier meeting outside of this study agreed to explore this concept for our school) -ACTION

- Second cycle represents cycle meeting following the first mentoring meeting with teachers, upon REFLECTION from the staff's reaction to earlier meetings it was decided by the principal and the resource teacher that this meeting would focus on trying to establish literacy targets- ACTION

- Third cycle represents a mentoring meeting following a critical friends meeting composed of the principal, resource teacher and outside professional (principal on leave who has agreed to mentor our staff in this process) to discuss work and reactions of teaching staff to date-REFLECTION. This professional dialogue then led to the structuring of the mentoring meeting with teachers -ACTION

COMMUNICATION PACKAGE FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE

D.1. The Invitation to Participate Letter

April 9th, 2007.

Dear colleagues,

As you know, I am studying in a doctoral program in education administration at McGill University. My research has taken the format of action research that has focused on my work as a principal and how this role impacts on the teaching of literacy and students' literacy results. I am now at the stage in my research where I need to seek input from my colleagues about my work in the school.

The purpose of this note is to invite you to be involved in my research and to give me about 30 minutes of your time to provide me with some feedback. You do not have to be a literacy expert or have had a long-time association with me at GECES. All that I require is your honest feedback based on your observations of my work and practice in the time that you have known me. I really need your input so that I can analyze my work more objectively.

Your involvement will involve completing a questionnaire of 31 questions (Part A) adapted from The Literacy Principal by David Booth and Jennifer Rowsell using a five point rating scale and then you will be asked to answer five questions requiring more detailed anecdotal responses (Part B). Both parts should require no more than a total of about 30 minutes of your time or less. Your answers can all be done online or if you prefer, you can download the questionnaire and write in your answers manually. You may respond in English or French.

All your responses will be kept confidential by forwarding them to a third party from McGill University who is not affiliated with our school board to protect your anonymity. Your questionnaires will be stripped of any identifying features and then be forwarded to another McGill graduate student. This student will tabulate your responses for me. When I receive the data from McGill all I will have is a collection of answers without any identifying features so you will remain anonymous to me.

Attached above are a consent form that discusses your involvement more thoroughly that must be completed and your copy of the questionnaire. It is also important that if you choose to be involved in my research that your feedback is returned to the email address or to the street address on the questionnaire no later than April 21st. As a student, I need your feedback and I sincerely hope that each of you will give this request serious consideration. I deeply appreciate your time and support.

Thank you: Marian Lothian☺

D.2. The Participant's Consent Form

Name of Researcher: Marian Lothian

Institution, Faculty, Department: McGill University, Education, Integrated Studies PhD Program

Telephone Number: (xxx) xxx-xxxx, cell (xxx) xxx-xxxx

E-mail address: [researcher's e-mail address]

I, _____ (Name of research respondent), agree to participate in a research study called: "The study of a principal's practice in creating literacy-based professional learning community" conducted by Marian Lothian as part of her doctoral dissertation for McGill University. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of the principal in changing literacy-teaching practices to improve students' literacy. Its focus is on the role of the principal in improving literacy.

I understand that the questionnaire consists of two parts (A & B). I will be asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of thirty one questions using a five point rating scale (part A) and to answer six broad questions in written form (part B) that will be emailed to me on April 9, 2007. My responses to part B will be anecdotal and will include comments that I believe will contribute to the researcher's analysis and understanding of her role in this study. I can respond to these questions in English or French. Both parts of the questionnaire will be forwarded to a third party (not affiliated with the [my] School Board) via email or by post however I prefer to respond. This third party will remove all identifying features from my responses before forwarding them to another McGill graduate student who will compile data collected from all the responses. When all the responses have been tabulated, this information will be forwarded to the researcher, Marian Lothian.

I understand that the contents of my answers will be used for research purposes only and that my confidentiality will be respected at all times as my responses may contain personal professional information. Anonymity will be assured in the following manner: neither name nor grade level taught will be used at any time and any details about me that could identify me will be changed as required. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.

I understand that I too must respect the confidentiality of my responses as they relate to the professionalism of the researcher in her role as principal. I have been informed that all analysis will be shared with all research respondents through the third party. I can also request that any or all portions pertaining to me not be used if I find the contents unacceptable.

This questionnaire and responses plus other data will be kept in a secure manner in a locked location determined by the researcher. This information may be kept for a period of five years and will only be accessed by the researcher for study purposes. After such time the data will be destroyed.

There are two copies of this consent form - one that I will download for my files and the second copy will be electronically filled in and forwarded to [name of researcher's colleague] at [e-mail address of researcher's colleague] .

If returned by post, one copy will be downloaded for my files and the second copy will be mailed to:

[name and address of researcher's colleague**]**

If I have any questions about the nature of the research project, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor:

 Dr. Kate Le Maistre at McGill University at kate.le.maistre@mcgill.ca.

- I understand the nature of the research and my involvement in it and I agree to participate by responding to the questionnaire.

Please check one response by placing an X in the box: [YES _____] [NO_____]

<u>For electronic return</u>:

An X in the box indicates that I have read and understand that when this is returned electronically, I am giving legal consent.

Research subject's signature (please type in your name to replace signature if returned electronically):

_____

Date: _____

<u>For Postal return:</u>

Research subject's signature (please sign and print name):

_____

Date: _____

D.3. E-mail Reminder to Participants

Hello,

Just a short friendly reminder! If you have not had time to respond to my research questionnaire please consider taking a few minutes this weekend to do so. My research will be so much stronger and far more valid with your important input!

Thanks again. I truly appreciate your taking a little time to do this for me.

Marian☺

D.4. The Questionnaire

Please note that there are two parts to this questionnaire (A & B). Part A should take less than ten minutes to complete and for part B, response time will vary but approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

- **Please return completed electronic questionnaire to:** [name of researcher's colleague] **at**

[E-mail address of researcher's colleague] **(All your responses will be kept confidential.)**

- **Or if you prefer you can download this questionnaire, fill in your answers manually and mail your responses to:** [name of researcher's colleague]

Please return your questionnaire as soon as possible before April 21st.

Part A

Please indicate the category that best describes your relationship with Marian Lothian:

Teacher	
Parent	
School Administrator	

If you are a teacher please indicate the teaching level that best describes you:

Primary (Kindergarten to grade 3)	
Senior elementary (grades 4 to 6)	

If you are a teacher please indicate the number of years you have taught at G.E.C.E.S.:

0 to 7 years	
8 years or more	

In the following pages you will find 31 questions that have been adapted from "*The Literacy Principal*" by David Booth and Jennifer Roswell (2002).

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Please use this rating scale to describe how often you have seen Marian engaged in these activities.

Rating	*Most of the time*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Don't know*
Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Please type/mark your score (number 1 to 5) in the box beside each question.					

In support of literacy, Marian:

1. Reviews all literacy initiatives in the school with the staff.	
2. Encourages staff to engage in professional development to enhance the teaching of literacy.	
3. Encourages teachers to reflect and share ideas in order to plan instruction, monitor, and assess student development in all areas of literacy.	
4. Provides preparation time for staff to develop and plan literacy initiatives.	
5. Assigns appropriate resource personnel to coach and mentor literacy teachers.	
6. Ensures that teacher timetables reflect a school-wide priority for literacy by providing hour and a half to two hour blocks in each class to teach reading and writing every day.	
7. Ensures that students' literacy skills are regularly assessed for learning	
8. Ensures teachers have adequate literacy supplies and materials	
9. Provides effective and inviting workspaces and reading resources	
10. Sets a culture within the school for a change in literacy reporting practices to reflect the literacy competencies outlined in the Q.E.P (Québec Education Program).	

Rating	*Most of the time*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Don't know*
Score	1	2	3	4	5
Please type/mark your score (number 1 to 5) in the box beside each question.					

Within literacy teaching blocks, Marian encourages:

11. A time for teachers to read to children daily.	
12. A daily silent-reading time for students to select their own books.	
13. Opportunities for group reading and interactive response.	
14. Rehearsed oral reading by the students for real purposes such as reader's theatre or book buddies.	
15. Reading conferences that allow teachers to observe the reading strategies individual children are using and to assess the meaning as they read.	
16. The integration of what children read with their writing.	
17. Block time to engage in different aspects of the writing process.	
18. Attention to the use of word walls to teach how words work and sight vocabulary.	
19. Assistance for at-risk students in the form of remedial support and/or second language support where needed	
20. The opportunity for students to work in flexible groupings and settings with other children to reinforce particular skills and knowledge	

Rating	*Most of the time*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Don't know*
Score	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Please type/mark your score (number 1 to 5) in the box beside each question.					

To promote effective literacy teaching practices, Marian:

21. Sets a culture within the school to improve the teaching of literacy	
22. Offers administrative support and leadership in the teaching of literacy	
23. Frees up time for literacy professional development	
24. Exhibits and circulates professional literacy materials (e.g., articles, books, etc…)	
25. Creates collaborative networks for teachers by cycle level and interest	
26. Shares information about successful literacy programs	
27. Finds personnel and resources to support literacy professional development	
28. Consults outside sources and professional materials for up-to-date guidelines on running and implementing literacy programs	
29. Is receptive to literacy research projects conducted by other school boards and colleges	
30. Shares literacy assessment and data with teachers to enhance the teaching of literacy	
31. Demonstrates commitment to continued literacy improvement.	

Do you have any other comments that you would like to add about the teaching of literacy in the school, or about this study? If so, please include them here:

Part B

5 Follow-up questions – your chance to elaborate

- **Please respond to the following questions providing as much description as possible.**
- **Please note that the boxes are expandable so you may write your detailed responses and not be limited by space.**
- **Please respond in either English or French.**

1. What initiatives do you think have been most effective in improving literacy teaching practices in the school? (Please describe the initiatives and their impact on literacy).

Response #1

2. What initiatives did not enhance literacy teaching practices or may even have deterred students' literacy progress? (Please describe the initiatives and why you believe that these proved to be unsuccessful).

Response #2

3. What literacy initiatives would you have liked to have seen implemented and believe would have been successful in enhancing literacy in the school? (Please explain why you selected these initiatives, why you believe they might have a positive impact on the school's literacy and why you think that they were not implemented).

> **Response #3**

4. During the time that Marian has been principal (nearly seven years), have you witnessed any changes to the school's culture and learning environment that have affected the teaching of literacy? What were the changes and what caused them?

> **Response #4**

5. Do you think that, overall, Marian has had a positive or negative influence on literacy teaching practices? Please give examples.

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Response #5




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6. Please add any other comments that you may have about this study or about literacy teaching practices.

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Comment B/Response #6




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Thank you very much for taking the time to respond to this questionnaire and for helping me with the study!

THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

E.1. Responses to 31 Likert Scale Questions in Part A

Question	Participant																											
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10	T11	T12	T13	P1	P2	P3
Q1	5	1	5	5	5	1	1	1	2	1	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	5
Q2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5
Q3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	5
Q4	2	1	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	5	5	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	5
Q5	1	2	1	5	1	1	5	2	2	2	5	5	1	3	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	5
Q6	5	1	1	5	5	1	5	5	1	1	5	1	5	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2	1	1	5	1	5
Q7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Q8	2	1	5	1	5	1	1	5	1	2	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	2	2	1	1	1
Q9	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1
Q10	2	1	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5
Q11	2	1	5	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	5	5
Q12	5	1	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1
Q13	5	1	1	5	5	1	1	1	5	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	5
Q14	5	2	1	5	5	5	5	1	5	2	5	1	1	3	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	5	5
Q15	5	2	1	5	5	1	5	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	5
Q16	5	1	1	5	5	1	5	5	5	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	5	1	1	5	2	2	5	2	1	1	5
Q17	5	1	1	5	5	1	5	2	1	2	5	1	1	1	2	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	1	5
Q18	5	1	1	5	5	1	5	5	5	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	5
Q19	1	1	1	5	5	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Q20	5	1	1	5	5	1	1	5	2	2	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	5
Q21	2	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Q22	2	2	1	5		1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	1
Q23	2	1	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Q24	5	1	1	5		1	1	1	1	1	2	5	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1
Q25	5	2	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Q26	5	2	1	1		5	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	5
Q27	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Q28	5	2	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	5	2	2	1	1	5
Q29	5	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	5
Q30	1	1	1	5		1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Q31	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

E.2. Anecdotal Responses to Parts A and B of the Questionnaire

Participant	Comments (A)
ADMINISTRATORS' WRITTEN RESPONSES	
A1	I was very impressed with the level to which literacy was the focus at GECES during my tenure. It is my opinion that students definitely benefit from the efforts.
A2	The teaching of literacy has greatly improved and become a focus in the school since Marian joined the staff. Her commitment to spending resources on books and literature has increased every year.
A5	I do not know of the day to day operation within the school. Marion is always professional and interested in doing the best for the students and teachers. She is open to new ideas and actively tries to incorporate these into her school. However, Marion's teachers feel overburdened. They feel, more strongly than most schools I visit, that there are too many initiates and demands. Streamlining efforts may yield better results.
A6	Marian has worked diligently to ensure that her teachers have as much pd as possible to help them improve literacy levels in the school. She makes excellent use of data provided by the board and helps her teachers direct their student groupings and teaching strategies accordingly. I wish all principals had the same level of expertise and commitment!
A7	Although it is 3 years since I worked with Marian, I feel my assessment in this study is reflective of a very dedicated professional teacher and administrator who has made the improvement of literacy in her school the number one priority. It should be noted that GECES school is the most multi-cultural elementary school in [our school board] and therefore, the teaching of literacy is challenging.
A8	I have reported on what I know of my colleagues' school from: talking to her staff at various meetings; professional dialogue at management meetings; and discussions at our informal "professional learning community meetings
A9 Note: This participant's handwriting was a bit difficult to read.	Marian has clearly focussed on this element in leading her school. She has taken steps to inform herself by visiting literacy programs in other schools.
A11	There are many questions that I am unable to respond to and I apologize for that. I am the Board's Psychologist and although I have known Marian for many years, as a teacher and as an administrator. I am not involved that much with the overall teaching of literacy in the school. My involvement with Marian has been with special needs students and to the extent that their needs are met in the school, I can respond to some of these questions.

A12	Marian is professional in all education work.
Participant	**Follow-up Question 1**
A1	Providing scheduled Language Arts blocks to allow for small group spec. ed/reading remediation, which in turn provides teachers the opportunity to focus efforts on cohesive student groups and reading levels. *Reading Recovery* for Cycle 1-1 students catches those students who have potential for reading difficulty, offering individualized literacy skills training. Literacy evaluation (DRA) provides consistency and continuity throughout the students' elementary years, and is a tool for teachers to follow the progress. Creation of a Book Room with levelled readers (independent reading, guided reading, shared reading) and Professional Development Material targeting literacy.
A2	The purchase of guided reading materials, books for home reading, extensive purchases for the school library have provided the teacher's necessary resources for teaching literacy. The implementation of the Development Reader's Assessment (DRA) has proved valuable for testing the students and providing concrete evaluations.
A4	The work done through research grants on exemplars, progress folios and evidence of learning, rubrics and student-led conferences. Marian has encouraged her teachers to attend professional development in all areas as she herself is a life-long learner striving to stay au courant of new developments in the field.
A7	Based on my knowledge prior to December 2003: Assessment – use of DRA & DWA Shared reading books Teacher conferences Student conferences Leadership in literacy – particularly initiated by Marian Lothian Classroom practices geared to improving literacy Professional development on literacy
A8	Professional development opportunities Resource support Teacher supporting teachers
A10	This school piloted the new report card with all that that implies. Beginning with the end in mind, the school readjusted its focus to properly assess and evaluate the students. As a result their teaching practices changed and improved. With team meetings, focused P.D. and an encouragement to share what they learned the students benefited immeasurably.

Participant	Follow-up Question 2
A1	I am not in a position to respond adequately to this question.
A2	The Developmental Writers Assessment (DWA) took to long to assess and did not provide concrete levels. It was very bias on the assessment depending which teacher was graded.
A9 Note: This participant's handwriting was a bit difficult to read.	The large turnover in her staff and therefore having to support and mentor an unusually large number of new teachers has diverted her time away from other literacy possibilities.

Participant	Follow-up Question 3
A1	Parent/guardian workshops focusing on developing literacy skills at home would benefit the student, and create an atmosphere of mutual respect.
A2	More support in the early grades, (cycle 1) to help the students get a solid base. More *Reading Recovery* so that they don't get to grade 4 and realize they don't have the skills to be reading at the grade 4 levels. Based on our school population, more ESL training in the early grades. Bottom line is money.
A7	More time, more PD, more resources!

Participant	Follow-up Question 4
A1	Again, I am not in a position to respond adequately to this question as my tenure with GECES was brief. That said, however, I do know that many of those with whom I worked spoke admirably of the changes which had occurred at GECES since Marian's administration began. I can say with certainty that there is a very clear focus on literacy, giving focus to the staff.
A2	There have been huge changes during the time Marian has been principal. Marian has spent a lot of time trying to schedule the classes so there a large blocks of time for teaching literacy. Literacy has become the school's focus. She has brought in experts to mentor the new teachers; she has encouraged cycle meetings so the teachers can work as a group to share the methods for teaching literacy.There has been an increase in the ESL population in the last seven years and Marian has increased resource support for these groups and by scheduling most Language Arts at the same block, students can be pulled out and put in small groups for those needing extra help.
A4	I have known Marian as a fellow administrator and not as my supervisor. I have known her to constantly fight for resources (monetary or staffing) to come to the aid of all her students. She has applied for grants and has worked collaboratively with her colleagues to advance the literacy not only in her school but across our board.
A7	In the first few years that I knew Marian in her principal role, the school's culture changed towards being focused on the improvement of literacy. Her leadership was a "pioneer" and she moved the "settlers" and challenged the "saboteurs"! Not only in her staff but

	also in her parent community…..many of whom were not English mother tongue. This is definitely an example of a strong leader with a shared vision that has been able to bring about change
A9 Note: This participant's handwriting was a bit difficult to read.	Beyond her focus on literacy she has included the very important aspect of student evaluation as a key ingredient in any good pedagogical program. Assessment for learning is critical.
A10	I refer to #1. That had the greatest effect on change.
A11	The population has changed significantly with many new Canadians and many native Canadian students coming to the school. The students have numerous special needs and are often quite a transient population. Also with the amalgamation of the Protestant and Catholic School Boards, the staff has had to adjust to often dramatically opposed teaching philosophies and teaching styles. This has definitely impacted across the curriculum.
A12	In the last 4 years there has been increasing evidence of print [unclear] in the school and progressive [in difficulty – unclear] word banks in each classroom.
Participant	**Follow-up Question 5**
A1	Marian has made a point of providing all possible means to improve the teaching and learning practices at GECES. The teachers involved in the lead school initiatives have taken on responsibility and leadership roles within the school, and their expertise is benefiting both students and staff. What was, by all accounts, a mediocre elementary school before Marian, has become one to be emulated.
A2	She has had a very positive influence on literacy teaching practices. She has invested time and money on many different programs of guided reading and ensuring the teachers have books in their classrooms. The teacher's have also been encouraged to attend many workshops on teaching literacy and to share with their colleagues when they return.
A4	Only positive influences throughout the years. She has extensive knowledge on literacy and constantly seeks out new materials, workshops and research. When interviewing potential candidates for teaching positions, she asks many in-depth questions on literacy to insure that the successful candidate is an asset to her school. She also recommends places to find information to candidates who are weak in the area of literacy.
A7	Very positive – see #4
A9 Note: This participant's handwriting was a bit difficult to read.	There is no doubt that Marian has had a positive impact on literacy. The benefits however will not be known for sometime as she will need to see how her students fare at the high school.
A10	Marian never lets go of something once she is committed and she is passionately committed to improving her students' literacy. This is an

	inner-city school with much cultural diversity.
	Her teachers may not always appreciate her rigor but in the end, the result, I think, has been very good. They know that kids learning and success come first and always with her. The student led conferences have grown and developed over the years and they now have a 98% attendance. Parents are now keen to know what's going on with their children and the community is much more actively involved in the school. With more parent involvement, the teachers are more accountable are encouraged to do their best. The result is improved literacy.
A11	I find Marian to have a wonderful vision for her school and a tireless enthusiasm for trying to meet the needs as she views them. Some teachers, however, find her to be quite demanding and, as a result, there has been tension and unrest amongst the teaching staff which has probably negatively influenced teaching in general.
A12	Positive attitude as noted in the ability of teachers to highlight the importance of reading and writing to student teachers.
Participant	**Comments (B)**
A2	I think that this is a great study for a principal of an elementary school and that we hear more and more in the news how poor the literacy levels are for today's students. However, the bottom line is time and money and as usual there never seems to be enough of either. Since the school's population is always changing and there is a constant influx of ESL students in the year who come and go, it becomes very difficult to serve all the students equally.
A4	On a recent research trip, I was able to observe Marian interacting with principals, teachers and students from various schools. She was very curious to find out what worked for them, to ask where she could procure materials, and to debrief with her colleagues on what she had witnessed. Many discussions ensued on best practices and evidence of learning. She kept everyone on task and focused so we could bring back as much information as possible to help us in our search for effective instruction and learning.
A9 Note: This participant's handwriting was a bit difficult to read.	I believe this is admirable when on top of the challenges of the GECES paradise she has seen fit to pursue her Doctoral studies with a focus on leadership in literacy. Congratulations

TEACHERS' WRITTEN RESPONSES:	
Participant	**Comments (A)**
T2	Marian places a great deal of emphasis on literacy in our school. She is diligent in reminding her staff to strive to create a very literate group. The population at GECES does not lend itself to high literacy scores; however. Marian also makes a good attempt to stay on top of new and successful ways of improving literacy however the resource support in the school needs quite a bit of fine tuning.
T6	There is a difference between mandating time to meet as teams and creating "…collaborative networks for teachers by cycle level and interest." Marian has provided the staff with opportunity for PD. She has brought in assistance from outside the board to act in a supportive role. She readily garners assistance from the spec ed team at the board. She has brought in board level specialists to provide PD. Marian has supplied the literacy room with much professional reading.
T7	Blank: NOTE that the remaining T7 responses are exactly like T4
T8	Marian improved the library resources of the school significantly. Literacy book rooms were established and well stocked with levelled texts and professional materials. Each year additions are made to the book rooms. Marian makes a great deal of professional development and support available to teachers. Two highly competent, experienced resource teachers are also available to support teachers. She has hired outside help [name of literacy consultant] to work with teachers as a coach and mentor. Marian is well versed in Balanced Literacy and can engage in discussions and conversations about any aspect of this with teachers.
T9 (I'm not sure why this appears in strikeout format)	~~Because my time at GECES dates back to 4 and 5 years ago, I am unable to remember a lot of specifics, except that Marian was very interested in exploring all aspects of literacy, and of furthering our practice and study of literacy at the school. She was supportive in every way possible given budget constraints and the fact that she was just beginning to put the emphasis on this new focus.~~
Participant	**Follow-up Question 1**
T1	L'apport de notre personne-ressource a grandement contribué à l'amélioration constante de la qualité en ce qui concerne nos pratiques littéraires. Par son travail acharné, elle guide autant les enfants que les enseignants dans ce domaine.

	Toutefois, il ne faudrait pas oublier le jumelage que constituent les «reading buddies» au sein de notre école. Les enfants de tous âges y prennent de l'assurance et y trouvent leur compte.
T2	Board implemented workshops and meetings help to support teachers to develop programs to improve their literacy programs in the classroom.

Marian is very eager to use DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) scores to motivate teachers to bring up their class scores.

As a staff, we should be teaching each other more. There is quite a lot of expertise within our own school and we need to mentor each other more.

While Marian does not always come to us with the ideas on how to effectively structure a reading block, she does always support ideas/input from staff members when they are offered. |
| T3 | Guided reading is the most literacy teaching practices that was implanted in the school. We received support from the resource teacher. She provided us mini workshop about the literacy strategy. |
| T4 | Good materials provided for teachers
Resource support provided
Team cycle meetings
Professional development |
| T5 | Same as T4 |
| T6 | DRA. Marian introduced formal reading evaluation of all students twice a year. This has enabled teachers to closely look at each student individually. Teacher's practice has changed based upon the knowledge gleamed from this tool.

This year, an ESL class was introduced midyear. The removal of 2-3 children from many of the English stream classes allowed the rest of the class to become more productive. It took one pressure off of the teachers enabling them to focus on the other special needs children within their language program.

Marian has worked hard pushing us to write increasingly detailed report cards. This has resulted in us being forced to develop reflective practices. Over the past 3 years, I have observed both myself and my colleagues becoming more informed about individual students' literary strengths and weakness. We have become better at determining what the next step is for each individual. I believe our literacy teaching practice has grown because of the increased awareness of the individual learners' needs.

Marian introduced the concept of balanced literacy. Teachers' practices have changed reflecting current reading research |

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T7	Good materials provided for teachers Resource support provided Team cycle meetings Professional development
T8	The establishment of literacy book rooms means that: - appealing and appropriate texts for guided reading, home reading, LA units, read aloud and shared reading are organized and readily available to teachers. - books on tape are included to provide support for struggling readers/ESL students - an excellent selection of professional resources is available for teachers and is added to each year - baskets of high quality children's lit is available for kindergarten students to take home for parents to read to them Structures and PD put in place to support literacy teaching/learning: regular literacy meetings scheduled - representatives sent to Board PD sessions for reading comp strategies and 6 Traits - teachers attended IDC each year - resource teachers in place to offer support to teachers and students - outside resources brought in to mentor/coach and provide PD [names of 3 literacy consultants] - teachers taken to Hawaii to visit schools re-assessment - many teachers encouraged to use PIC funds for PD
T9	Time set aside for planning and reviewing new practices in grade groupings, common, school-wide professional development, having an outstanding resource teacher to provide in-services – these initiatives allowed us to support each other in our learning and make sure that we incorporated the new practices into our daily planning and teaching.
T10	I was a Special education Teacher at GECES for only one year. During that year, I went into several classes to support the teacher and students, especially those with exceptionalities. In assigning me this role, Marian intended to support the teaching of literacy by establishing small groups based on ability within the class. Where large class sizes existed, the additional teacher support helped provide attention to the more needy students.
T11	Marian m'a constamment encouragé à faire de la lecture dirigée chaque jour. Beaucoup de livres étaient disponible pour cela, en français et en anglais. Marian a regroupé des élèves de même niveau afin qu'ils puissent travailler ensemble, et ce malgré l'existence de classes multiples. Ce fut très apprécié.

T12	When we had a *Reading Recovery* teacher that was able to teach in this capacity all the time – that was helpful. We had [names of 2 of the Board's literacy consultants] come in one year almost once a week and some of these sessions were very helpful (especially the ones where we began to layout a teaching continuum – i.e. what writing skills, printing skills etc. would be taught in which year)
Participant	**Follow-up Question 2**
T1	Je suis désolée. Je ne vois vraiment pas.
T2	The population of our school consists of a high number of First Nations students. These students tend to be very transient and come and go with very limited English skills. As a result, because their skills are so low, they tend to become a priority for allotted resource time. This takes away from the "home-grown" population who continue to struggle on a year to year basis with us.

The resource program for cycle 2 and 3 students is very inconsistent and needs more dedicated delivery. |
T3	I think that the word wall strategy was not enough used from the teachers as a school project. We received good workshops but it was not enough follow up.
T4	More principal involvement needed in delivery of literacy program Assessment took time away from teaching
T5	Same as T4
T6	I believe that an important part of developing early and later literacy with children is developing trust, risk taking and confidence in the supportive classroom environment. At GECES, the children have been time tabled in such a manner that many of the youngsters interact with 4, 5, 6 or more teachers. This breaks up their day. It breaks up the flow of their thinking process and breaks up the development of their relationships with significant adults within the school. Furthermore the QEP challenges us to offer integrated units incorporating several competencies from different subject areas. This valuable integration of ideas and skills is lost due to the number of teachers involved in each class. The opportunity for developing authentic literacy assignments is compromised.
T7	More principal involvement needed in delivery of literacy program Assessment took time away from teaching
T9	I cannot specifically remember any that might have deterred students' progress.
T10	The same intended team teaching model did not work in some classes because the teacher may have felt that the SERT was imposed upon them. If the teacher was unwilling to plan and execute the lesson jointly, given consideration for the modified expectations of the exceptional learner, than the initiative was doomed from the outset. The highly qualified spec ed teacher was then turned into a glorified

	educational assistant. Such was the unintended outcome of Marian's initiative.
T11	Le manque de livres dans les classes. Ma classe était complètement vide de livres pour les temps libre. J'ai moi- même du dépenser des centaines de dollar de ma poche pour acheter des livres usage pour mes élèves. Le maintient d'une ambiance de travail négative et le style de gestion autoritaire ne laissant que peu de place au jugement professionnel des enseignants. Lorsque le moral est miné, il est rare de voir les enseignants s'élancer dans de grands projets de literai.
T12	It has been difficult when we have been asked to work on many different projects or initiatives at once – it is much easier to focus on one initiative at a time in order to become more efficient.
Participant	**Follow-up Question 3**
T1	Les initiatives qui sont en place m'apparaissent bien implantées.
T2	One idea would be to support new teachers with teacher mentor programs. Instead of going in to evaluate, the principal (or other senior teachers) could be going in to work side by side and coach the new teachers. Another idea would be to take more time to celebrate some of the many small achievements that happen on an ongoing basis in the school. (I don't know if that's what you mean by initiatives, but I feel they would help)
T3	I do believe that assessment in the portfolio would be a good way to engage the students in their own learning. Portfolio was part of our school literacy teaching. The student led conference was also an important way to teach to the students. However, to go deeply in their learning would be interesting. At the same time, it is so many strategies that are implanted in the evaluation of a student. It is almost impossible to use all of them at the same time. The most important is that the school was working on improving that strategy.
T4	Many literacy initiatives have been successful More regrouping of students reading at same level Appropriate assessment tools for younger students
T5	Same as T4
T6	I would have liked to see some mixing of the French immersion children in with the English stream students for certain units of study. I believe that Marian would have supported this endeavour. I think it wasn't implemented because many of us were planning short term only. This makes it difficult to inter-plan with colleagues.
T7	Many literacy initiatives have been successful More regrouping of students reading at same level

	Appropriate assessment tools for younger students
T9	I cannot think of any.
T10	Looking back six years, I would venture to guess that any literacy initiative that staff was willing to try would have been welcomed. Institutional problems exist when the teachers within a grade or division are not willing to adjust to change. Teachers, who have been doing things one way for a long time, find new initiatives difficult to implement. Some of the staff needed to attend some PD to be able to stand back and see a new direction for personal and professional growth.
T11	I can't think of any.
T12	This year, some teachers were involved in 6 Traits workshops – but I believe it would have been much more productive if all of us (teachers) had been actively involved in the workshops – then we could have been able to have a more meaningful community of learners where we all had the same information, could use the same language – and there would have been more of us to share success stories as a staff (to feed off each other's practice and reflections)
Participant	**Follow-up Question 4**
T1	Je ne suis enseignante à cette institution que depuis un an. Je ne peux comparer.
T2	Marian has played a huge role in improving the amount of resources available at the school. She places a high priority on having enough home-reading books, library books and teacher resources. She has increased these resources many times over from where they were when she began.
T3	Marian put lots of effort improving the learning of the children. She cares for them and her implication at GECES make a great impact of the success of the children.
T4	More language rich materials are available Actively listens to teachers recommendations regarding materials, approaches Better use of library More professional development encouraged Resource delivery more effective
T5	Same as T4
T6	We have had a large turnover of staff for a variety of reasons. This year we have close to 1/3 of the staff being first year teachers. The constant re-teaching/retraining of staff to the [our school board] method of teaching literacy has been draining on all staff. We are working with an increasing diversity of students. Many of these students have special learning needs, or behaviour and emotional challenges. The English stream classes at the upper grades are approaching 50% coded. This has resulted in many difficult teaching assignments. The mix of the class has affected the teachers'

	ability to provide a rich fast paced learning environment. Although many manage to involve students daily in a rich environment, there are many interruptions. Many students are pulled from class. Many students are regularly absent. Interruptions, absenteeism, discord in the school yard which is carried into the classroom, take away from the learning environment and learning opportunities hence compromise the literacy attainment of too many of the children.
T7	More language rich materials are available Actively listens to teachers recommendations regarding materials, approaches Better use of library More professional development encouraged Resource delivery more effective
T8	A greater understanding of Balanced Literacy and the reading/ writing connection is evident in conversation with teachers. I believe the PD, regular literacy meetings, pilot initiatives undertaken by the school (e.g. Report cards), and high expectations on the part of Marian for reporting and writing I.E.P.'s has contributed to this.
T9	When I first arrived at the school, it was obvious that literacy was supported by the fact that children in difficulty were given priority and help as quickly (as young) as possible. At that point, the conscious, systematic approach to developing teachers' skills in literacy was just being started, and as our resource teacher received extra training, she was able to guide and support us in the new practices. As the practices became common amongst the teachers, we were able to plan together and support each other as well.
T10	I was only at GECES for one year. It would be unfair for me to comment.
T11	N/A
T12	Brought in Jolly Phonics, Soundprint and 6 – Trait/Writing Traits materials supported us with PD resource people (some years on a continuous basis – other years on occasion)
T13	This is hard to answer as a first year teacher. I have only known Marian for about 7 months.
Participant	**Follow-up Question 5**
T1	Je pense que Ms Lothian a eu une influence positive sur notre programme littéraire. Elle se soucie autant des volets anglais et français dudit programme. Elle souhaite toujours le meilleur pour son corps professoral autant que pour les enfants.
T2	I believe overall, Marian has had a positive influence on literacy teaching practices. She almost always supports teacher input, suggestions and feedback. She is quick to support teachers looking for external training and fully acknowledges the need for extra aide and support in the school.
T3	Marian had for sure a great positive impact on the way to teach the children.

	She is always looking for new ways to motivate and to increase the success of each of one.
T4	Literacy is now a priority Teachers are setting smart goals for themselves and students Helped promote a literate environment Parents have been encouraged to be involved in their children's language development
T5	Same as T4
T7	Literacy is now a priority Teachers are setting smart goals for themselves and students Helped promote a literate environment Parents have been encouraged to be involved in their children's language development
T8	Positive. Marian's knowledge of Balanced Literacy and literacy best practices enabled her to question, guide and converse with her teachers in a manner that promoted the development of understanding and implementation of the above. I also think that her desire to move and support teachers' learning in both conventional (workshops, pilot projects) and less conventional (coaching) means contributed to the achievement of that goal. Review of assessment data such as the DRA with teachers enabled Marian to engage in discussions with them that focused on how to improve student achievement.
T9	Definitely a positive influence, in the ways that I have already mentioned; support for common planning time and professional development, resources to do the work, resource time for the children who needed that little bit more.
T10	Positive impact. I saw the sincerity of her efforts. I would have liked to track the improvement in literacy scores to have provided some accountability and measured growth. I did start this in the year that I was there by using some school wide measure of receptive language skills. I also did many individual assessments to track students at risk.
T11	I would say neutral. Marian has great ideas and initiatives and is very up-to-date on education research. Most of her ideas are great, but the manner in which they are presented often ruins their positive effect. Teachers often feel like they are overloaded and are left with no time to plan their classes. It often feels like the ideas are being imposed, and not suggested.
T12	Positive. Encourages us to participate in many workshops + initiatives and to push ourselves to try many new things in our classroom practice. Sometimes however, we feel pulled in too many directions as a result and end up doing many things in mediocre ways as opposed to doing

Participant	
	a few things really, really well.
T13	I think she has had a very positive influence on literacy teaching. She encourages us to work in cycles & always offers resources to help us.
Participant	**Comments (B)**
T3	I really enjoy working with Marian. She is very engage in her professional work.
T9	I hope that my comments can be of some use – my recollection of all the different practices is very faint now – having been gone from GECES for 3 years. Good luck!
T10	Marian has been a life long learner herself and a committed teacher and Principal. She has been challenged in moving her students along the path of literacy by the abilities and openness of her staff to accept changes in teaching practice. She is a good leader and has likely met with success by bringing in staff who share her vision.
T11	N/A

PARENTS' WRITTEN RESPONSES:	
Participant	**Comments (A)**
P2	As a parent and local school board commissioner I have known Marian for many years and have always seen her demonstrate clear and effective strategies to deliver and enhance literacy programs in our schools. Serving as the governing board chair at Marian's current school it was her drive and determination that had the governing board support and endorse literacy as the school's educational project for many years.
P3	With the very diverse culture within the school, Mrs. Lothian has worked hard to develop literacy as a school focus/project. Her effort and help in the development of the student library, guided reading resources as well as a literacy resource room are all proof of this commitment.
Participant	**Follow-up Question 1**
P1	*Reading Recovery* but not her initiative was there prior to her arrival. Homework club but initiated by reform because grants are provided to schools. Part of school success plan.
P2	- The governing board recognizing literacy as the primary educational project for the school. - Reading buddies – older students reading with younger students. - Increasing the library collection on an annual basis. - Resource professionals dedicated to literacy. - Purchase of guided reading material to encourage student reading at their level.
P3	- DRA scores and assessment - Creation of and continued financial support for the student library - Looking at alternate resources to help support literacy including e-Pearl (e-portfolio)
Participant	**Follow-up Question 2**
P1	Asking the parents to make their children read at home for 30 minutes. Not only do the students not have the time but I find that some parents might not have the skills in how to help a child read better. No help with this from the administration or teaching staff either. Answer always students need resources but not always available. Not having reading groups established early on in the students school life to encourage reading at home. Please note that this was not due to lack of resource as our school library is one of the most well stocked in books and reference material in our Board. When students have different teachers for different subjects, teachers do not get to know their literacy levels.
P2	None that I am aware of.
P3	Unknown
Participant	**Follow-up Question 3**
P1	The students should have special time to read not just to make the student read to evaluate what level they are at. They have started this year to let the

	students read in class for 30 minutes unfortunately I find it too late for the cycle 3 students who are below level and have been part of this reform also we have had literacy has a school success plan and have seen improvement but not to the expectation of the teaching staff. Maybe more project base learning and maybe more contextual which I thought the reform would do. Homework club opened to everyone again only a selected group (daycare kids) are allowed.
P2	- *Reading Recovery* – dedicate more resources at the earlier grades to build a stronger foundation for the students. - Many students in the school do not have English or French as their first language and it is very difficult for them to progress. More external resources to address this problem would be beneficial.
P3	Further training for new teachers in helping integrate special needs students. Some teachers seemed ill prepared and ill equipment to fully support students…further integration resources (people and financial) would have been a greater advantage to certain students.
Participant	**Follow-up Question 4**
P1	Yes I have witnessed changes that affected the culture and learning environment that have affected literacy teachings. She has assigned all her teachers to different subjects thus eliminating stability for young children. All teachers do not teach all elementary subjects to one class but to various students and different grade levels. I have found this very confusing for children and for teachers; they can not really work with or identify the students who might have a literacy or writing problem at an early age. The teachers do not have the quality time to spend on subjects that would follow through(e.g. teacher teaches cycle one first year but only grade one English and then science , math etc the rest of the day, they now teach math grade 1 and then maybe English to grade 2) to recognize potential problems. Teachers have more groups they are not able to know anyone group well enough to assess and understand individual children literacy needs or problems.
P2	- Marian's leadership has transformed the school for the good in many ways. The learning environment has been changed to reflect the importance of literacy for all students. - Marian has secured new resources to aid in a balanced delivery of literacy programs in the school. This has been very successful over the last several years. Prior to Marian coming to GECES the school lacked guidance and direction in many areas. Marian created a focused environment that continues to encourage success for all. - Marian works with her team on a daily basis to explore new opportunities to address the ever changing student population. I have seen her work with other school boards, educational institutions, and various professionals to explore new concepts that will improve overall student learning in the school. - From a Board perspective, Marian and her school are recognized as leaders

	in the field of literacy. - Marian ensures parents, students, and the educational professional teams work together to help all students. This has proven to be very effective at GECES.
P3	- Creation of the student library - Creation of the literacy Resource Room - Blocked ELA time across the cycle - Development of effective cycle teams so teachers can support each other
Participant	**Follow-up Question 5**
P1	I am not sure that overall it has been positive, as specific cultural or socio-economics groups have been targeted for extra help thus leaving everyone else lacking in remedial services. Has asked many parents to go private for assessments and tutorial help which might affect the DRA results.
P2	- Marian has a very positive influence on literacy teaching practices in the school and Board wide. She spends a considerable amount of time researching best practices, exploring new opportunities, and working with the teaching staff and parents to enhance the learning experience for all students. She is a fighter and advocate for all students and continually amazes and impresses me at how she effectively utilizes her resources to service the needs of all students while maintaining her focus on literacy and the many other demands of her job. - Marian is a very hard working professional that has dedicated her career to the students. Parents, students, and staff continually thank her for the positive changes she has made and continues to make at GECES.
P3	I believe that Marian has had a positive impact in literacy in the school.
Participant	**Comments (B)**
P3	[The School Board] has worked hard to develop, implement and increase literacy throughout the Board. Marian has certainly taken this role seriously and has worked hard to develop a school where literacy skills are highly valued and of the utmost importance.

Note that in the above tables, all non-responses were eliminated. In addition, all personal identifiers were removed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE 9 APPLIED LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

AND THE 31 QUESTIONS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Literacy Intervention	Question appraising the principals effectiveness in implementing the intervention

1. Fostering a literacy based school culture and promoting literacy research

2	Encourages staff to engage in professional development to enhance the teaching of literacy.
23	Frees up time for literacy professional development
27	Finds personnel and resources to support literacy professional development

2. Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction

8	Ensures teachers have adequate literacy supplies and materials
9	Provides effective and inviting workspaces and reading resources

3. Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices

4	Provides preparation time for staff to develop and plan literacy initiatives.

4. Providing appropriate supports for support for "at risk" literacy students

14	Rehearsed oral reading by the students for real purposes such as reader's theatre or book buddies.
15	Reading conferences that allow teachers to observe the reading strategies individual children are using and to assess the meaning as they read.
16	The integration of what children read with their writing.
18	Attention to the use of word walls to teach how words work and sight vocabulary.
28	Consults outside sources and professional materials for up-to-date guidelines on running and implementing literacy programs

5. Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction

7	Ensures that students' literacy skills are regularly assessed for learning
10	Sets a culture within the school for a change in literacy reporting practices to reflect the literacy competencies outlined in the Q.E.P.
30	Shares literacy assessment and data with teachers to enhance the teaching of literacy

6. Scheduling an uninterrupted literacy teaching block for literacy instruction

19	Assistance for at-risk students in the form of remedial support and/or second language support where needed
20	The opportunity for students to work in flexible groupings and settings with other children to reinforce particular skills and knowledge

7. Acquiring appropriate literacy teaching and learning materials, space and resources

5	Assigns appropriate resource personnel to coach and mentor literacy teachers.
22	Offers administrative support and leadership in the teaching of literacy
26	Shares information about successful literacy programs

8. Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models

6	Ensures that teacher timetables reflect a school-wide priority for literacy by providing hour and a half to two hour blocks in each class to teach reading and writing every day.

11 A time for teachers to read to children daily.

12 A daily silent-reading time for students to select their own books.

13 Opportunities for group reading and interactive response.

17 Block time to engage in different aspects of the writing process.

9. Supplying opportunities for literacy based mentoring and coaching

1 Reviews all literacy initiatives in the school with the staff.

3 Encourages teachers to reflect and share ideas in order to plan instruction, monitor, and assess student development in all areas of literacy.

21 Sets a culture within the school to improve the teaching of literacy

24 Exhibits and circulates professional literacy materials (e.g., articles, books, etc…)

25 Creates collaborative networks for teachers by cycle level and interest

29 Is receptive to literacy research projects conducted by other school boards and colleges

31 Demonstrates commitment to continued literacy improvement.

CALCULATION OF POSITIVE COMMENTS MATCHED TO INTERVENTIONS

Intervention Criteria	Comment A	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Comment B	Proportion of supportive comments
1. Promoting professional development that centers on literacy instruction	A2	A4,A7,A10 T3,T4,T7,T8,T9		XA7	A10 T4,T7,T8,T12	A2,A4,A7 T2,T8,T9,T12		21/23 (91%)
2. Acquiring appropriate literacy teaching and learning materials and resources	T6,T8 P3	A1,A2,A7 T4,T7,T8,T11 P2,P3	XT11	XA7	A4 T2,T4,T7 P2,P3	A2,A4,A7 T9,T13		23/25 (92%)
3. Creating a time for literacy teachers to meet and jointly plan instruction		A10 T4,T7,T8,T9		XA7	A2,A10 T8 P3	A2 T9,T13		10/11 (91%)
4. Ensuring a literacy curriculum content framework with instructional methods and models		A7 T3	XT3	T3,**XT4** **XP1**	A12 T8,T12	T1		7/10 (70%)
5. Implementing the use of a range of literacy assessment tools and appropriate assessment practices		A1,A2, A4,A7,A10 T2,T6 P3	**XA2** **XT5,XT7**	XT2	A9,A10 T5	T8 **XP1**		10/15 (70%)
6. Providing appropriate supports for support for 'at risk' literacy students	A6	A1 T1,T4,T6,T7,T8,T10,T12 P2	**XT2,XT10**	**XA2** **XP2,XP3**	A2 T4,T7, T9,	T12,T9 **XP1**	**XA1**	16/23 (70%)
7. Supplying opportunities for literacy based mentoring and coaching	T6,T8	T1,T3,T8,T9,T12 P2			A2 T9,T12	A4,A7 T8		23/25 (92%)
8. Scheduling a literacy teaching block for literacy instruction		A1 T11	**XT6**		A2 P3			4/5 (80%)
9. Fostering a literacy based school culture	A1,A2, A7,A9 T2,T8,T9 P2,P3	T2 P2	**XT11,XT12** **XP1**	**XA1** **XT2** **XP1**	A1,A2,A4,A7 T3,T4,T7,T9 **XP1**,P2	A1,A4,A7,A10,A12 T12,T3,T4,T7,T8,T10,T11,T12 T10 P2	A4 P3	37/44 (84%)
Proportion of supportive comments	18/18 (100%)	48/48 (100%)	0/11 (0%)	1/14 (7%)	36/37 (97%)	29/31 (94%)	10/11 (91%)	142/170 (84%)

Legend: A - represents administrator; T - represents teacher; P - represents parent; X - represents comments indicating area identified as needing improvement

APPENDIX H:

AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT SURVEY AND PUBLISH DRA SCORES

Removed

APPENDIX I:

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY

Removed