

PLANNING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

by

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B. Ed. University of British Columbia, 1985

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS (EDUCATION)

in the Faculty

of

Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

July 1990

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### **Abstract**

Many respected educational scholars maintain that for schools to improve, improvement projects must be planned and implemented at the school by the people who work there. The purpose of this thesis was to investigate such school-based projects in order to glean information which may assist others when they are planning such an undertaking.

Schools that were considered to have exemplary plans in place or under development were identified through a process based on professional expertise. Nine schools in three districts were identified, seven elementary and two junior secondary schools, and within each school the principal and two teachers were interviewed.

Data analysis showed many similarities among the schools in the way the improvement plans were started, implemented and evaluated. Most plans began with a goal setting process involving all the staff. The goals became the focus of the plan but other plan components such as strategies, timelines, resources, professional development, and persons responsible allowed goals to be attained.

Implementation was supported through the creation of opportunities for teachers to work together as well as ongoing professional development. The evaluation component, although often

included in the plan, was the least developed element.

In all schools studied, it was the principal who drove the plan forward. Through principal initiative, time for teachers' ongoing involvement was created and money obtained. Through principal support, supplies were provided and concerns addressed. Through principal openness and empowering, teachers had continuous input into the plan and control over its direction. Through principal commitment, teachers were freed from the classroom. Through principal monitoring and organizing, the plan was always the focus.

Very importantly, the school district must also support the schools in this planning process. School staffs identified district personnel assisting at the school level and money as being the most valuable forms of plan support.

As well as giving the school focus and direction, benefits of school-based improvement planning were many. It resulted in teachers' sense of ownership in the school. Teachers became more collegial and school-focused. Teachers' power and efficacy increased. When these components are present in a school, much empirical research assures us that teachers feel satisfied with their jobs and also that their schools are more adaptable and successful.

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## **Chapter I: Problem Statement and Rationale**

Some schools are considered to be more successful than other schools. Current empirical research explains one reason for this difference. In more successful schools there is school-based planning for school improvement. There is however, very little information on what this planning looks like.

### **Research Problem**

The focus of this thesis is to study school-based improvement planning to discover how planning is done at present - to look at the process of a plan's development and implementation. Many questions are tied into this central focus. Who is involved in the planning? When and how is the planning done? Are all plans the same? Do plans contain common elements such as goal setting, an implementation section which includes timelines and methods for goal achievement, and an evaluation component allowing goal attainment to be measured incrementally as well as at goal completion? How are these plans institutionalized? What specific benefits result from school-based improvement planning? Answers to these questions then will provide a basis for an answer to the

central research question, what makes a good school improvement plan?

## **Problem Background**

### District Initiated Beginning

Six years ago in the researcher's school district, principals attended a conference on planning for school success. A team of presenters from Calgary led the Effective School Program which they had developed called Schools Do Make a Difference. Their work was based on Rutter's empirical study, Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children (Rutter, 1979).

These presenters demonstrated to principals how they could involve all their staff in a goal setting process at their schools. It was suggested that either the principal could lead this activity or someone from central office could if requested.

The focus for the school goal setting was to be on seven factors put forward by the Calgary Team:

- 1) use of rewards and praise
- 2) emphasis on learning
- 3) the level of expectations that teacher behavior represents

- 4) student participation
- 5) appearance and comfort of school environment
- 6) school organization and teacher skills
- 7) firm leadership and teacher involvement in decision making.

#### Beginning at the School Level

In the following May and June, most principals did involve their staffs in a goal setting process as outlined by the team. Many had assistance from district office personnel. The planning took place on a Professional Development Day.

After the school staff had gone through the descriptions of each factor, they looked at ways the factor was used in their school. The staff then selected which factors they wanted to focus on during the next year. The factors became the school's goals. Together the staff outlined proposed actions and timelines to implement the goals. The plans which came out of this workshop were called School Growth Plans.

There was a district expectation that each school would have a School Growth Plan by the end of June. Accountability was ensured by having each principal discuss the plan with the assistant

superintendent. Plans were therefore developed but very little more was done with them. Principals had not been inserviced past this point.

### Researcher Involvement

During the time of this school district focus, this researcher first took part in school-based planning as a teacher. On being appointed a vice principal, participation was in the form of leading the initial workshop to set goals and form a two-strategy plan (proposed actions and timelines). After appointment as a principal, the researcher involved all staff in a goal setting process based on Mortimore's twelve factors which distinguished effective elementary schools (Mortimore, 1987, pp. 7-8). As well, the process included an assessment of where the staff believed the school focus was, where the school focus needed to be (goals) and how the staff could ensure the school focus (goal attainment through strategies).

Many frustrating concerns arose. Firstly, the forms which the district office supplied for year-end input did not mesh with the plan the school staff had devised. The forms still focused on the principals' performance objectives and were separated into five

domains:

1. school philosophy and direction
2. organization and management
3. instructional leadership
4. interpersonal relationships
5. professional development.

The new school growth plan focused on the improvement of the overall school through school goals and strategies for reaching the goals. Although the district's expectations had changed, documentation for these expectations had not.

Lack of knowledge was the basis of another concern. Principals looked to the district for feedback about their plans but none was forthcoming. No one seemed to know anything more about what should be happening next. Schools were therefore very much left on their own with their school-based improvement plans. For plans to be successful, more information was required.

After the researcher looked at school improvement research by respected educational leaders, school-based improvement planning gained further importance. Many empirical researchers believed

successful school improvement projects must be school-based and school specific (Sirotnik, 1987; Heckman, 1987; Fullan, 1982; Goodlad, 1984; Coleman, 1984; LaRocque, 1983). What was always missing was the "how." It is this background then that led to the questions outlined previously and ask the overall question, "What makes a good school-based improvement plan"?

### **The Significance of the Study**

By finding the answers to the outlined questions, this study will form the basis of a 'How To' manual on school-based improvement planning. The guide will give ideas about not only beginning the undertaking but also continuing the process. It will enable central office administrators to guide principals as they lead their school staffs in planning efforts. It will assist principals in not only developing a plan but in plan implementation and evaluation.

In addition, the principal's role in this process will be uncovered. Principals will be able to see which of his/her actions tell others that this plan is to be taken seriously. It will tell them, from a teacher's point of view, how the principal's actions are interpreted. The results and conclusions about the principals' role



will ensure success for a principal through action.

Benefits to school planning may be discovered. In some cases it may be a new finding, in others it may confirm what other researchers have found in their studies. For example, Little's study found that teachers talking and planning together led to continuous professional development and collegiality (Little, 1982, p. 331). By providing opportunities for teachers to work together on an improvement plan, will teachers develop these same attributes or does such work indicate the existence of these norms? This type of finding will be significant because it will further validate school-based improvement planning.

This study will therefore be significant in three ways. It will help other educators begin or continue to expand school-based planning by providing guidance for successful implementation. It will help principals understand their roles in the process. It will help confirm or uncover benefits of such a program.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Central office staff - senior office administrators, all hold one of the following positions; district principal, director, assistant

superintendent or superintendent.

Codes - an abbreviation or symbol applied to a sentence or paragraph in transcribed notes. Codes are categories of information.

First level coding - a single code describing a category of information, for example, out inf = outside influence.

Second level coding - a further refinement of first level coding; for example, first level - outside influence is divided into sources of influence > district, ministry, parents.

Outside source - any one or a group not based in the school building.

School-based improvement plan - a plan originating at the school level having total staff input. The plan outlines the direction the school will be taking and strategies for maintaining and reaching that focus. It is the basis by which decisions are made and actions taken by school personnel.

School Portrait - a description of what is happening in a school drawn from data collected during the interview(s) and the plan's contents.

Staff Development Liaison Group - group members are central office administrators responsible for their districts' professional

development program. They are experts in what is happening in each of their district's schools.

Teacher Efficacy - a teacher's belief that he/she can influence others, that he/she can make a difference.

### **Study Limitations**

In this or any educational study, one is limited by the accessibility within a district and within a school. Because a researcher is making demands on district and school staff, one can only ask that certain things be done and hope that it is followed through. For example, when central office administrators select the exemplary schools to be studied, no validity check is possible. This fact is seen as a study limitation by this researcher.

As well when interviewing staff, the researcher is always very aware of the time element - even though teachers select interview times and interviews are to be twenty to twenty-five minutes. Either the teacher will have just finished teaching or be about to start. The principal although busy will have more time flexibility than the teachers. Time limitations may restrict the study because answers may not be as complete and introspective as they would

have been if time were not a factor.

### **Study Outline**

This qualitative study involved three school districts within British Columbia's lower mainland. Each district was asked to identify two or three of their schools which district staff consider to have exemplary school improvement plans. In total, nine schools were studied.

Three staff members in each school - the principal and two teachers - were asked to participate in separate interviews. All three interviews took place on the same day. Identical, preselected questions were asked each interviewee (see Appendix D). Questions focussed on the plan's contents, development, implementation, evaluation and staff participation as well as outside influences that may affect the plan. Effort was taken to ensure questions were not leading. Many open-ended questions were also included.

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. As well, a copy of their school plan was requested to give additional information and/or clarification. These two sources formed the data for analysis.

The district superintendents' approval was sought prior to beginning this project in a district. Throughout the study, he/she was informed as to the progress being made, that is, when the researcher was in the district doing interviews and when the interviews had been completed (see Appendix B and G).

Within each school, the principal's approval and willingness to partake in the study was required. The principal was involved in the selection of teachers to be interviewed. It was through the principal that interview times were decided. At all times the principal was informed when the researcher entered and left the school building.

After interviews were completed, data analysis took place. Analysis on a school level preceded cross site analysis. At the completion of this overall study, results were forwarded to each participating school principal and district superintendent. The results will hopefully help district administrators and principals as they continue with school-based improvement planning.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

The basic premise of this thesis is that in order for schools to improve, the focus must be on the school as the unit of change. Self renewal will be individual because each school is a unique entity serving various population groups which together form a school's culture. It is through the principal and teachers working together to plan the school's current and future direction that renewal (improvement) is possible.

Guthrie (1986, p. 306) maintains sustained school reform requires this active involvement of educators at the building level. Sirotnik also believes this premise and maintains that,

...School improvement must take place in schools by and for the people in them; description, judgement, decision making, and action taking regarding improvement efforts require informed inquiry and critical thinking; this evaluative process includes multiple perspectives on what constitutes appropriate knowledge and information; and this process is not a one-shot deal but an ongoing part of the daily worklife of professionals involved in their own school improvement efforts (Sirotnik, 1987, p. 41).

Sirotnik's statement is supported by many empirical researchers. LaRocque talks of the school as, "a unit of change" and quotes Goodlad's argument that, "...in any developmental or renewal

activity the school as an entity,...should be the unit of analysis, planning and implementation" (LaRocque, 1983, p. 228). Coleman concurs and writes, "Efforts to change schools need to be school-based and school specific" (Coleman, 1984, p. 1). When evaluating more and less renewing schools, Heckman notes that school-focussed characteristics were a distinguishing factor of more renewing schools (Heckman, 1987, p. 68). As well, Fullan (1982, p. 120) points out improvement and progress are possible and do happen but it is, "...as a result of deliberate planning, not just by chance." If schools are to improve, therefore, the *planned* improvement effort must occur at the school level by the people involved in the school.

### **The School's Community**

It is vital to look at an important aspect of the school when looking at an improvement effort - the school's community. When planning for improvement, it must be known what factors may hinder or help in the improvement effort. By examining the schools' community, factors that may contribute to the plan's overall success or failure, may be uncovered. Henshaw et al., encourage,

...those of us comprising the school community to examine not only our own immediate environs...but also the interactive

effect of each setting upon; the entire school community. Through such activity we gain a clearer understanding of our present identity as well as our potential for change (Henshaw, Wilson, & Morefield, 1987, p. 134).

The reason for this close scrutiny of the community is when you make changes you confront the school's culture and the problems involved in changing that culture (Sirotnik, 1987, p. 63). These problems or difficulties need to be taken into consideration when planning for improvement.

The school staff is in a position to understand that culture. Sirotnik (1987, p. 64) therefore, like Henshaw et al., also encourages school staff members to examine the total setting in which they work.

### **Teacher Involvement in the Improvement Effort**

Goodlad supports staff involvement in change and says that the people connected with the school must develop, "...a capacity for effecting renewal and establish mechanisms for doing this" (Goodlad, 1984, p. 276). Further, that people other than the principal must be involved in decisions regarding the schools' welfare (Goodlad, 1984, p. 278).



It is important, therefore, that the process of improvement becomes a focus as it is through this process that teachers become "involved." According to Leithwood and Montgomery (1982, p. 326) and Blase (1987, p. 600), effective principals use the process of improvement planning and goal formulation to encourage teachers' participation in decision making and these principals actively solicit teachers' opinions. Participative decision making takes advantage of the skills and knowledge of all members (Sirotnik & Clark, 1988, p. 663) and has also been linked to the performance levels of teachers (Smylie, 1988, p. 10). This type of participation was viewed as helping connect teachers to the school processes, programs and goals, "I'm a part of the whole"; "you're on a team that's going somewhere"; "you are important to others" (Blase, 1987, p. 604). As well, it, "... increases teachers ownership of school instructional goals and buys them a stake in the future of a collective enterprise" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 374). Rosenholtz adds that it is this participation which leads to collegial interaction and "...implies a commitment to school-based instructional programs, better curriculum development through the adaptation of curricular

material to specific classroom needs, and increased student learning resulting from greater teacher effectiveness" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 374 & 375).

She points out that, "Successful schools were distinguished ... by patterned norms of collegiality among staff," and "...greater task-related interaction leads to greater faculty cohesiveness" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 365-66; Little, 1982, p. 338). If collegiality is an indicator of successful schools, then involving staff in decision making regarding school improvement planning should increase that collegiality. Rosenholtz's research would support this idea. She emphasizes that norms of collegiality don't just happen but "...are carefully engineered by structuring the workplace with frequent exposure to contact and frequent opportunities for interaction" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 367). Fullan also concurs that this type of, "focussed teacher interaction is essential to large-scale successful change" (Fullan, 1982, p. 122).

In LaRocque's studies, she identifies two types of teachers; school-oriented and classroom-oriented teachers (LaRocque, 1983, p. iv). She points out that working successfully with colleagues had

changed some teachers from classroom-oriented into school-oriented teachers and if, "... there are many school-oriented teachers on a staff, then the staff is likely to share the norms of collegiality and continuous improvement" (LaRocque, 1983, p. 206). It is important, therefore, to involve teachers in the process of school improvement planning not only in order to have teachers "buy into" school improvement but also to increase collegiality. The benefits of such a program are summarized by Little. In her research she found,

Some schools sustain shared expectations (norms) both for extensive collegial work and for analysis and evaluation of an experimentation with their practices: continuous improvement is a shared undertaking in these schools, and these schools are the most adaptable and successful of the schools we studied (Little, 1982, p. 338).

Continuous improvement is the desired outcome of school-based improvement planning which includes teacher participation throughout the effort. Mortimore's work agrees that, " Schools in which teachers are consulted on policy issues as well as issues affecting them directly, appear to be more successful" (Mortimore & Sammons, 1987, p. 7).

## **Teachers' Feelings**

But what about the teachers' feelings in this process? Do they feel it is worthwhile?

In the schools that Coleman studied, he found a factor which summarized the preferences of teachers, "...school level planning led by the principal...(was) a critical climate component" (Coleman, 1984, p.4). Heckman also found that teachers in more renewing schools, "...perceived that the staff together got jobs done" (Heckman, 1987, p.69). McLaughlin and Yee's study noted the most important change to teachers is through organizational direction. They maintain, "If teachers are part of the decision-making process they are enthusiastic about bringing about (the changes necessary to improved practice)" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 28). Furthermore, a participatory orientation was related to teachers' sense of professionalism ("I'm recognized for my professional knowledge") (Blase, 1987, p. 604) and collegiality (Little, 1982; LaRocque, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1985).

Spuck reports his findings in which schools that reported low levels of teacher absenteeism also report high faculty agreement

with organizational goals (Spuck, 1984). Rutter's research concurs with this finding, "Schools where most teachers planned jointly tended to have better attendance...." (Rutter et al, 1979, p. 136). The results of these studies indicate that teachers have positive feelings about school-based planning which includes participatory decision-making. Statistical findings on teacher absenteeism substantiate this idea.

### **Teacher Autonomy**

It must be included at this point that although the school staff together plan the improvement effort, there must be much room for the individual teacher's professional style and judgement when implementing the plan in the classroom. Mackenzie says, "The goals of change are strongly focused and clearly defined but multiple strategies are encouraged, and teaching staff have the autonomy and flexibility they need to discover and implement adaptive practices" (Mackenzie, 1983, p. 11). As well, one of three conditions Rosenholtz identifies as necessary for professional fulfillment of teachers is teacher's task autonomy. It is, "...the sense that achieving work goals results directly from purposive actions, or teachers' feeling

that their own intentional efforts cause positive changes to occur" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 164). Goodlad's (1984, p. 189) studies also showed that schools in which teachers had high levels of control over how they carried out their job, came out high in teacher satisfaction.

It is therefore important to remember when the plan is actually being used in the classroom, there must be much room for individual teaching styles and classroom practices. In fact, individual adaptation should be encouraged.

### **Role of the Principal**

The principal's role in school-based improvement efforts is central to its success (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982, p. 309; Fullan, 1982, p. 135). Teachers see effective principals as ones who use goal-setting processes based on faculty participation (Blase, 1987, p. 604). Not only do teachers see effective principals in this light but also empirical research indicates this view to be true. Lieberman notes, effective leaders know, "...the best way to lead is to empower others by finding ways for all members of the community to participate in shaping a school's values, goals, and procedures for

attaining those goals" (Lieberman, 1988, p. 649). Principals who empower others in this way therefore, find many benefits. "When principals relinquish their need to control, trusting faculty with discretionary decisions, decisions that may result in greater performance fulfillment, teachers tend to become more unstinting contributors to the workplace" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 144). If empowerment of this type is to be possible, it is the principal who must release his/her control and share the decision making power which he/she currently dominates. Empowering teachers through the process of participatory improvement planning appears to be a positive step in the right direction.

In addition to the principal's role in the planning stage of an improvement effort, the principal also plays an important role throughout the plan. It is the principal through his/her actions who carries the message to teachers that a change is to be taken seriously (Fullan, 1982, p. 135). These actions show support for teachers, both psychologically and with resources, as they work through the improvement process (Fullan, 1982, p. 71 & 135). As well, principals must supply local assistance to staff members and also

protect them as they carry out the improvement effort (Huberman & Miles, 1984, p. 277). Assistance of this nature, lets staff members know that the principal, although perhaps not involved in the same way as the teachers, is definitely behind the improvement plan and will protect teachers as they work to implement it. Fullan agrees and maintains, "Whether it is direct or indirect, the principal plays a fateful role in the implementation and continuance on any change proposal; the evidence is very strong on this point" (Fullan, 1982, p. 140). In his research, Fullan found, "...the principal was the key to both implementation and continuation" of an improvement effort (Fullan, 1982, p. 76). For this reason, principal stability plays a vital role in school improvement efforts (Fullan, 1982, p. 77; Huberman & Miles, 1984, p. 211 & 281; Blase, 1987, p. 607).

### **Implementation**

Implementation of an improvement effort is also enhanced when teachers are more collegial, more school regarding. In a longitudinal study across all grades, Wilson and Corbett (1983) report that, "...tighter coupling increased the implementation of new teaching practices" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 360). Fullan's research



agrees with this finding. He maintains, "Within the school, collegiality among teachers as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, etc. was a strong indicator of implementation success" (Fullan, 1982, p. 121).

Another factor Fullan identified as influencing school implementation efforts is teacher efficacy. This factor came through strongly (Fullan, 1982, p. 70). Efficacy is the teacher's belief that he/she can make a difference - can cause things to happen. The direct relationship between personal teaching efficacy and change suggests if teachers believe that they themselves are instrumental to the learning of their students, they are more likely to change their behavior in directions that may improve their classroom effectiveness (Smylie, 1988, p. 23). But findings suggest, "...that efficacy is more of an organizational feature of schools which come to have a school-wide emphasis and expectation that they can improve student learning-and they do" (Fullan, 1982, p. 72). It appears then, that schools which engage in school improvement planning involving all staff members in a way that is being outlined here, would contain the organizational controls which give teachers

this sense of efficacy.

The very nature of teacher involvement in the implementation of an improvement plan has a real benefit. Like involvement at the planning stage, involvement at this time can increase teacher commitment to the overall improvement effort. Crandall's studies found, "The commitment of teachers and administrators can be engaged as fully ... by involvement in actual implementation activities as by extended participatory planning and make-ready activities" (Crandall et al., 1986, p. 23). The involvement of teachers in school-based improvement planning therefore, does not stop at the planning stage but most importantly for their commitment, must be ongoing throughout the implementation period.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of the improvement plan becomes crucial in this process. As Sirotnik pointed out, this process is ongoing (Sirotnik, 1987, p. 41). School staffs could use self-evaluation as a framework for measuring the effectiveness of their school. Mortimore maintains this is what good teachers have always tried to do, "...to reflect upon their successes and failures and, as a result, modify

their practice. What is new is a more structured approach, and an awareness that there is more to reflect upon than just teaching in one classroom" (Mortimore & Mortimore, 1984, p.12 &13). That reflection then, becomes one of a school rather than a classroom focus.

Sirotnik agrees and affirms the process of school renewal becomes that process of rigorous self-examination (Sirotnik, 1987, p. 42). The important point to remember is, "... evaluation is better used to understand events and processes for the sake of guiding future activities" (Sirotnik, 1987, p. 52). It is what you then do with the information gained through evaluation that becomes the challenge. Linking the evaluation data to instructional improvement is a difficult task. The reason for this difficulty is evaluation information takes you back to the beginning of the plan (Fullan, 1982, p. 248). It tells you what should be changed but not "how" to go about changing it. Regardless of the challenge involved, "Gathering information and using it for altering the program is central to effective change" (Fullan, 1982, p. 177). According to Fullan, the message in the research suggests, "...a system or procedure for

information gathering and use is part and parcel of an effective change process" (1982, p. 177). As a result, an evaluation component is an important part of and needs to be included in any school-based improvement effort.

There is another area of evaluation that needs to be mentioned at this point. It is teacher evaluation. It appears information collected to evaluate the effectiveness of an improvement plan, could be used not only to assist teachers in becoming more effective within that improvement effort but also to measure how well they are doing within that effort. Rosenholtz believes that this idea is possible.

Obtaining information on the outputs of teaching, comparing those outputs against standards prescribed by goals, detecting significant departures from the standards, and issuing technical assistance and directives back to the technical core to improve on the quality of outputs suggests a taut system where teacher uncertainty is minimized (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 370).

In this way, "Teachers can gauge their performance not only against individual goals, but also against goals established for the school as a whole (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 31). Teacher evaluation then becomes part of the overall school-based improvement process.

It is not carried out as an isolated event but rather as a collective accounting for school outcomes.

### **The Role of the District**

Obviously, if schools are going to be able to implement their improvement plans, the school district is going to play an important role in this procedure. MacKenzie says, "Purkey and Smith (1982) mention district-level support for school improvement as a positive factor in schoolwide change" (Mackenzie, 1983, p. 11). This support was also one factor identified by David (1989, p. 51) as effecting school change, "...studies of school improvement programs find that when changes occur, they are the result of district support...."

But what should this support look like? Goodlad says there should be, "...greater decentralization of authority and responsibility to the local school site" (Goodlad, 1984, p. 318). Coleman points out, "The task of the district administrator is to develop and protect the autonomy of the schools" (Coleman, 1984, p. 4). He also maintains, "District administrators should adopt the view that a good school district is only a group of good schools, working well" (Coleman, 1984 p. 4). Goodlad concurs with this point and claims that as far as

the individual school is concerned, "The major decisions regarding it are made there, where they are easily scrutinized by the school's patrons. The district prospers to the degree that its schools exhibit good health" (Goodlad, 1984, p.318-19).

Fullan's research further emphasizes the importance of district level support. He claims the paramount task for district administrators is to build the capacity of the district to handle any and all innovations (Fullan, 1982, p. 179). One of the guidelines he identifies for district administrators is to, "Directly and indirectly (e.g., through principals) provide resources, training, and the clear expectation that schools (teachers, principals, etc.) are the main units of change" (Fullan, 1982, p. 178).

The message then is clear. District staff need to support the schools in their change effort. But make no mistake about it, it is at the school where the change must be made.

### **Benefits**

When the plan becomes the school's focus, the direction for the school becomes clear. The importance of this clear direction is noted by McLaughlin and Yee. They point out that when the

institutional "rules of the game" are clear, teachers have a direction in which to point their efforts (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 32). As well as clear direction, this type of integrated environment provides a degree of comfort and certainty to teachers as they try to acquire new strategies and skills (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 32). They maintain,

Having common goals and objectives so that all the faculty is headed in the same direction not only creates a sense of solidarity around a shared purpose, it is also a source of motivation and reward in itself. .... In such an atmosphere, the general level of opportunity for an individual teacher - in terms of stimulation and challenge - is high. And individual power or capacity is enhanced by the collective, cohesive nature of the school's purpose - as is collegiality, a third institutional element fundamental to a satisfying career as a teacher (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 33).

Little (1982, p. 338) found schools which had high collegiality were the most successful and adaptable because in such schools continuous improvement was a shared undertaking. Most important to the school is that collegiality among teachers is related, "...significantly to teacher change associated with the implementation of school innovation" (Smylie, 1988, p. 9). In other words, providing teachers with the opportunity to work together on such an activity as school growth planning develops collegiality and

collegiality then helps to implement the plan.

In addition, a further benefit to teachers working in this collegial environment, happens because they develop a body of technical knowledge about which teaching practices are likely to be effective (Smylie, 1988, p. 24). These effective teaching practices can then be used to implement the improvement plan in the classroom.

Many additional advantages occur for teachers and schools in this type of environment. For example, schools that have collaborative goal development (e.g., definition, evaluation, redefinition) were identified with increases in organization cohesion and greater consistency between teacher values and teacher behavior (Blase, 1987, p. 600). Furthermore, it is within the framework of school-based improvement planning that teacher commitment to the future and their own professional growth is enhanced (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 156). Within this framework, there is also opportunity for teachers. Rosenholtz found, "Work that allows people to grow and develop, to perfect current skills and learn new ones, gives them a sense of challenge and personal progress that compels greater



workplace commitment" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 142).

A most important benefit to the entire school is that schools in which there is clear direction for improvement allows the resources, time, responsibilities and assistance to be focused (Lieberman & Rosenholtz, 1987, p. 89). The type of teamwork described here is characteristic of more successful schools, Rutter maintains. He found, "...good morale and the routine of people working harmoniously together as part of an efficient system meant that both supervision and support were available to teachers in a way which was absent in less successful schools" (Rutter, 1979, p. 137).

Focus of direction through school-based improvement planning, results in many positive outcomes not the least of which is improved academic programs. Rosenholtz says, "The performance benefit of collective decision making may result from the deliberate evaluation, suggestions, discussion, and modifications that are necessary to improve the quality of academic programs" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 373).

It appears therefore, the possible payoffs of this organizational process - school-based improvement planning - are vast. This fact is especially important to remember when the input is considered - little effort, just reorganization.

### **Conclusions**

To make these improvements, the message is clear. The focus must be on the school as a unit and school level planning is essential. The principal and staff must be involved in this planning and together find the processes that will allow implementation to occur.

The principal, the key in successful improvement efforts, needs to be held accountable for using widespread staff participation in developing, implementing, evaluating and replanning a school improvement plan. Keeping in mind the benefits of such a process, it becomes most important for the principal to find ways in which staff interaction about the plan can occur on an ongoing basis. It is through this interaction that the staff would continually discuss where they are, where they are going right and/or wrong, and where they expect to be in the future. This type of evaluative process is central to the success of the identified improvement plan.

Data collecting must also be an ongoing part of the process. It has been pointed out that, "...despite espoused goals of student learning, data on student performance are almost never collected by principals to evaluate teacher performance (or to monitor student performance), despite the fact that data are frequently available" (Rosenholtz, 1985, p. 359). Built into the plan therefore, should be an evaluation component outlining what types of data need to be collected, what measurement instruments are to be used as well as a method of using the results to re-evaluate the plan. An evaluation process such as this one would legitimize not only the school plan but also what the school staff is doing.

To enable these recommendations to occur, each school should be expected to design such a School Improvement Plan. This plan would not only outline the goals, but would also identify specifics for implementation and the processes for ongoing evaluation. The principal would be held accountable for this plan.

The district must support the school as a unit by providing it with necessary resources in order for the plan to be implemented.

They must hand over more control to the schools. The district's first step would be to provide school based administrators with inservice regarding the importance of school based planning and goal setting and then hold the principals accountable for implementing the process. During the time a school is working on this process, the district should support and protect the school in order to preserve the school's autonomy.

School improvement is within our reach but as Coleman noted in his research, although it seems vital to school quality, "...the kind of intensive school-level planning activity ... is not characteristic of schools at present..." (Coleman, 1984, p. 4). Improvement planning at the school level would fill the void. Staff involvement in the process and the resulting agreement about goals and ways to achieve them, means a more collegial staff with clear direction for school improvement. The ongoing evaluation of the goals gives the school staff knowledge on which to base future "planning" decisions as well as to judge student achievement. In addition, focus on "the plan" informs everyone that this school knows where it is going and how to get there. It legitimizes what the school is doing.

## Summary

Literature relevant to this study provided knowledge about school improvement planning. The importance of staff participation at all points in the plan was emphasized by many researchers. The role of the principal as a supporter was made repeatedly. The value of teacher collegiality and efficacy during implementation was found to be important. The significance of evaluation in order to guide future activities was also stressed. The literature, therefore, confirmed the importance of these topics in school-based improvement planning.

The questions that still needed answering were related to how this planning was done and what actually took place. For example, if staff should be involved in decision making throughout the plan, what strategies are used to include the staff? In order to answer the how and what, a closer look needed to be taken within representative schools partaking in school-based improvement planning as suggested by the literature.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### Background to the Method

In order to answer the question, what is a good school-based improvement plan, a process had to be devised to identify schools which had such plans. The focus was to be on schools which had exemplary improvement plans in place or under development. For this study then, "expert" identification was needed, by people working within school districts with access to all district schools as well as having contact with other districts.

Once that step had been completed, the next question to be answered was, what is the best way to obtain information about this planning? The staff's written plan was one source. But a written plan does not guarantee it is being carried out in the school and tells nothing about how the plan was developed or implemented. It became evident therefore, that information must be collected at the school level from the people who worked there - teachers and principals. According to Merriam, (1988, p. 3), "...Research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant

contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education."

A decision was therefore made to use a qualitative research method based on interviews. This method seemed best suited to address not only the 'what' of school-based improvement planning but the 'how' and 'why' as well. It was decided therefore to do case study research. Merriam (1988, p. 2) maintains, "Case study research, and in particular qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena."

### **Research Procedures**

The study was to involve schools from districts surrounding Vancouver. In total, there were fourteen districts used in the selection pool but only three were to be identified for study. Experts within each of the fourteen surrounding districts were contacted in order to identify school districts that were using school-based improvement planning. These experts were all members of the Lower Mainland Staff Development Liaison Group and met regularly to discuss and plan cross-district professional development activities. The members of this group were all district office personnel ranging

in titles from district principal, coordinator, director, to assistant superintendent.

Each of these individuals was contacted and asked two questions.

1. Do schools in your district take part in school-based improvement planning?
2. Could you name three districts within the lower mainland in which schools are involved in school-based improvement planning and which you consider to have a good model for any district to follow when undertaking such planning?

The first question was asked as a validity check. If a particular district did not do this type of planning and a nominator selected it as being a good model, then it would be known that the person doing the selection was not a credible source. Any nominations made by that person would therefore not be used. This did not happen. All identified only those districts using this type of planning. Some experts did find it difficult to identify three other districts as they felt there was only one or two districts that were really advanced in this subject. As a result, some districts only



nominated one or two other districts.

Table 3.1 indicates the results of the survey. Each district had a possible four votes, one for themselves if they did school-based improvement planning and three for other districts. The mark at the cross-section of, for example, Merrill and Merrill is the nomination of themselves. The results were tabulated and the districts with the most nominations were then selected to be studied - Merrill, San Juan and Flora Districts.

Districts	Mer	Moss	Har	Oc P	Row	San	Fern	Pur	McK	Com	Flo	Oxf	Hya	Ginn	Total
Merrill	•	•	•	•	•	•	•				•			•	9
Moss		•				•	•			•					4
Harris															0
Ocean P				•		•			•				•	•	5
Row			•	•	•							•			4
San Juan	•	•			•	•		•			•	•	•		8
Fern							•								1
Purdy								•			•				2
McKay							•		•						2
Coombs															0
Flora					•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	8
Oxford		•								•		•			3
Hyatt													•		1
Ginn								•						•	2
District Identification															
Table 3.1															

A letter was sent to the superintendent of each of these districts requesting permission to do research within that district and requesting the help of district office staff in the selection of the schools to be used (see Appendix A). Only schools with "exemplary" plans in place or development were to be identified. The name of the person already contacted from that district in the initial selection process was included so that the "expert" would be involved in this next selection step.

Flora District responded very quickly with the schools to be used - Court Elementary, Maitland Junior Secondary and Garden Meadows Elementary. Merrill District selected Fir Grove Elementary, Glen Oakes Elementary and Glenside Elementary. However there was a problem with San Juan District. This district found themselves involved in a strike. Due to this situation nothing was heard from them for quite some time and therefore Ocean Pacific District, the next most frequently nominated district, was selected for study. This district identified Edgemont Junior Secondary, Northbend Elementary and Nightingale Elementary as the schools to be studied.

Each district had office staff contact the identified schools and request the principals' assistance in this project prior to forwarding their names. As a result, principals were expecting to meet with the researcher and this initial meeting went very smoothly.

Interviews were to be used as the means of collecting information. "The purpose of the interview...is not to put things in someone else's mind ... but rather to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1980, p. 196). The principal and two teachers were needed for the interviews. In case study research, "...the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but rather the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1988, p. 77). As a result, together the researcher and principal using set criteria decided on the two teachers to be interviewed. The selection criteria used was two-fold. Firstly, the teachers had to come from different grade levels and/or subject levels. Secondly, the teachers had to have been in the school for different lengths of time - someone who was on staff for some time compared with a new teacher. The reason for this criteria was not only to get teachers with different

perspectives but also to make the selection quite random and therefore not interview only teachers in agreement with the principals' views. Having teachers selected in this manner was used as a method of checking the validity of what the principal had said. "The major way to detect and correct distortion is by comparing an informant's account with accounts given by other informants" (Whyte, 1982, p. 116).

Once this selection was completed, and selected teachers asked to take part in the study, interview times were scheduled at the teachers' convenience. All three interviews were scheduled for the same day - one after the other. A letter was then sent to the superintendent outlining the days the researcher would be in the district collecting data (see Appendix B).

Interviews were all done within the month of April and proceeded according to plan with two exceptions. At Court Elementary, a teacher to be interviewed went home ill on the interview day and therefore another teacher had to be selected. The principal conferred with the teachers at recess and after explaining the selection criteria asked teachers who they felt would be a good

person to be interviewed. As well at Edgemont Junior Secondary, one teacher had a conflicting appointment and therefore someone else had to be selected. In this case the principal just asked teachers as they came into the office after school if they would be interviewed. The second teacher asked agreed. In both cases at Court Elementary and Edgemont Junior Secondary although the replacement selection did not have researcher input, the selection of the second teacher fit the criteria.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Each person interviewed was asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix C). This form guaranteed them confidentiality and explained how the information collected in the interviews was to be used. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984, pp. 87-88) these issues need to be addressed at the outset of every interview.

The interview was semistructured. "In the semistructured interview, certain information is desired from all the respondents. These interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored..." (Merriam, 1988, p. 74). All questions asked therefore

were preselected including the follow-up, open ended questions. The researcher was quite prepared to change the order if their answers dictated it. At times it was necessary to be flexible to follow a lead or allow the person being interviewed to express opinions, thus the semistructured format was best suited to this topic.

All teachers and principals were asked the same questions (Appendix D). The questions were formed to obtain information in the following areas:

- 1) plan development
- 2) content of the plan
- 3) plan implementation
- 4) plan's affect on the teacher in the classroom
- 5) evaluation of the plan in both the classroom and the school
- 6) outside sources that may affect the plan.

A pilot interview was first done in one school in order to test the questions for clarity, to see if they elicited responses easily, as well as to give the researcher practice in interviewing. Because of this pilot interview, one of the questions was changed and tape recording techniques improved. However, once the interviews were

underway, no further changes were made in the questions.

Each interview was done separately with only the researcher and subject in the room. During the interviews, researcher reaction to responses was minimal in order not to influence what people were saying. While at each school, some information about the schools and the respondents was recorded on the question sheets. Every interview was tape recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **a) during interviews**

Each interview was transcribed before the next interview took place. The written copy was checked against the audio tape to correct any errors. Each school was coded as a number according to the order the interviews were done and each transcribed page numbered. Within the same school, although each interview was kept separate, the pages were numbered concurrently. The purpose of this numbering was to form a code so that as information was being compared and contrasted, recording the code beside a quote gave easy reference as to where it could be located in the original transcript. Thus VI-35 meant a particular quote could be found in the sixth

school interviewed on page thirty-five.

During the interviews, descriptive coding was begun but kept to a first level. Miles and Huberman claim, "...form follows function. Formats must always be driven by the research question(s) involved, and their associated codes" (1984, p. 80). In depth analysis did not take place at this time however, as the researcher felt there could be possible influence on the next interview.

b) after interviews

After interviews were completed and all were transcribed, in depth data analysis followed. Codes were continued on a first level as dictated by the answers but were then further broken down into subsequent levels as was dictated by the responses given in the interviews (Appendix E). For example, a first level category of 'outside support' was divided into a second level of 'district, parents, community, ministry'. The second level 'district' was divided into 'personnel and money'. 'Personnel' was broken down to a fourth level, workshops and demonstration lessons. A statement such as, "The money paid for us to have a sub come in" was coded as outside support > district > money. Another statement, "She's a district



person and she's been the one coming in to give us examples and we go in and observe her teaching a class," was coded as outside support > district > personnel > demonstration lessons.

The first interview to be coded was the one which the researcher thought would contain the most amount of information in it. This interview was given to two colleagues who were knowledgeable about the study topic. Each person firstly worked through the interview alone and selected codes which they felt were most appropriate. Secondly, all three persons went through the interview together and compared each response and the way it had been coded. In this way, codes were refined. For example, plan components was changed to be a second level coding of plan characteristics rather than a first level code by itself. This process continued through one interview and by the end of that interview, all three people agreed on the way the researcher coded the information. According to qualitative researchers, triangulation by using independent investigators to establish validity through pooled judgement does ensure the study's internal validity (Merriam, 1988, p. 169).

The codes were then used for all three interviews within one school but were added to as new information arose in a subsequent interview. After all interviews were coded it then became necessary to go back and review the interviews in order to ensure that all were broken down to the last level, make notes in margins and look for important aspects. As the coding progressed, the data from the interviews was charted for each school according to the themes which emerged. Each school then had a separate chart and it was from this chart that the next step was taken, drawing a portrait of each school.

### **School Portraits**

By charting the data on a school basis, the information could then be compiled to form a portrait based on the emerging themes. This meant once again going back to the original coded transcripts and pulling out quotes which illustrated what the researcher was saying in the portrait.

Portraits were drawn of each school according to the themes of: plan beginnings, plan characteristics, plan problems, plan implementation and evaluation, participation of staff throughout the

plan and outside sources that influenced or supported the plan. Each portrait was sent to the corresponding school with a letter asking principals to share the portrait with interviewed teachers (Appendix F). The letter also requested a reaction to the accuracy of the portrait. This technique has been called "member checks" and is one way of ensuring internal validity in a study (Merriam, 1988, p. 169; Guba and Lincoln, 1981).

All school principals responded to the request. Only one wrote a note - all others telephoned. They had shared the information with staff members. All agreed the portraits were accurate in the descriptions of school-based improvement planning as it was happening in their schools. Sometimes however, there was a detail that needed changing such as the number of portables was four not five or the principal had been in the school for eight not six years. One staff wanted to add a footnote about the start-up of the plan emphasizing that it was a staff development plan. Such comments as, "The portrait is spot-on," "It represents a clear picture of what is going on in our school," and "It is very accurate," indicated that the interpretation of the information was correct.

### **Cross-site Analysis**

The analysis done for each school was extended across all nine schools. Each emerging theme was charted alongside each school by using a large matrix. The purpose of the matrix was to look at similarities and differences in order to draw some conclusions that would help others undertaking such a project. At this time, new themes arose due to the frequency of being mentioned across schools. For example, the topics of time, plan flexibility and benefits emerged as themes of importance and therefore needed to be addressed. Once again after these categories were established from the data, a review of the transcripts provided many quotations to support these findings.

Although some case studies are purely descriptive, according to Merriam's research, many more are a combination of description and interpretation (Merriam, 1988, p. 29). It is this combination approach which was used in this study and led to the descriptions, results and interpretations in the following chapters. The next chapter is purely descriptive as it contains the portraits of each school studied.

## **Chapter IV (Findings)**

Using the "expertise" technique outlined in the previous chapter, three districts were selected and then three schools within each district. Finally the selection of teachers to be interviewed was easily done at each school with the assistance of the principal. As a result, the techniques used produced a list of eager and willing participants who had been identified as knowledgeable about the subject of school-based improvement planning.

Three interviews took place at each school - the principal and two teachers. The coding of the respondent's answers resulted in emerging data that could be grouped together under the headings of: how the plan began, a description of the plan, problems that did or did not happen, involvement of the staff throughout the plan, implementing the plan, evaluating the plan, and outside sources which influenced and supported the plan.

The next step was to look at the data produced from each school and assimilate the information to form one portrait. In this way a clear picture of what was happening in each school was drawn. Each portrait was sent to its corresponding school with a letter to the

principal explaining what was done and requesting a reaction to it. In each case the principal was telephoned prior to sending the portrait in order to let him, (all principals identified in this study were men), know to expect it. A copy of the letter and one of the written responses are included in Appendix F and H. What follows in this chapter are those portraits.

## **Portrait Number One**

### **Court Elementary School**

Court Elementary is situated within an older section of Flora School District. There is new building going on around the school property. A lot of this building is high density housing. The part of the school the visitor sees when entering the parking lot is very old but behind this old building is a newer, much larger school. As well, there are several portables on site. This school accommodates 600 kindergarten to grade six students.

The principal of Court Elementary is in his final year before retirement. This is his fifth year at this school. He has been in Flora District working as a principal for many years. During the time the two teachers were interviewed, the principal taught in their rooms.

The first teacher interviewed currently taught grade three. She had been at Court Elementary for seventeen years and now felt it was time for a move. During the time at the school, she had taken an active role in the school's Collegial Council and seemed to be involved in many staff development activities.

The second teacher to be interviewed was ill and had to go home. As a result, the principal conferred with some of the teachers as to who would make a good candidate and it was decided to ask the kindergarten teacher. She readily agreed to be interviewed. This was only her second year in the school.

### **Plan development**

When this principal arrived at Court Elementary five years previously, there was no school improvement plan in place. He, along with a new vice principal, sent out teacher questionnaires at the first staff meeting asking about teacher interests and goals and soliciting input as to what the school's goals should be. From the information obtained from those forms, the two administrators drew up a five year plan.

Currently, in the spring, the staff votes on six teachers to make up a School Collegial Council. In May this council along with the principal and vice principal evaluate the goals from the current school plan and, "formulate a plan that we take to the staff at the staff meeting." Each of the five goals has a committee to look after it. Teachers choose which committee(s) they would like to work on.



"Usually a chairperson is decided upon and that person calls the meetings." The committees meet "several times during the year," according to the grade three teacher. Committees take proposals to the staff meeting for staff input and voting. Strategies are added to the plan, a timeline inserted and professional development days and speakers are tied into it.

This staff has found that it is important to do the planning in the spring, "so that we were well on our way to looking at them (the goals) and being able to get down to practicalities in using the goals in September," stated the kindergarten teacher. She also points out that often an idea comes from one staff member and then is discussed by the group as a whole. Ideas are then prioritized by the staff and those ideas that have top priority become the goals. The voting or prioritizing is sometimes done with the use of stickers - everyone having the same number of stickers. "In this sense, it was a very democratic process.... It does tend to consolidate things as well."

### **Plan description and contents**

The kindergarten teacher describes this as a "co-operative"

plan, for the reasons she mentioned above. It is broken down into five main areas in which, "we wanted to establish school goals." Each area then is divided into objectives, strategies, resources, timeline, and progress. The committee keeps track of the progress they are making in each area. At the end of the plan there is another section on evaluation. The items listed in this section describe the evaluation techniques to be used in the school during the year, not the evaluation of each goal.

One of the goals 'Curriculum Improvement' is also broken down into the different subject areas, "so that we cover everything with those objectives in mind," the grade three teacher pointed out. She said, "It is quite an extensive process," but she feels it is important to have all this information in the plan because it gives you a "focus" and protects against the staff becoming "splintered" and staying "in your own little world."

The objective of this type of planning is, "to collect each professional person's ideas - lay them out so everyone can look at them," felt the kindergarten teacher. The principal stated it differently, "Consistency of effort on behalf of children from the

point of view of the total staff." All agreed that all staff members are involved in the plan.

### **Problems with the plan**

The principal remembered when they first started this type of planning there was, "a bit of resistance because the vice principal and I were new." But he maintained the problem was overcome when the staff recognized that the input from their sheets had become part of the plan. As well, they started having a staff committee (now the School Collegial Council) that bought, "into ownership right away and they were the ones, really, that convinced the rest of the staff, almost all of them."

A problem they encountered the first year was in the size of the plan. It was really too big. At the end of the year, "we really determined that we tried too much so we cut it back." The grade three teacher also remembers that the format gave them, "a lot to think of and any setting up of any kind of a plan and initiating it is difficult."

Currently there is no problem getting the plan, according to the two teachers. It was felt a reason for this was the staff choosing

the objectives themselves. It is not a top - down plan. It is a "democratic process" and "everyone has a chance to voice their opinions."

### **Involvement of staff in the plan**

From the beginning of the plan's development, the administrative team sought staff input in the form of questionnaires and the establishment of a School Collegial Council. The use of the questionnaire is now limited to new staff members. Currently, teachers get to choose which goals will be selected for each year by having a vote on them. Teachers also select which goals they will work on and have input as a committee. Committees then take their plans to the staff as a whole and all staff members have a chance for input. By choice, teachers select which workshops they will attend that pertain to their goals. After attending such workshops, teachers, "come back and give a little talk of what they did." This too is done during staff meetings.

The kindergarten teacher said the year she spent as a member of the school's collegial council made her understand, "exactly what our school goals were made up of and gave me a much better idea of

how we were doing things at the school about the democratic process and actually having perhaps a little more input into areas because I was directly working on a committee." The time she put into the council, she felt had therefore benefitted her.

Staff members mentioned that there is a lot of talking going on between staff members about the plan. This talking allows teachers, "the opportunity to give opinions on how well or how poorly things have gone and to make suggestions for improvements for another year."

There appeared to be teacher participation regarding the ongoing evaluation of various components of the plan. For example, as the school's population changed, the special needs of students changed. According to the grade three teacher, the principal often sent around a clipboard with a mini needs assessment on it for teachers to reassess student needs, for example, newly identified learning assistance students. The kindergarten teacher also pointed out this method is used to ask for input on the overall plan such as, "the plus' and minus' and suggestions for next year."

The principal believed that everyone must be made to feel their

opinions are valuable, "We begin to recognize that some of the older ones (teachers) call themselves dinosaurs. The dinosaurs really do want to keep up with things and they are just as vital as the younger ones and once you get that across, that everybody's contribution is appreciated in some way, then you get away from the negativism and you're into the positive." Age then was not a factor in participation but he pointed out some teachers don't want to participate fully in the plan. They feel that things are working out perfectly fine and they want to be left out. "So to suggest that in any plan ... you're going to get everybody, is not the way it works out." This principal's comment appeared not to be made with regret but rather he was pointing out the reality of the situation.

Teachers on staff at Court Elementary, seemed to be very used to this democratic process. This fact was demonstrated clearly when, "a date was set for the spring production without the staff being consulted - that had to be rescinded and the democratic process was gone through again." One staff member pointed out that this teacher strength could also be attributable to the fact that teachers now belong to a union.

### **Implementation of the plan**

At Court Elementary, it appears the Collegial Council plays a role in the implementation of the school's overall plan. Each month they are involved in setting the staff meeting agenda. It is therefore to this group that committee chairpersons as well as individuals take items that they wish to be discussed as a whole staff. The issues are raised at the staff meeting, "discussed amongst the whole staff and then meetings would be set and committees would go about fulfilling their tasks." It therefore goes from individual or small group input to whole group discussion and then returns to "breaking down into groups."

It was pointed out that teachers interested in a particular direction may choose to go to workshops on this topic, for example, cooperative learning. Teachers return to the school and share the information at a staff meeting and discuss newly tried strategies, "with other people who have been interested and have asked us." The grade three teacher felt it was important to be learning about the goal or strategy and using it in the classroom at the same time. "So you're learning about it and you're using it and I find that the

workshops we have helped me because I'm using it in my class."

Another strategy identified as being important to goal implementation was the use of school-wide themes. The themes appeared to be a vehicle to combine various goals such as cooperative learning and whole language. The kindergarten teacher said teachers keep, "in mind what the school goals are, what the focuses are and will use those ideas in their planning." These goals and themes had been noted in her long-term planning when she did her previews.

Sometimes the implementation of a goal means reorganizing existing structures. The focus in Court Elementary on whole language has meant the setting up of, "a new resource centre for whole language materials." Changes at this school seem to come about by the staff working together as a whole, in groups, and individually, but always the overall plan guided the staff's direction.

### **Plan evaluation**

Mentioned by all staff members interviewed was the importance of the end of the year evaluation of the plan at which time all staff members had a chance for input. Although the School's Collegial Council reviews the goals and puts forth a plan for staff



approval, this does not eliminate the end of the year review. The kindergarten teacher remembered there had been some problems with a fund raiser spelling bee, "but at the end of the year we assessed that and decided to change things a little bit."

The principal maintained that he could evaluate how well the plan was going by teacher reaction. For example, at staff meetings when teachers, "request that we get on with the business of let's see about resources for the new primary program and who would be willing to put out the effort to get that all together," this type of feedback let him know the plan was working. He also pointed out that the vice principal was extremely good at giving teachers feedback when they were trying out parts of the plan in the classroom. She did this by writing teachers notes.

Ongoing evaluation of the plan is carried out in the committees and by teachers talking together. Through the committees, "We monitor ourselves a lot. We keep track of it . We know we've got the plan and we've got our timelines," mentioned the grade three teacher. She maintained that this interest happened because, "We made the plan and we want it to work. We're interested in these things. We

work towards them because you want to. It's your interest. You've invested." Teachers talking together, helping one another was also mentioned by all those interviewed. "We discuss it and we compare how things are happening," said one teacher. The other teacher commented, "If someone has come up with a good idea ... they will share that idea and others will give the ideas that they have too." She felt, "communication is the big word." This sharing appeared to happen at all times - after seeing a display someone had put up, after inservices, at staff meetings - all the time.

The teachers felt they could also evaluate the plan by; observing their students, the tone of the class, feedback from substitutes and class helpers, the enthusiasm of the rest of the staff, the turnout of community members and the amount of parent support with class projects. Evaluation at Court Elementary seemed to come about through both planned channels such as the end of the year meeting, and also unplanned channels like receiving feedback from students and others.

### **Influences outside the school that affect the plan**

This staff mentioned many influences outside the school that

affect their plan. Both teachers and the principal pointed out that Ministry innovations affect them directly. Some areas which they identified were the new Primary Program, the policy regarding mainstreaming handicapped children and the Year 2000 document. The point being made was that these items had not been part of their plan but due to outside pressures, they had become a focus for the school. Central office sometimes asked the schools to be innovative in certain areas, the principal pointed out. The grade three teacher mentioned the accreditation currently being undertaken in the school took away from time spent in meetings about their goals.

The union's role was mentioned by the principal as making it currently impossible to do some things that they had done in the past to help make their goals work, such as, changing the location of everyone's class, telling the teachers, "you are moving to such and such room." The kindergarten teacher felt the union influenced the way things were done. It was currently important that, "this decision has come from the teachers not from the administration."

The changing student population in a school can also affect the plan. In Court Elementary, a large influx of students that could not

speaking English meant that an increased focus must now be placed on the English as Second Language and Learning Assistance Programs. The concerns of the community was a final factor noted as affecting the plan. This concern had influenced the school's goal regarding multiculturalism. This staff identified many pressures from outside the school that directly affect what they planned and then how they carried out that plan.

### **Outside Support of the Plan**

District office was seen as being an important source of support from all interviewees at this school. The principal mentioned that members from district office give the school recognition and feedback "to let you know you're moving in the right direction." The support offered by district personnel coming into the class and teaching or giving workshops, was greatly appreciated by the two teachers. "It reinforces that what you're doing is right and it encourages you to go on." Another source of support were the parents and outside guests to the school. It was the feedback from these sources making positive statements to staff members that they found very valuable.

## **Portrait Number Two**

### **Maitland Junior Secondary**

Maitland Jr. Secondary houses 690 grade eight to ten students. It is situated west of, but close to, the town centre. The building itself is twenty-seven years old and is in good condition. The school entrance is not unusual but is very tidy and clean. When walking throughout the school, one is impressed by the overall shining floors.

The principal, although not new to administration, is in his second year at this school. He has been in education in the Flora district for twenty-seven years and actually went to school in this district. He is without a doubt energetic and dynamic. He is also very welcoming and remained unguarded and open during the entire interview.

Greg, the first teacher interviewed, had been at this school for twelve years. He had taught for sixteen years. He teaches English at Maitland Jr. Sec. and is currently the English Department Coordinator. He has been very involved in the development of the school's improvement plan and took over as the head of the staff development committee at the beginning of this year.

A new teacher to the staff, Blair, was the second teacher interviewed. This was only his second year here. He had taught for only a short time before coming to Maitland School. He teaches Social Studies at all grade levels.

### **Plan Development**

According to the principal, the idea for the plan developed between himself and one of the directors from Central Office - the district was looking for a school to pilot a new project. The two vice principals were then brought into discussions along with consultants from Central Office. The plan was taken to the staff as a, "non-compulsory sort of thing but we had certain things that we were looking at doing." Greg also agreed that this was the way the plan got started. He recalled, "at the staff level we really didn't have much input into the initiation of the pilot project." However, the principal was trying to dovetail what the staff was already doing in professional development with the pilot program. Greg said, "I guess we developed the plan in response to a specific mandate from the school district but we also had a generalized, if not formally, articulated plan of the development as well." Although the new

teacher on staff was not involved in the original part of the plan, he felt that the development from his point of view, was continued through staff involvement, "in a Pro D day where they laid out some goals and how they were going to accomplish those goals."

### **Plan description**

The plan is described as, "a cooperative plan, a plan of sharing." The teachers are looking at ways of keeping students within the school system, (the district's project), by using different teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, (the school's project). Greg felt the plan allowed them to, "incorporate those strategies into our classroom by supporting one another, by teaching one another, networking among ourselves to incorporate that kind of information." The plan allows the teachers to, "consolidate as much as possible, students into broader ranges of ability groupings in the classroom ...and deal with these students using strategies which we perhaps haven't generally used in the past."

Because of the funding that was provided with the pilot project, teachers have had the opportunity to do much more professional development. They have attended workshops given by

noted educational leaders and then brought back and shared this information among staff members. It also needs to be mentioned, that through creative timetabling, the staff has been able to free up a block "x". Teaching time was increased in other blocks, "leaving a spare block without kids in the school." During this time, the staff agreed, "It was a time for individual or collective staff development." Meetings are held each week during this time, "to pursue stated goals and share information received from external sources."

### **Plan components**

"Block x" was very much a component of the plan. Blair mentioned the importance of this time when, "teachers could get together and share ideas and learn new things." The objective of the plan, "to seek new and varied teaching strategies that will work well in trying to convert to a child centered curriculum," along with the use of time during block "x" appear to be the two components of the plan that allow it to go forward. However, Greg also mentioned that important in this process, is the objective of, "making teachers better at what they do and empowering them to feel they can make significant changes in their own lives and, therefore, in their



classrooms.”

New teaching strategies then come out of the time spent during professional development activities outside the school and then returning to the school and sharing them with staff members.

Specific strategies are not outlined in the plan. The principal felt that some people may say, “Well that’s not a plan because you didn’t know what you were going to do before you went and did it. I would certainly agree but it works for us.”

The plan itself did state a purpose, include eight objectives, an evaluation component, quotes from students, and a philosophy statement. Greg pointed out that the plan is, “a generalized vision of a direction in which we want to go. I guess we have kind of a road map of the continent but we don’t have a detailed topographical map of each little place.”

### **Plan problems**

To begin with, staff members recall that there was suspicion about the pilot project because it came as a top-down idea. However, teachers soon realized the district was not going to mandate how the staff went about developing the pilot project. Teachers had lot of

input. They saw opportunities for professional development would be vast due to the \$30,000 that accompanied the project. Therefore, staff members' "resistance turned into acceptance." Blair mentioned that not everyone bought in at first but as teachers had a chance to "get out and about" enthusiasm and excitement grew and almost everyone now participates in the weekly staff development meetings.

The principal remembers that at first there were some critics of the plan. He felt the teachers wanted a "nice finished product" and this plan was not such a plan but rather it was an ongoing plan that, "constantly would be changing." This idea took a while to be accepted. The principal felt, "communication was the key to acceptance and the communication happened during those weekly meetings when staff members could see how ideas would change." During this time, teachers also became more open because it "was okay to have a problem and not know exactly how you're going to deal with it." Together, as a group, problems were solved.

One of the teachers thought it may be better to have more of a detailed plan but pointed out that the vision type of plan allows teachers, "to be finding new ways to be excited about their work."

Also identified by one of the teachers was the need to find out which strategies really were working, in other words some type of evaluation to give teachers feedback as to how successful they really are.

Another problem noted by the teachers is staff turnover. Some of the key players in their plan have left the school for career moves. The teachers who replaced these players have, "by and large been younger teachers and that made it important for us to spend time integrating those younger teachers into our culture and trying to actually make them part of the creation of a culture." Blair was one of those younger teachers. His comment about the plan, "Oh I'm really satisfied. It's been tremendous."

### **Participation of staff in the plan**

From what all those interviewed said, the principal's role was key in getting the plan started. He was the one who approached the Director of Instruction for funding for the school's project and through some creative juggling saw a way to dovetail the school's action plan with that of the district. In this way funding was provided which allowed the plan to be implemented in a variety of

ways.

Both the teachers and principal agreed those staff members who wanted to be involved were "invited to be involved." At first it was those teachers who were perceived as leaders as well as those teachers who were interested. Now everyone is involved in professional development. "Every teacher on staff has gone to at least two major workshops." The teachers get the release time but are then expected to debrief and share what they have learned. Once again this sharing takes place during the time created by block "x."

According to Blair, the head of the professional development committee was and is a "catalyst" in moving the project ahead. Although the person who headed that committee had left the school, the position was filled by another staff member, Greg, who is currently seen as a catalyst.

To the teachers, the principal is seen as, "overseeing the change." All staff members are involved in this change process, "at their level, with their interests, and their little networks of co-workers." Blair points out that it started with "a core of people who were keen to change. But now I would say it is the vast majority of

the staff."

### **Plan Implementation**

In actuality, it started with eight to ten committed teachers in June of the first year and by November there were in excess of thirty teachers involved. The plan was implemented by asking teachers to participate not by demanding participation. The teachers involved at the beginning used brainstorming and problem resolution to come up with "how to start and what we were going to do." The first year was used to get the teachers using a variety of new teaching strategies. This was done through attending workshops and then sharing the new knowledge with colleagues during "x" block. The importance of this time together cannot be underestimated. Greg feels, "Having that hour every week, which was put aside for matters of reflection, timing, collegial activity, I think has made it possible for us to continue forward with whatever seems to be appropriate at a particular time." Blair adds that having district resource people "that regularly come into the school and model new ideas," has been a big help in implementing new teaching strategies. He felt that implementation was further assisted by, "people talking about what

they are doing in the classroom and asking people into their classrooms to see what's going on and ...you get invited into other people's classrooms."

This year, grade eight students have all been put in regular classrooms. There is no modified program. This new approach is possible by, "using the various teaching strategies which have been learned and which had not been used in secondary schools in the past," according to the principal.

Some teachers playing key roles in the plan have, "been freed up to pursue activities other than strictly teaching." For example, Greg as the head of the professional development and Mary in charge of the integrated program, are given this extra time to assist in implementation and ongoing reassessment of the plan. The implementation is done through professional development both outside and inside Maitland Jr. Sec., giving time to teachers to discuss what they have seen, observe each other teaching, and then discuss again what they are doing.

## **Plan Evaluation**

How the teaching strategies are being used in the classroom is by observation of fellow teachers. Through the process of peer coaching, colleagues give each other feedback. Regular block "x" meetings give teachers a chance to constantly evaluate and revise what they are doing. The fact that teacher participation in these meetings has increased to include almost all the staff, is an indication to Blair that teachers are feeling successful.

Blair maintains the plan is working because in his classroom, he sees increased student interest and involvement. In his classroom, he has fewer discipline problems than he had before and a higher percentage of students on task.

Another evaluation technique being used is that of tracking student achievement. The teacher in charge of the integrated program, "tracks the students at risk and notes their achievement." According to Greg, with all students, "increased student marks," also give teachers feedback on how their teaching strategies are working. As well, the vice principal, along with a professor from U.B.C., are evaluating the program by doing interviews and surveys with staff

members and students. The results from this evaluation should give some hard data as to how well the overall plan is working.

### **Outside sources which influence and support the plan**

Certainly, the Flora School District played an important role in the beginning of this plan at Maitland Jr. Sec. It was district office staff and Maitland administrators together that developed the plan's focus. As well, all those interviewed noted the importance of the large sum of money from the district that allowed teachers "to pursue, virtually without restraint, professional development activities" and "collaborative-cooperative planning time." According to the teachers, this financial support has made the teachers feel that the Flora district and the principal of Maitland Jr. Sec. really believe "that professional development is important in this school." One of the teachers noted it meant to him that his, "worth as a person who is in this for a life time career is being valued and (he) think(s) many people feel that way."

The teachers also feel that the members of the district's Learning Services Team have assisted them by being, "a sounding board for what we are doing." These people come to the school with,



"fresh ideas and we bounce ideas off each other and come up with better ideas." "We're in contact with them frequently and they encourage us and guide us. They have been in the school a lot." As a result, the district as well as outside presenters have had a tremendous impact on what is happening at Maitland Jr. Sec.

The principal also notes the school staff have been and will continue to be influenced by the new educational movement within the Province. The Sullivan Report, A Legacy for Learners, The Primary Program, The Year 2000 Document and currently The Intermediate Program - all influence what they are doing. He says about The Intermediate Program, "We're all sitting there with bated breath waiting for it to come."

### **Benefits from this plan**

From the principal's point of view, he sees the plan has, "drastically changed the activities in the classroom. Teachers now use strategies they never used before." He also feels there is increased communication between teachers which has been generated by the plan. "Teachers work together, not individually."

From the teachers' point of view, the teachers feel

"empowered" and believe they can "make significant changes in their classrooms." They believe these changes "benefit the students directly." It was also mentioned that teachers feel they are "valued" and have "worth." Overall then, all staff interviewed felt the plan had many positive outcomes for their teaching.

### **Portrait Number Three**

#### **Garden Meadow Elementary**

Garden Meadow Elementary surrounded by expensive new homes, is located on the south side of the Flora School District. The building itself is new and well kept on the outside and inside. The school houses three hundred and thirty students from kindergarten to grade seven. When I arrived during the noon hour, it was pleasant to see the students outside shouting, running, using playground equipment - in a relaxed way. There was no fighting going on. I noticed the situation appeared very carefree and tension-free.

The principal of Garden Meadow Elementary had been in this school for six years. He was being transferred to a larger, dual track elementary school in September.

Chris, the grade seven teacher interviewed had been in this school for ten years. She had applied for a transfer at the end of the year as she thought it would be a positive move for her. Chris was friendly and welcoming. She taught in an open area with the other grade seven teacher. According to Chris, she enjoyed teaching in this way.

The second teacher interviewed was a grade two teacher, Mary. This was her fourth year teaching in this school and her fifth year teaching. She had begun by teaching kindergarten but had recently moved to grade two.

### **Plan Development**

The first two years the principal was at this school, the staff spent time, "really thinking about what we were about as a school, the direction that we wanted to go in." It was during the second year he was at Garden Meadows that the direction for the school "became much clearer to us as a group." The professional development committee made up of staff members, met on a "fairly regular basis" and seemed instrumental in focussing the school's direction. At the end of that second year, a vice principal was appointed to the school. She had expertise in the direction the school staff had chosen to go. After the direction of the school had been decided by staff, the new vice principal, the principal and a district colleague sat down during the summer and developed a plan to take back to the staff in September. The plan was accepted by the staff and "it just went from there." Chris recalls that the vice principal was a member of

the planning committee. Very important to kicking off their plan was the attendance of all staff at an evening workshop in Vancouver. She felt, "that kind of got everybody working together towards a common goal."

### **Plan description**

The plan has been described as one of direction. It has "some sense of where we want to go." It had a "foundation" to it, being supported by current literature at that time. The plan was "a long term commitment although Chris didn't know "if initially we saw it as one." However, this plan was also "flexible." The principal pointed out, "We had an idea of what our ultimate destination was but we were quite prepared to take side trips off along the way and investigate things that seemed to be interesting." He also mentioned this flexibility was seen in the classroom. "In many cases what finally came out, in a practical sense in the classroom, was really very different from teacher to teacher, based on their background, personality, what they were comfortable with and so on."

"The plan contained thirty to forty teaching for thinking strategies that utilized a cooperative learning approach." The

principal pointed out that money was an important component of the plan because substitute time had to be used to provide the teachers with planning time. "Time" was also mentioned by Mary as an important component. Their plan outlined training for teachers as well as resources "to use for the implementation of the process."

The main objective of the plan was, "to make our students more responsible and self motivated learners," according to Mary. Chris also agreed with this objective but added, "to be cooperative citizens." From the principal's point of view however, the plan's objective was "to provide every teacher on staff with a whole range of teaching for thinking strategies that they could use across the curriculum at their level, whatever level they happened to be in the school."

### **Problems with the plan**

There was no problem getting the plan going once the direction had been identified by staff. However, the principal recalled, "If there was a problem, it was deciding what we wanted to do, (to begin with)." He felt this was partially attributable to the fact that he was new to the school and the staff hadn't changed at all. The ideas

of the staff "didn't necessarily match entirely with the sorts of things that I felt that the school would do well to pursue." The plan they developed, "wasn't necessarily the agenda for either group." He also mentioned the staff going together as a group, (all but one), to the Johnson Brothers workshop really was what "sold" or "cemented" the plan.

Both the principal and Mary identified pacing as a problem. It was in the initial stages. Mary said, "that first year was very intense." The principal agreed that there were times when there was total "overloading" which lead to teachers saying "it's too much" but he also felt that there were times, "when we could have really focussed in a lot harder than we did." He claimed this problem could be overcome by careful monitoring along the way and communicating honestly with each other.

Sometimes the scope of a strategy had to become more grade specific. Mary recalled they would have to regroup into primary and intermediate or further narrow it down into a kindergarten-grade one group and a grade two - three group. The scope of certain ideas was too diverse when working together.

Both teachers felt the loss of the vice principal had currently affected the plan because "they didn't have other people leading the workshops." "This year we haven't had as much sharing amongst teachers because we didn't plan." The vice principal had been "very good at organizing those things and she's not with us now." The vice principal then seemed to be a key person throughout this plan.

### **Teacher participation in the plan**

All staff interviewed noted that teacher participation throughout the plan was important. Frequently mentioned by everyone were the opportunities for staff dialoguing. In the beginning, the staff development committee was important in formulating a direction for the staff. Information was always brought back to the staff so "everybody could have input," recalled Chris. Mary also felt everyone had a chance "to have our two-bits" in the discussion.

The staff development committee was itself chaired by a teacher and included four teachers and the administrators. This committee met monthly but always brought everything back to the whole staff for input and ratification. Sometimes a questionnaire



was used to gather follow-up information. The results were then tabulated and taken back to the staff.

During the implementation of the plan, once again staff dialoguing seemed to play an important role. The principal remembered, "They talked about it and they might help each other a little bit. Then we come together and talk about how it was going and modify and adapt it and go back and try it again." "The staff would come to your rescue," said Mary. "There was a commitment to each other to say, well let's stop and spend ten minutes talking about how we can make this work...." Chris as well pointed out, "We had time then to talk about it, what was going well and what was not going well. The talking also continued throughout evaluation of the plan which seemed to overlap the plans' implementation. If something hadn't gone well, Mary pointed out, "you'd have three people saying, what did you do? How did you do it? Gee I wonder if.... There is a lot of support. I don't think anything would have gone bad, it would have just gone again." Talking amongst the staff seemed to have been a great influence in the plan's success.

### **Implementation of the plan**

This staff used their professional development time to focus on their plan. A group of teachers, perhaps primary or maybe the odd numbered divisions, "would take a half day, meet for lunch in someone's home and spend the rest of the afternoon discussing and planning a particular strategy." Six half days were also used for demonstration lessons within the school. They were given by a resource person from outside the school. She was mentioned by all staff interviewed as a critical component of implementing the plan's strategies. Groups of teachers together would watch her teach a lesson and then they would "debrief" about it. Mary said, "It was a time to be alone with your colleagues and say, 'Did you hear what so and so said?'" The lessons were not just taught once but many times using a variety of classes. This technique allowed teachers "to see it again with your own kids or with someone close to your level, watching her actually interact with the kids. Then you feel like as a teacher, you're more secure."

The teachers also did "side by side" teaching recalled the principal. Mary pointed out that they had the opportunity to go into

each other's classrooms. "I would go in and watch the grade sevens do this and say, 'Wow, look what they've done with this.' This would inspire me...." This type of plan implementation allowed the teachers to learn a strategy, "have a chance to get together in school time to talk about what we're doing and go back and try it again," stated Chris.

The cooperative learning model was also used with staff members at a staff meeting. Teachers would go into groups of three, "hash some of this stuff through and figure out what's best and what we are going to do next." Using this type of model the principal felt allowed for flexibility. "So along the way there is a lot of talking and a lot of modifying and adapting the program."

Although initially this program was viewed as a way of teaching language arts, the teachers soon saw it could be used in other areas. Chris found, "if a strategy worked in one subject, why not in another"? So she now used a particular strategy across subjects. As a staff, they felt their plan also could be used in dealing with students on the playground, so once again they extended into another area - discipline.

After three years of having the professional development days being lead by someone from outside the school, currently staff members take a leadership role on these days. They felt they now had expertise from within.

Part of the plan's implementation turned into involving the parents. Staff members put on workshops for them. Teachers showed parents "what we do with their children."

### **Plan evaluation**

The principal maintained that through observations he knew the plan had been implemented. Teachers were now less "front and centre." They were using a broader repertoire of teaching strategies and he had noticed an increase in the amount of teacher dialoguing about the use of strategies. He also found that when he talks to staff members individually about their planning, the teachers have changed focus from, "What I'm planning for my class" to "this is how I think the children are going to benefit."

The teachers evaluate how well they've done by observing the students. Both teachers noticed an increase in student involvement during the lessons and cooperation at all times. They look at output

of student work - sometimes in the form of writing or discussion. Currently, it was to be a performance by the students.

Feedback is also an important evaluation tool. Hearing from substitute teachers about student involvement and cooperation, helped these teachers to know the students were learning. Parent feedback during parent-teacher conferences also helped. Mary felt personal satisfaction was also a good indicator of successful implementation. Chris pointed out fewer discipline problems on the playground was also a good indicator.

Mary recalled that the feedback she got from other staff members as she progressed, helped her evaluate what she was doing on a regular basis. Regular debriefing, "at the start of the next pro day or at the staff meeting," was very important to Chris. This allowed everyone to have input into how well the plan was working. As well, "at the end of the year, as a whole group, we sat down and we evaluated the program for the year and then re-established what it was we were going to do for the next year."

At present the staff is not trying to implement any new strategies. They decided they needed a year where they could, "sit

back and use what we have learnt." This activity in itself seemed to be a form of evaluation. The principal felt it was important to, "see if we can't get a hold of the stuff we've learned and learn to do it well but not learn any more on top of that." He pointed out they had used the CTBS in the past to evaluate student learning, but that format wasn't suitable to evaluate teaching for thinking strategies. As a result, the staff have had a lot of talk about what to use in its place and this talk is ongoing.

### **Influences on the plan**

The biggest single influence from outside the school was the district consultant who came into the school on a regular basis throughout the three years and put on the many demonstration lessons, provided the staff with new ideas and offered the staff advice. The principal felt her presence was "crucial." She was seen to be "highly skilled" and have a lot of "expertise." All staff members agreed on the importance of this individual to their plan.

It also seemed the vice principal was a very strong inside influence for this plan. She was seen as the "instigator" of the plan. She coordinated the overall plan for the staff. She was the person

who applied for money from the Ministry to help implement the plan. The principal felt the Ministry money really was an important outside influence on the plan.

### **Support for the plan**

That money helped show support of the plan and allowed the teachers to use in-school time for teacher release. According to Mary, "The money paid for us to have a sub come in. You didn't feel the stress of your classroom being there." Chris pointed out the parents were very supportive and allowed the staff to use parent-raised funds to supply substitutes. It was felt part of the reason they were so supportive were the workshops the staff had put on for them. As a result, they knew and understood exactly what the staff at Garden Meadows was trying to do. The principal recalled, "They let us go to it and really didn't run interference at all."

The commitment from the district's Learning Services Team over three years showed that these people, particularly the one consultant, was very supportive of the plan. It seemed then that three outside sources showed support for this plan; Ministry money, parents and district consultants.

## **Portrait Number Four**

### **Fir Grove Elementary**

Fir Grove Elementary is situated in the eastern portion of the Merrill District. The school is in a middle class neighbourhood and is about twenty years old. The building is spotless inside. Shiny floors and attractive displays give the impression of orderliness. This school also has four portables. The increase in size is partly attributable to the French Immersion Program that is housed here. That program is for grade one to seven students while the English program includes kindergarten to grade seven students.

The school's principal has been in this school for eight years and is being transferred to a new dual track school in the same neighbourhood. The first teacher interviewed, taught grade six and had also been in this school for six years. He had taught for some time before that. The second teacher had only been in the school two years. She was the "school-based staff associate" and took a leadership role in the implementation of the school's improvement plan. She taught kindergarten half time and a variety of other programs making up her full time assignment.



## **Plan development**

In June, this staff goes on retreat for a day at which time the principal leads the staff through a process that starts, "fleshing out the type of things that we want to do." According to the principal, "We look at our academic achievement, we'd look at our school community, we look at our school climate and those types of areas and we'd determine goals in those areas for things that we wanted to do as a group, as a staff." As well, the school had not had a staff development focus prior to this time. Therefore during the retreat, plans were put into place to get this focus started. For example, the kindergarten teacher was selected to be the school-based staff associate and she looked at literature, (specifically Johnson and Johnson's Leading the cooperative school), that would help the staff implement it's goals. "As well there was a staff development committee. Within that we made two task forces to address each of those goals and then other people could climb on board those committees," remembered the kindergarten teacher.

In early September, the staff once again has a day off to revisit the goals, try to get new staff members on board and further refine

the goals. They identify "who will take responsibility for those goals." The grade six teacher recalled, "During the planning session, the teachers brainstormed their ideas and put these ideas up on paper." These ideas were narrowed down to five and gradually to two. The principal noted it was important to compare the goals to the mission statement and say, "Does this match and if it doesn't match there is something wrong." The plan developed by the staff in this way was then submitted to the district office by October.

### **Plan description and content**

The overall plan was based on the school's philosophy that was developed by the staff. It is a, "philosophy statement about what you believe about education and what you believe about kids," the principal felt. "Supporting the philosophy are a series of mission statements saying here's what we believe about our philosophy." Finally the goals were selected and compared to the mission statements. The principal saw the plan then as one that is based on what the school staff believes in. The teachers saw the plan as, "meeting the needs of kids," - "very much a working plan where strategies were tried one at a time."

The staff also pointed out the plan contained objectives for the goals and strategies to reach those objectives. Datelines, and resources in the form of people and money were also mentioned as being included in the plan. The kindergarten teacher noted, "It's important to have these components but it's okay to constantly change them.... If you don't set dates and guidelines and know when you've got there, it is very difficult to know that you have indeed arrived and to celebrate that you've achieved that." These components then, were seen to be important to the plan.

### **Plan objective**

All interviewees agreed that the main objective of the plan is to implement cooperative learning in the class. It was pointed out this objective tied into the school goal of improving student achievement. There was also another objective; to implement a school-based discipline philosophy. However, this second objective was only mentioned by the kindergarten teacher. It was outlined on the plan as number two, "to work towards a staff ideal of what good discipline looks and sounds like, for staff and students."

### **Plan Problems**

There was no problem getting this plan according to staff members. When asked why there wasn't a problem, they all mentioned that the staff was "pretty good," "very professional," "everyone is absolutely committed," as the reasons why this was so. The kindergarten teacher did mention that one teacher was getting married and as a result is too overworked to be very involved but that was just one of those things that happened and didn't affect the momentum of the plan. The grade six teacher felt more time was needed during the school day to work on the plan's strategies. Overall however the credit for few problems was given to the entire staff.

### **Plan participation**

Throughout the year, all staff members were involved in putting this plan in place. From the early stages of developing the plan, staff members had input through brainstorming and the selection of goals. There was "whole staff consensus on our focus," pointed out the kindergarten teacher. Groups of teachers worked on the plan's objectives but then input from the whole staff was solicited and she noted that as a result of this input, "we may modify some of those

other components."

As the plan was being implemented, teachers attended workshops on identified goals, observed district staff teaching strategies to classes within this school and then used peer-coaching techniques to assist each other in implementing the strategies into the classroom. The grade six teacher stated, "First we combine with one teacher and then observe them and we switch again and we see different levels being taught." Peer coaching was mentioned by all these staff members to be an important strategy in implementing their goals.

Teachers talking together was noted by all staff interviewed as an important way of evaluating how well the plan was working in the classroom as well as working overall. "We talk to each other," maintained the grade six teacher. The kindergarten teacher felt "communication" through conversation or notes assisted in this process. She also mentioned, "Everyone's involved in some way at every point. It doesn't mean that we're all equally involved but we all have involvement." It was however through involvement that she believed the staff had become committed to the plan and had

"ownership in what's going on." The principal remembered, "I was afraid to give the ownership away at first but now that I've given it away, it's great. I would never want it back." Staff participation throughout the plan was seen by all staff interviewed as being important to its effectiveness.

### **Plan implementation**

It was through the district's initiative, that the principal first saw this school improvement planning process working in schools. The district took a group of administrators to Lake Oregon where they observed "the tremendous goals that they were achieving ... so we adopted their plan." This principal also sat on a district task force in '82 with the chairman of the board, superintendent, a teacher, and people from the community. The outcome of this task force was the agreement to adopt a policy on this type of school-based improvement planning.

Within Fir Grove Elementary, a staff member was selected to be in charge of directing the school towards its goal and two other teachers chaired the identified committees. Teachers volunteered to sit on the committees. As a group then, they worked on an individual

goal and brought their recommendations back to the entire staff for discussion and staff input.

As well, staff development activities were shared by the entire staff, for example, all staff attended a three-day workshop on one of their goals. District resource people came into the school and demonstrated a particular strategy of the goal such as the carousel technique. According to the grade six teacher, "We all observed the lesson and then we tried it ourselves." The teachers felt, this type of implementation provided a common language for all staff and a big impact was made when teachers actually saw someone modelling a strategy. "We see it first and then we try their sample."

Trying the strategy was then followed by teachers working in pairs using peer coaching techniques. The teachers, "Observe each other and we discuss it," mentioned the grade six teacher. The use of peer coaching appeared to be a very important strategy used to implement the plan as it was mentioned by all staff interviewed. The kindergarten teacher noted when the teachers are involved in this type of "peer coaching immersion," talk between teachers became focused on the goal. "At recess time, when it comes to cooperative

learning immersion week, talk was all about that and after the fact it's still about that too." In this school, teachers then are involved in implementing the goals through input as a staff, a committee and working in pairs. Peer coaching also provided an opportunity for feedback as well as input.

The kindergarten teacher - the staff development chairperson - was the person who kept tabs on the plan. She said, "It wasn't so much that I was the fertilizer for the garden but I was sure the gardener checking that all the plants were coming along fine." The principal made it very clear that he was not the person in power in this process. He said, "I have a task force on staff development that is chaired by a teacher. I have two sub-task forces that are chaired by teachers. I don't sit on those committees. They submit their plan. We talk about their plan and away we go."

The principal felt this process allowed the goals to be implemented in a "very natural" way. He did however mention next year he would give teachers the book Leading the Cooperative School ahead of any planning so the teachers could better understand the model that he planned to use and "how we're going to get a handle on



things."

Another point made by the kindergarten teacher was that things don't happen the same in "all rooms all the time." The principal claimed, "Some teachers will take things on in great gobbs of it, they're just gobbling it up, and some are a little hesitant, so it's at different levels." They all agreed that changes were being made in all classrooms. The fact that some teachers were more involved than others did not appear to be surprising to them or reason to feel discouraged.

### **Plan evaluation**

Whether or not the plan worked was first seen in the classroom. "Just watching kids and seeing how they work and seeing the change - to see that they're doing different things than they used to," observed the grade six teacher. The principal also used observation to judge classroom success of the plan. "What you'll see in every classroom is a lot more student participation, a great deal more than what we've had before. You see kids involved in their learning groups ... a great deal of the time." The grade seven teacher had done some classroom research. She taught a Spelling Unit using the, "same old

method that she normally did. And then she taught one using a cooperative learning strategy and she was just amazed at the difference particularly in retention levels a week later," recalled the principal.

Using peer coaching was also seen as a method of plan evaluation. The teachers received feedback from each other when trying to implement a particular strategy. Sometimes this feedback was submitted to the chairperson in order to let him/her know how well things were going. Talking with colleagues appeared to help teachers know how they were doing. "I can talk it over. I can reflect upon the success by talking about what's happening with either my coaching buddy or other people on staff."

There is ongoing discussion regarding the plan during staff meetings. Teachers said, "I need more time for this or I wish I'd known another cooperative learning strategy before I tried my last session." The chairperson of a particular goal is seen by the grade six teacher as an important component in ongoing evaluation. "She will talk to us about it and she goes to individual teachers to see if there are any problems and she tries to rectify them."

Other strategies used to evaluate the plan included the number of teacher complaints. The grade six teacher noted, "There are none." Fewer suspensions, according to the kindergarten teacher, meant the discipline goal was working. Standardized achievement tests will be used as a measurement of goals. The principal claimed, "We should see some changes in children's achievement, not immediately but over the next two -three years." The members of the staff development committee will meet over dinner in May to look at, "how well the plan is working," recalled the kindergarten teacher. Finally, in late May the staff together will review their plan to see how well it is working. By using these techniques, the staff believed they could evaluate the plan.

### **Influences on the plan from outside the school**

As the principal had noted previously, the district played an important role in initiating school-based improvement planning. It appeared to have been a top-down initiative but had input from both teachers and administrators by including them in the original task force. Schools in the Merrill District are currently kept accountable for this planning. Senior district administrators "require" school

principals to submit their school's goals in plan form to the district by October of each year. As well, in June, the principal and the teachers in charge of the two task forces had to present a school improvement plan summary of what they had accomplished. This summary was made at district office to senior office administrators.

Parents also seemed to influence the plan. They wanted to know, "what's this cooperative learning stuff that's going on"? The teachers therefore put on a workshop for parents so they would understand. The kindergarten teacher felt, "some knowledge about what we are doing, increases their commitment and empathy for us."

### **Outside support**

Mentioned by all staff interviewed was the importance of the district office personnel in supporting the schools in this process. In particular, the Director of Staff Development had helped this school a great deal. She offered the teachers expertise by giving demonstration lessons and support by providing resources such as bibliographies.

Another support factor was characterized by the kindergarten teacher as "the carrot that gets the teachers involved." It was

money. The district had a Quality Enhancement Fund from which each school received some money. Fir Grove received \$13,000. The principal turned this money over to the school staff associate to be used to assist in the plan's needs. This staff chose to use the money to pay for program materials, inservice and teacher release time. For example, "A substitute is hired for five days straight. That costs money." Hiring a substitute allowed teachers to partake in peer-coaching activities. Outside support from district, (personnel and money), appeared to be a factor that really assisted in putting the improvement plan at Fir Grove Elementary into place.

## **Portrait Number Five**

### **Glen Oakes Elementary**

Glen Oakes Elementary is also found in the Merrill School District. It is located in the far western corner of the district in a new subdivision. Houses in this area are mini-mansions. The area is definitely upper-middle class.

The school is new and looks it. Upon entering the school, the visitor is awed by the openness of the building. Windows on both sides of the entrance allow a view inside the library and the office. As well there is a high vaulted roof line composed of skylights further adding to the open feeling.

Glen Oakes Elementary has 350 students composed of kindergarten to grade seven as well as Program Cadre. All staff interviewed had been at the school since it opened eighteen months earlier. The principal had been an administrator for nine years. The intermediate teacher just days before the interview, had been appointed vice-principal. He was an experienced teacher. This was his first administrative position. The second teacher interviewed was the librarian. She had taught for a total of seventeen years and

was bilingual. She was involved in the pursuit of the school goals regarding the Primary Program and increasing student enjoyment and achievement in reading/language arts.

### **Plan development**

In late spring, prior to the school opening, the principal and staff along with a facilitator from district office, "spent the whole day together developing visions and missions, goals and objectives." In June before that first year, staff once again got together away from the school to talk about, "our goals for the next year and how we'll work together as a school. We talk about what would be the most important thing for us to do, what resources we will need and who will be responsible for working on it," according to the librarian.

The initiative for this type of planning was given from the district office. All three staff members mentioned the direction of the district in this process. It was pointed out by the intermediate teacher that it was then the principal who, "took the ball" and carried out the process.

### **Plan description**

The plan itself is called a, "School Tactical Plan." The principal

explained the plan, "is more of just goals and objectives that drive our operation." Because the school is so new, the goals haven't changed much. The intermediate teacher points out the goals are written and these goals have an action plan, "with dates and people responsible and so on and then an evaluation in the end."

### **Plan contents**

It appears the staff together began by forming a mission statement or overarching goal. The librarian maintained this took a lot of concentrated work, working together in small groups, combining ideas and finally honing the idea so it was what they wanted in both French and English. Five goals for the coming year were then identified. Although the plan was not in front of the interviewees, they all pointed out that it contained directions for implementation, "How we'll do it." The intermediate teacher said, "I've forgotten the exact terms we used but the whole idea being that if you're going to have a goal then things have to be done to achieve that goal, for example, who's going to oversee it, also the dates for completion and at the end evaluation to see whether it's effective."



The plan located on the staffroom wall, was divided into sections with the performance goal on top followed by an operational goal. Each goal was on a separate sheet of paper. Each was then divided into strategies, staff development, resources needed, person responsible, target dates (start and finish), budget and evaluation. These components were valuable to the staff interviewed. The librarian said, "It's pie in the sky if you haven't articulated the means by which you can obtain it."

### **Plan problems**

The three staff members interviewed agreed they had no problems getting their plan and maintained lack of problems was the result of all "teachers thinking along the same lines." They had, "similar goals and objectives and then also the teachers were willing to cooperate and come to consensus" noted the intermediate teacher.

Although there didn't appear to be a problem getting the plan, the principal mentioned there was more of a problem getting the wording. The librarian also pointed out that for the primary teachers, working on the new program meant, "A lot more meetings. A lot longer hours. You might finish a meeting at four o'clock and

then you still have all your planning and marking to do." She also felt overall the plan could improve if they were, "able to articulate better what we are doing exactly (regarding the Primary Program)."

### **Staff participation in the plan**

It was pointed out by all staff interviewed that the entire staff has input during all stages of the plan. For example, when the plan was developed, "The meeting was run by the principal but all the teachers were asked to be there and then there were brainstorming sessions," the intermediate teacher recalled. The plan was therefore developed by the staff as a whole. The librarian maintains, "The principal is very open to letting the staff decide what they want."

The actual implementation of the plan is then carried out by various groups that are involved in each particular goal. The goal of implementing the primary program had all primary teachers as well as the librarian involved. It was this group who decided together, "that we would move into the primary ungraded as a lead school," according to the librarian. In order to carry out implementation, this group meets weekly, "in a team kind of setting so they're all involved all the time." Spending money to assist in goal implementation is

also decided by the staff. Together they decided to use money to release a primary and an intermediate teacher for half a day each week. During this time, these teachers would work on developing the plan's strategies.

At the end of the year, the whole staff is once again asked for input regarding the plan. The two teachers pointed out, "The principal is very open to input and feedback from teachers." The teachers take part, "in a session where we have a chance to brainstorm in a small group and then those comments are recorded." It is during this session that staff, "talk about how well we have succeeded and the way we've done it."

### **Plan implementation**

In order to implement the goal of the ungraded primary program, Glen Oakes Elementary primary teachers meet every Wednesday afternoon, after school to work on program goals and objectives. As well, the staff used the money they received as a lead school, \$4500, to provide release time. On one occasion, all primary teachers hired substitutes for the day and together visited another school involved in this program. This gave them an opportunity to

"meet and talk about the program."

The curriculum coordinators, provided with a half day release time, use this time to work on school goals and strategies, "whatever the needs are identified by the staff." The teachers decided this method could, "help that program along." For example, the intermediate teachers felt if measurement of student achievement was going to be done, teachers needed to, "teach test taking skills to the kids." The intermediate curriculum coordinator therefore used the provided time to develop sample questions, "like the ones they would be faced with." The intermediate teacher pointed out, "Teachers then use those in the classroom sometimes as a sponge activity."

Teachers together also plan themes. The themes help to integrate the curriculum. There is sharing of this approach between primary and intermediate classes by having a buddy system which in the long run helps intermediate teachers use the theme approach. In this way, the librarian points out, "there's more unification in the school. Things have become much more fluid and flexible and open and there's been a lot more co-planning and dialoguing between

teachers." Implementation then, appears to be continuous and as a result of teachers' decisions and input into the plan.

### **Plan evaluation**

Plan evaluation, according to those interviewed all agreed was on-going through weekly primary meetings, biweekly intermediate meetings and then monthly staff meetings. As well, in June the plan is reviewed through a debriefing session, "where we take every one of our goals, one by one, and very exhaustively in a large group or smaller group setting, come up with what we think are the strengths of what we have done and how closely have we come to achieving the goal we had set," recalled the intermediate teacher. At this time it is also decided if goals should be ongoing or put in a maintenance category. All staff members were quick to point out that their type of evaluation is subjective and that in the future they need to have "more hard core data."

Within the classroom the principal felt teachers knew parts of the plan were working because of a gut feeling they had and through principal observations. The teachers felt they could tell through increased student involvement, interest and cooperation as well as a

higher level of work being produced by students. The intermediate teacher pointed out if student marks were improved on standardized tests, part of that improvement may be attributable to teaching test taking skills. At this time however, there was nothing in place to validate this finding.

### **Sources outside the school that influence the plan**

The central office was seen as an outside source that influenced the plan. Both the teachers and the principal mentioned this to be so. "They have their missions and goals and that kind of stuff and we have to be hooked in together," according to the principal. The librarian maintains, "it's the district that sets the structure within which we operate and gives us the freedom to develop our own plan." The intermediate teacher as well cited that he believed, "the superintendent was instrumental in this as well, getting involved in the idea of schools setting their own goals that are compatible with the district goals." In this school then, the district seemed to exert pressure on the school to develop their plan.

The Ministry was also identified as a source of influence. The intermediate teachers had been having monthly meetings to deal with

curricular and plan-related matters. Currently they had increased the meetings to biweekly in order to deal with the Year 2000 initiatives put out by the Ministry. The intermediate teacher pointed out these initiatives "are not a stated goal for the school." Time then was taken from the focus of the goals to deal with these new matters that resulted "from the pressure" from the Ministry.

The final outside source identified was parents. It is through the Parent Advisory Committee that the parents let the school know what is going on and "we respond quite quickly to what they say."

### **Outside support**

Two outside sources were also seen as a support for what the school was doing. Mentioned by all the interviewees was the district. As well as assisting in "the original vision-objective setting," the district was seen as supportive by providing personnel, expertise, funds, inservice and professional activities that go along with the goals, according to the intermediate teacher. The District for example showed support by providing money -the \$4500- for the Primary Program and parents too supported the plan by giving the school good ideas that help in goal setting plan. The district then

seemed to give this school the greatest support for its plan although the parents did also provide some support. The support seemed to be important to let the staff know they were headed in the right direction.



## **Portrait Number Six**

### **Glenside Elementary**

Glenside Elementary is located within the Merrill School District and is considered to be an inner-city school. The building itself is old and needs updating. Three hundred students from kindergarten to grade seven currently attend this school.

It was the principal's second year at this school but he had been a principal for ten years and had been in this community for twenty-one years. The experienced, intermediate teacher interviewed had been on this staff for two years and was very involved in the Critical Thinking Process. She had given many district and province-wide workshops on this subject. The second teacher interviewed taught early primary and had been in the school for three years. She had been involved in the teachers' union at a local level and had taken part in some goal setting workshops put on by the BCTF.

### **Developing the plan**

It was the primary teacher and the principal who actually developed a workshop to involve the rest of the staff in a goal-setting process which then led into the development of their school

improvement plan. This workshop took place in September. "We had a staff meeting, a non-instructional day and we looked at what our strengths were and what our weaknesses were and then put these up on charts and we prioritized the ideas we felt promoted a better school." Once the four or five ideas or goals were identified, "Then we formed small groups to work on the goals that were isolated as the school goals." The staff members chose the goal they wanted to work on and it was in the small groups where they, "worked on the various strategies that would help us put the goals in place." It needs to be made clear that each staff member is intensely involved in only one goal, not all four goals identified by the entire staff.

The plan itself was described as a "one year plan" but also it was pointed out that each goal such as "critical literacy certainly isn't a ten month program." It would take much longer. This particular plan was based on what had happened previously in the school as described by their successes and therefore although set out as a ten month plan, it, "is based on what we did last year so it ties in." It is also described as, "not a dictated workshop type plan. People were actively involved in it, lots of brainstorming ideas,

everybody was involved in it." The idea of staff participation throughout the plan came through strongly and is dealt with in a later part of this outline.

### **The Plan**

The plan that had been developed by the staff was printed out. Each teacher had a copy and when discussing the plan each staff member being interviewed referred to his/her copy. When asked, "What does the plan contain?" Each member pointed out as well as the goals, the plan contained strategies for reaching these goals along with, "resources that are going to be needed and this could range from time to money, substitute time - whatever it is. The person responsible, when it will start, when it will finish and of course evaluation - how do you measure that you've actually done it?" The need to have this information in the plan was agreed by all but clearly explained by the intermediate teacher, "I think it gave us a direction. It also gave us a sort of reality as to whether or not it is possible. When you're doing this for the first time as we were doing it, you can be wildly out." The primary teacher also pointed out the need of having strategies and someone responsible for monitoring the

plan ensured that the plan didn't, "go by the wayside."

### **Plan's objective**

The importance of a clear direction for the school staff and students was also seen as the main objective of the school plan. This plan allowed for the direction to continue, "throughout the school year." One teacher also pointed out that the objective was, "to make a good beginning...for the first year we are implementing it. We feel very successful." The objective of the plan then was to give direction and smoothness to the running of the school.

### **Problems getting the plan**

There was no problem getting this plan. However one teacher pointed out that if the plan is too "encompassing" she noted that "you set yourself up to feel less successful than you should feel" but on the other hand it gave "a vision by having a larger view." Both teachers maintained that lack of problems in this school was due to all the professionalism of teachers on staff. "There is so much interest and professional expertise around this particular question we had almost too many strategies." Another identified factor was teacher input. The principal sees the overall importance of this

factor as being central to the success of any improvement planning, "The whole thing starts and ends with the teacher input."

### **Staff participation throughout the plan**

The participation of staff members was mentioned by all the interviewees numerous times throughout the interviews. In fact, direct mention of teacher participation in the plan was mentioned twenty-two times -sixteen of those times were mentioned by the teachers. This participation was recalled by all as beginning with the development of the plan, through to the evaluation of the plan. "We conducted the workshop..... We did a lot of brainstorming, people got to choose areas that they'd like to work in." The second teacher noted, "Then we formed little sub groups.... There were four of us that worked on this particular goal.... We all contributed our expertise and one new primary teacher, was so open and she contributed questions more than anything. So we came up with our plan."

In this school, teachers participated in the implementation of the plan too. "We allocated a lot of money this year to buy better reading materials, and once again the teachers were all involved.

They gave the librarian the lists of resources to order." "We have theme charts and there's a big chart up in the staff room where teachers write in what they're doing and then other people can see that." The implementation is ongoing and visible. The principal maintains, "I know teachers are involved in the strategies because we've set time for it. They talk about it. I know it's being done. They know it's being done. Theme charts - we know it's being done because it's up in the staff room."

This ongoing implementation turns into evaluation with continued staff input. At the end of the year, "We'll just go all through them (the goals) and say did we achieve this or didn't we?" It is the teachers working on a particular goal who will, "summarize and then open it to discussion around each particular goal," according to one teacher. As a final summary of the year's plan, a representative staff group will accompany the principal to the District Office and talk to senior administrative staff about the plan's successes and failures. In Glenside Elementary this same procedure was done at the beginning of the year, after the plan had been formulated.

During all phases of the plan then, teacher input was planned for and appeared to be one of the forces that drove the plan forward—continued the momentum. From the teachers' point of view, both agreed that this type of input resulted in ownership, "You bought in through ownership and it is more of a commitment to help see that the goal is achieved in the year."

### **Plan implementation**

Implementation of the plan has taken time. As one teacher describes it, "It hasn't been drama... It happens very gently, really." It seemed to the teachers that it took a long while to get started but when then looked back over what they had accomplished, they were surprised at how far they had come. "And now when I look at it, it's only April and when we go in there (the computer room) we do it as though we've always been doing it."

All agreed the teachers are the ones who do the implementing. There is a plan in place to allow this to happen. One strategy used to develop critical literacy in students, was to teach keyboarding. Part of the plan is a schedule of computer times every week. It is the teachers who see that their time is used and as the principal pointed

out, "their enthusiasm just kept the ball rolling."

Plan implementation in Glenside Elementary is enhanced through workshops and inservice by teachers within the school. This inservice is done on non-instructional days, after school or at staff meetings. Another implementation strategy is teachers visiting each other's room. "I've had my classroom open for other teachers to be able to come in and do a little team work and the principal has relieved people so they could come in. But it's such a capable staff. You just have to know them to realize it." Both teachers agreed on the visiting factor, "We have gone into each others classrooms a lot more this year."

The various goals of the plans in these ways then become, "very much a program that's integrated with the daily work rather than a program done besides what we are doing." The primary teacher gave a clear picture of how their improvement plan is implemented throughout the year. "Because you're aware of what your plan is for the year, a lot of the teachers try to incorporate these plans into their monthly planning - their yearly planning. So you try to bring it right into your core curriculum and tie the curriculum areas into it."



The principal too is seen as an important member of the implementation team. It is during staff meetings that he asks how teachers are doing and are they achieving goals. He monitors the plan by reminding teachers ahead of time, "Remember you volunteered to organize Author's Day." He also relieves teachers of their teaching duties so they can visit a fellow teacher and observe a particular strategy being implemented. He considers some of the teachers to be experts in various areas and encourages them to take a leadership role by putting on workshops. "We have experts on staff so the teachers are getting the inservice from each other so they're not afraid to try these things."

Money is also required during implementation to, "send teachers to other schools or to workshops, so they can observe other teachers and we've taken the bill for that." Also in order to develop evaluation strategies for the writing program, a half day non-instructional time was required. Substitutes were brought in for all the teachers working on this part of the plan and the school covered the cost of that. Glenside Elementary also received a large sum of money to help use computers in the writing project. This money had to be "won" by

submitting a proposal to the district. It involved many hours of teacher time in order to obtain the money. Although this money currently helps to implement their critical literacy goal, it was quickly pointed out the obtained money required a lot of hard work to get and once it's gone, it won't be replaced.

### **Plan evaluation**

Plan evaluation is done at the end of the year, having all staff involved. The principal said, "We'll look at the plan and say do we continue with this goal or are we finished with it? So it's one year but it's tied in with more than that." As was mentioned previously, the teachers, "summarize as a group because the ones in the group will know the most about what's gone on - summarize and then open it to discussion around each particular goal," according to the intermediate teacher. "Last year, we came together at the end of the year and we summarized what had worked well, put it on charts that went up on the wall, so we had a visual summary," noted the teacher.

There is also an evaluation component built into the plan and in some cases this component is measurable but not always. However the keyboarding strategy is measurable. The primary teacher

mentioned, "I know the intermediates have actually monitored how successful the kids have been so we have some solid evidence that Becky started out typing two words/min. at the beginning of the year and now in April she's typing fifteen words/min." She also mentioned that folders of samples of students written work were kept at the beginning of the year and added to throughout the year. She believed this meant, "There is now solid data of the student's improvement."

Other means of evaluating the plan are the number of students involved in a particular strategy. Their actual active involvement was noted by both teachers as an observable factor that let you know how successful a particular strategy was. Feedback from many sources was also noted by all interviewees. The results of student work where teachers see "new responses, better responses. They see the better work they get." Feedback is sometimes from another teacher who says, "Boy what a great idea and they say that would be something good to share at a staff meeting." There is also feedback from parents, senior board office staff and the community. This feedback was noted during an Author's Night when these people came to the school and the teachers noticed them "right in the groups with

the children." Letters later sent to staff from these people, gave staff feedback to know that what they were doing was "valued and appreciated."

### **Influences outside the school**

These influences outside the school also help make the school improvement plan work. "The interest from the board office is something that makes this seem important," noted the intermediate teacher. The primary teacher felt the goals of the district are also important in this process and tying into these goals makes sense. She saw the principal as being a key player in that process, "he's more aware of what the district goals are than what the teachers are." The principal felt a strong outside influence was the pressure from district office to make goals. "The board office wants to know what our goals are," he said.

On the other hand, all interviewed felt that the district office had given the school positive feedback about their plan after it had been presented by a delegation of staff members along with the principal. "They thought our goals were wonderful and gave our school good direction," noted the primary teacher. Their support was

also noted by the staff in two other ways. First of all, by sending representatives from Central Office to school functions, specifically the Author's Night, and secondly through the funding of their writing program.

One final point regarding outside influences needs also to be mentioned. The principal at Glenside Elementary, "solicits support from some of the community groups like the Kiwanis," according to the primary teacher. He attends meetings of service groups and lets them know what they are doing in the school and gets financial support from these groups in order to support some of the goals identified in the school plan. The principal points out, "The Legion gives us money for the program."

### **General comments**

This school may appear at first glance to be old and run down but after you get into the school and see what is happening, a different feeling and tone takes over. This appears to be a school staff that knows where it is going and will also know when it finally gets there.

## **Portrait Number Seven**

### **Edgemont Junior Secondary**

Edgemont Junior Secondary lies on the edge of a twenty-five year old subdivision. In front of the school there is a shopping area with professional offices as well as stores. Behind it is located the District Resource Centre from which District Helping Teachers and Supervisors work. This school, although not new, has been given an internal face-lift. It is tastefully painted and has graphics painted on the walls throughout the school. There are currently 440 students who attend the school from grades eight to ten. A French Immersion Program is included.

This school was about to be closed three years ago. The district had a change of plan and appointed a new principal to the school. This is now his third year at Edgemont. Previously he had been vice principal in a larger senior secondary school in this district - Ocean Pacific District.

The principal was warm and welcoming. He appeared proud of his school, staff and students as he gave me a tour of the building. He insisted that I use his office to conduct all the interviews

although this must have been inconvenient for him.

As well as the principal, two teachers were interviewed. The first teacher, Bud, had been on staff for six years. He had taught in the district for twenty years. He was teaching Social Studies and appeared to take a leadership role in the development of this school improvement plan.

The second teacher to be interviewed had a conflict in appointments so another teacher, Jim, was selected to be interviewed. This was Jim's first year on staff. He had taught for two years previously in a nearby secondary school within the Ocean Pacific District. He was currently teaching Physical Education and English. He was friendly and very willing to cooperate in the interview.

### **Plan development**

When the principal was appointed to Edgemont three years ago, he "was aware that the staff in place was a good, strong staff." A district consultant at that time was looking for a school to do a pilot project on student-team learning. Bud recalls, "the principal was involved to the extent that he liked the idea and sponsored the idea to

staff and facilitated a vote on it." The principal maintained it was important for the staff to "buy in" to the plan as it would mean a two year commitment. Teachers voted on the idea. Bud said, "Most people voted for it or didn't vote against it, although some did vote against it." This majority vote was required, the principal felt, in order to begin the plan.

The new teacher, Jim, came on staff the second year of the project. He, along with some interested teachers on staff, attended a Summer Institute on student learning and when they returned in the Fall, presented their new ideas to the principal and staff. He recalls, "We drafted up a proposal and gave it to the principal and presented it to the staff and out of that came what we have now." The new ideas were then used to strengthen what was already in place.

### **Plan Description**

The plan is seen as a "staff improvement plan, plain and simple," by the principal. The teachers describe it as one involving peer coaching where time has been set aside so, "we can coach one another in learning new teaching strategies." "Everybody is required to participate in the group and have some input each week."



The plan is in action but is not written down. It does contain financial resources which were secured from the district. It contains a central goal - student team learning. It also contains a strategy for reaching that goal, "staff development," according to Jim. All staff interviewed agreed the main objective of the plan was to improve the quality of teaching by introducing and using new teaching strategies. Although the plan does contain various elements, these are not recorded.

### **Problems with the plan**

There appeared to be no problems getting the plan. From the principal's point of view, he believed the reason for this was good timing. "The time was right for a change." There were some problems getting some of the teachers "on board." That problem seemed to be resolved by celebrating the successes of teachers. One of the teachers noted the professionalism of the teachers also helped, "Teachers want to move forward."

There are some other problems that staff can see are hampering the plan. The principal felt the semester system impedes the flow of what they are doing. Everything is proceeding smoothly and a change

in semester means time must be used to settle in new classes. One of the teachers noted that because the teachers are divided into groups, "teachers don't have much chance to look at what others outside their groups are doing." A final problem noted by all was the weekly half hour meeting time. Although the time is at the end of the day, teachers are "involved in other things so sometimes don't get to their meetings on time." As a result, the staff is looking at changing this time to perhaps once a month, using a half day. This was seen as a possible answer to the meeting problem and the staff was willing to give it a try.

### **Participation by staff members in the plan**

When the plan was first conceived by the principal and a central office staff member, it was taken to the staff for approval. The staff then voted to partake in the plan. When plan change is needed, administrators and staff members take the revisions to the Professional Development Committee which then bring the ideas forward during staff meetings for approval and/or discussion. The input from the staff often results in modification of the plan. As well, teachers in the school attend workshops outside the school and

return to give workshops to colleagues on the new techniques learned.

Edgemont staff members participated in the beginning of the project by voting to adopt it. As the plan proceeded, teachers had a chance through the Professional Development Committee and during staff meetings to have input into the implementation of the plan.

### **Implementing the Plan**

In order to give the teachers time to meet together and discuss what they were doing, the staff did some creative timetabling. "We took off a minute between classes and four minutes during the lunch hour so we could bank the time for Tuesday mornings when the kids don't arrive until 9:30. That was the first year and we found that wasn't working as well so we went to Tuesday afternoon this year." During this time, teachers are divided into cross-curricular groups. The groups were outlined initially by the administrators but then given to the Professional Development Committee for modifications, insuring teachers were put in a workable group. Teachers remain in the same group for the year and use the group time to "plan to do observations with one another's classroom and try to facilitate

through peer coaching techniques better learning of these strategies.” Sometimes the time is spent to give each other advice, allow time for reflection or help each other with lesson plans. Jim mentioned within his small group, the teachers take turns leading the group, but each group is run differently.

Although the original plan was just to implement one strategy each semester, Bud noted that because of the professional development some teachers took during the summer, the process was very much speeded up. They did this by putting on a workshop for the staff and introducing a number of new teaching strategies at the same time. He pointed out that if a teacher didn't buy into the first strategy in order to improve instruction, they now had other things that they could be looking at.

Implementation of the changes has been greatly assisted by reinforcement from peers as well as administrators, according to Jim. He felt, “The principal and vice principal are very cooperative in covering classes if need be and in providing us with the materials or resources that we need in implementing some of these things.” The administrators attitude of, “Give it a try, if it doesn't work - no big

deal - try it again," has been very helpful. Jim also felt there was a lot of sharing among the staff and teacher talk in the staffroom was focussed on the classroom "not fishing." When he is sitting in the staffroom, he said someone will come up to him with a lesson plan and say, "Hey, what do you think about this?" and it may be something he hasn't seen before. In the staff's estimation, collegiality had therefore really improved.

### **Plan evaluation**

Two years ago before the school had an improvement focus, there were fifty to sixty students wanting to transfer out of the school. At present there is a waiting list of forty to fifty students wanting to come into the school. School enrolment has increased from three hundred forty students to four hundred eighty students anticipated for next September. The principal saw this factor as being an indicator that their improvement plan was working well. Ongoing evaluation of the plan is done by the Professional Development Committee with input from all staff members. "The Pro D committee deals with those issues and we have just sat down and formulated what we're going to do for next year and then we'll take it

back to the staff." The proposed plan was presented in June for input and then ratification.

Within the classroom, Bud felt teachers knew the plan was working by observing the students' active involvement in the lesson. Jim agreed, "You can see the kids on task more." He also noticed an improvement in student grades which he attributed, "...to the variety of teaching strategies being used." He noted, "There are a lot more kids on the honor role here compared with my previous school."

Feedback from other teachers also let these teachers know the plan was working. Feedback occurred during peer coaching and the weekly group meeting times.

### **Outside sources that influence and support the plan**

Support from the school district office was important to the staff at Edgemont Jr. Sec. In order to maintain the school's student population at first, the principal sought and received the superintendent's support in order to refuse students from leaving the school through the use of cross-boundary transfers. The district was also important in the beginning of the plan for introducing a variety of teaching strategies through the use of peer coaching. The district

has also supported the school staff as they worked through their project by "sending teachers to workshops and school district people have been in the school to observe and give teachers help and information." The importance of these people coming from outside the school was noted by both teachers. Teachers in the school who had been "busy with teaching and hadn't had the opportunity to see other techniques, saw that there were other things out there." These outsiders then "opened some teachers eyes". As well their involvement in the school lets the staff know that what they are doing is "valid" and "innovative" and they are being "recognized." All those interviewed felt the importance of the support of district staff throughout the plan.

Support within the school also seemed important to teachers at Edgemont. They felt the principal supported their efforts because he "juggled" the timetable in order to free people to go into fellow teachers' rooms. "The principal and vice principal are very cooperative in covering classes if need be." Freeing teachers allowed more coaching time to occur. In these ways the principal was seen as being very supportive of the plan. Support for this plan was

therefore seen from inside as well as outside the school.

### **Benefits from the plan**

Benefits were seen by the principal and teachers. The principal felt because the teachers were working together from outside their department, they were now, "attuned to the idiosyncrasies and nuances that other teachers have in a different specialty area." As well there was greater "exchange of ideas and appreciation of the other person's job." Teachers felt classes had opened up. Bud said, "It makes their class more accessible to other teachers. They don't mind if another teacher is there. They feel they can try something and if it doesn't work, it doesn't really hurt. You don't feel closed off and isolated, as disempowered as you have in the past." Not only are teachers trying the new strategies as a result of what is happening, "they use them on an ongoing basis."



## **Portrait Number Eight**

### **Northbend Elementary**

Located at the street's end on the north side of a subdivision in Ocean Pacific District is Northbend Elementary. This three hundred student school is not new but appears to be in reasonably good condition on the outside. The inside could do with some updating and this is one of the principal's goals.

The principal at Northbend Elementary had only been at this school for seven months. He had followed a well-respected gentleman who had retired after being in the school for a long period of time. The new principal is young, friendly and energetic. After offering me coffee, he called in his secretary and asked that he not be disturbed while doing this interview.

Both participating teachers were very experienced having each taught for over twenty years. Sara, the learning resource teacher, was the chairperson of the primary team meetings. She had been in this school for a long period. Other staff members spoke highly of her leadership ability and valued the direction she offered.

Bob taught grade seven. He had only been in this school for two years. During his twenty 'plus' years teaching, Bob had taught in only four schools all of which were in the Ocean Pacific District. He had recently completed his Masters Degree at a nearby university.

### **Plan development**

When this principal was appointed to Northbend Elementary in May, he came to the school and spoke to the staff giving them a general overview of his concept of "what a school should be like." In June he asked staff for feedback about their teaching assignments and the school's three strengths and three weaknesses. Using the feedback, the principal and staff then, "drafted goals at the end of June for this coming year." As well, in September during a parent meeting, the principal explained the goals to parents and had "a formal needs assessment for parents. Part of it was asking them, where do you think we're at now and where do you think we should be going?"

### **Plan Description**

The principal was very quick to point out their school improvement plan at this time is not a written, long term plan but

rather, "the beginning of a plan that is taking shape in terms of actual things that are happening ... which will evolve into a school improvement plan." It is a plan for school improvement driven by the goals set by the staff, Sara points out. As a result, when asked questions about the plan's components, the interviewees mentioned the question was difficult because, "we did not sit down and devise a point by point plan although the new principal very clearly delineated his direction."

There are however some components obviously in place. For example, very important to this plan, is the time provided during the school day allowing teachers to meet together to discuss and implement the goals. This time is provided by the principal taking all the primary students and then all the intermediate students for a half hour assembly each week. All staff mentioned this component of the plan and the positive impact the time had made. The plan also contains goals that were described in detail by everyone interviewed. Although not written anywhere, the staff groups do plan inservice, look at required materials and have set timelines for implementing their goals. Therefore, many plan components are being dealt with,

they just are not yet written.

The main objective of the plan was clear in everyone's mind. It was a "theme of constant improvement." From the principal's point of view this was making the school "a place where people want to learn, where people want to work and where everybody, the children and adults, want to grow." Bob mentioned, the school must, "provide as well as we possibly can," to make children successful. All interviewed wanted Northbend Elementary to be "the best."

### **Problems with the Plan**

For a principal new to a school there is always a fine line regarding how much do you do and how fast, at what point do you get into the new school and begin working with the staff prior to actually taking over. The principal was very aware of these concerns and felt it was important for a plan, "to develop based on where the staff felt where we were at." As a result it was the survey which the staff had done that was used as the basis for goal setting and school focus. Possible problems were therefore avoided.

Sara mentioned the only problem they had when getting their plan was in "narrowing it down, sticking to one thing and working it

through rather than a little bit of this and a little bit of that." She felt the reason for lack of problems was due to the fact teachers were already looking at the kinds of things which the plan was focusing on. She also mentioned that one of the problems with the plan is that it lacks formality and as a result things may, "just slide off if we don't have it formalized." On the other hand, she maintained the plan is working well the way it is as an "action" plan and formalizing it would cause "more paperwork." She seemed to feel ambivalent about this point. The other teacher interviewed also mentioned the point regarding doing a "more sophisticated job" but added time was a factor.

Another point maintained by all but clearly stated by Bob regarding the reason why there were no problems getting their plan was attributable to the "excellence of the staff." He also felt good communications had played a role because everyone felt they were contributing to the whole organization, their concerns were being met and the principal was very supportive of them. For all of these reasons, potential problems with the plan were avoided.

### **Participation or Involvement in the Plan**

The entire staff had input into the development of this plan through the use of the survey and then through involvement in a goal setting process in June of the previous year. Both teachers agree all staff members are constantly involved. "The whole staff at any time has input into everything that goes on," stated Bob. The way this involvement is carried out is through the weekly team meetings and staff meetings. The result of this constant involvement of all staff members, according to Sara is, "Everybody sees this as their place and everybody's always interested in making it better all the time."

The principal has also been very involved throughout the plan. It was his idea to initiate the weekly assemblies and change the format of the staff meetings to focus on the goals. However, although the ideas have originated with him, he always takes the ideas to the staff for ratification. The principal does not take part in the weekly team meetings as he is supervising students. He meets weekly with the chairpersons of the groups and reviews with them the minutes from the meetings and any issues that need his input or direction. His involvement at this time then is one of overseer rather

than participant.

### **Implementing the Plan**

Once again, mentioned by all staff interviewed, was the time created by the weekly assemblies. This time was seen as an important implementation tool allowing for discussion, problem solving, idea exchanging, brainstorming and planning. As well, staff meetings timed at one hour and fifteen minutes, are used for information exchange for the first fifteen minutes and for working on school goals for the remainder of the time. These two meeting times were seen by all to be crucial in their ongoing implementation of the plan.

Sara pointed out the first step when implementing a new program was "to prepare ourselves." During this time staff development then becomes an important focus as well as preparation in terms of the required materials. In this way, "we're trying to do it gradually so we're comfortable with it as we go along." Sometimes resource people from outside the school do inservice in the school. The intermediate helping teacher, for example, had been in to share some ideas with the intermediate staff members. The teachers try

out the ideas and then discuss them during the team meeting.

The teachers feel the collaborative planning and peer coaching going on really enhance the implementation because, "everything teachers do, they bounce off each other." In the past Sara maintains, "We did our jobs separately and now we're going back and forth a whole lot more so we're finding the stress is relieved greatly." The school focus was also mentioned by Bob as being a result of increased time together. "Together we make plans for the whole group," not just a single class. The teachers also noticed the new programs or changes in the school were occurring faster than what they had anticipated and this was due, they felt, to spending more time together in a collegial way.

It should also be mentioned that parents are kept abreast of the changes being made within the school. This information is included in monthly newsletters as well as during meeting times with the Parent Advisory Council.

### **Evaluation of the Plan**

The principal noted the fact that no tangible measures are used in order to evaluate their plan but what they do have are "many



intangible measures." Teachers get feedback from each other using peer coaching. This is especially evident amongst the primary staff. As well, parents maintain their children like coming to this school and discipline problems have not increased. All agree there is constant assessment of goals at staff meetings but one of the teachers felt this evaluation could be made better. At the end of the year, a review of goals will be carried out before setting new goals.

One concrete type of evaluation was done by staff. The principal gave each staff member a three page report card to be done on him. Included in this card were his personal goals and the school's goals and teachers were asked, "How far do you think we've come with both of these"? In this way, some tangible feedback was obtained regarding the school's goals.

### **Influences and Support from Outside the School**

District office staff and policies are seen as being an important source of support for Northbend Elementary. According to the principal, the money which the district provides to the school for inservices and school-based staff development allows the staff to attend conferences, buy materials, visit other schools and buy time

for teachers to work in collaborative ways. District staff coming into the school are seen by the teachers as a support because they help to broaden one's knowledge and reduce time spent by "reinventing the wheel." These district people are seen as having, "very practical, very useful inputs that can help staff when you're teaching on the front line. They provide up-to-date materials, refreshing new methodology. ...In a relatively short time (they) can bring you right up to date and refresh you on new techniques and new directions."

Another source of support comes from the parents. Teachers feel parent participation during the school day and during school events, indicates they do support the school.

The staff at Northbend Elementary felt the Ministry was driving the direction which schools were currently taking. The new Primary Program and other documents influenced what the school was doing. Teachers spent time in the summer attending summer institutes put on by the Ministry in order that they would be up-to-date with what was happening.

**Benefits of the plan**

All staff mentioned that collegiality had been greatly increased this year and teachers were now looking at the school as a whole not just at their own classroom. The children receive the benefits that result from this type of joint planning and sharing, the intermediate teacher felt.

Institutionalization of the goals also happens in this atmosphere. Sara said, "People are just using it (the plan) as their own personal goals." As a result, all staff at Northbend Elementary are headed in the same direction.

## **Portrait Number Nine**

### **Nightingale Elementary**

There were many schools built to accommodate the influx of children in Ocean Pacific District in the mid sixties. Nightingale Elementary is one of these schools. Although it is twenty-five years old, it is in remarkably good condition. There was evidence of renovations and fresh paint at the time of the interviews. The school is situated high on the crest of a hill overlooking the community and river. Due to the nature of the neighbourhood, the school once housed over four hundred students but currently has two hundred eighty students from kindergarten to grade seven. There is also a behavioral class at Nightingale Elementary.

The principal at Nightingale had been appointed seven months earlier and had previously been a secondary vice principal. He was very friendly and had arranged the teacher interviews so they could take place during the lunch hour.

Sue, the first teacher interviewed had been in this school for fourteen years. She taught grade two. During her time at Nightingale, Sue had worked with five administrators.

A new teacher to the staff teaching grade seven was also interviewed. Marg was in a meeting prior to being interviewed but her enthusiasm and energy level seemed unending. Marg had been teaching at the secondary level and found the change to elementary quite easy. She was about to begin work on her Masters Program this summer and appeared eager to get started.

### **Plan Development**

On a professional development day in late September, the whole staff met and brainstormed things important to the school. According to everyone interviewed, they looked at things that were short-term and those which were ongoing. They also focused on what was already going well, the primary teacher recalled. The ideas were recorded on large sheets of paper. Each staff member was then given a set number of stickers to place beside those items which they felt were important to the school. The items which had the most stickers became the schools goals. Staff members then looked at "forces you could use to help achieve the goals and forces that were working against it."

From the sheets, the school secretary and principal put the plan in a typed form as a plan to improve the school. The principal hung the sheets in his office for some time "so we could see them and see what are we going to do here or there. When the Pro D. Committee would meet here, we would look over there. So that becomes a focus." The staff very much felt this was a "staff driven" plan, a plan based on a unanimous decision.

### **Plan description**

This principal felt it was very important for him to have "a view of where things should go and how to can guide it." But he also felt the staff must have input into the plan and have "some autonomy in the priority of things." Sue noted the plan contained short-term goals such as improving the physical surrounding by landscaping the courtyard as well as long-term goals like the implementation of the new Primary Program. The teachers believed all staff knew the goals and the overall plan influenced what they were doing. "The plan's in the back of our minds all the time," explained Marg. The plan however, was also seen to be flexible. "I think it has to be flexible. You need to know where you are going but not all the specifics."

The plan has professional development for the staff tied into it. As well there are actions or strategies for reaching the goals and timelines to implement them. The principal noted the importance of timelines in forcing teachers to look at what can realistically be achieved in a particular period of time. He felt, "This staff works like crazy. If anything, what they'd do is burn themselves out. So limiting is important because they'd try to do everything."

The main objective of this type of planning, is for the staff to work together as a group, according to these staff members. As well, it is important for the teachers to "buy into" the plan and "take ownership." It was felt this type of planning, allowed these results to happen. Overall, this plan was seen by all staff interviewed to be very much "theirs" and one which was "attainable."

### **Problems with the Plan**

Sue felt there were no problems making this plan because the plan was focused on "things that were important to the school." Awareness by staff about current educational trends also helped avoid problems. As well, these teachers at Nightingale are seen as "a pretty cooperative group." Teacher input into the plan was another

reason quoted as problem avoidance. Plan problems at this school were therefore avoided rather than occurring and had to be resolved. Skepticism on the part of some staff members was seen as a reality rather than a problem and did not impair the momentum of the plan.

The principal felt the plan could be improved in the developmental stage by spending more time with the teachers putting the final plan together. This year he and the secretary had taken the ideas and then drawn up the plan. He felt, "the whole thing right to the summary of what we're going to do ... should be done right then by the teachers." He added, "It will add more focus and that's what we'll do next time because it (the plan) is the driver for the year."

### **Participation by individuals in the plan**

The entire staff at Nightingale participated in developing this plan. Throughout the year, the plan was a focus during staff meetings. A meeting with the principal and department heads was held prior to the staff meeting. As Sue pointed out, this premeeting allows them to "have a few things in mind and then bring it to the staff. It is all discussed (by the whole staff)." Marg concurred and mentioned, "the entire staff gives input and ideas." At the end of the



year, the same "kind of a deal as we did in the beginning" will occur in order to allow all staff to look at what they've done as a group and decide where they will be going the next year.

On the point of staff participation in the plan, the principal pointed out, "If the principal tries to control everything, it's just going to fail. So you turn it over to the teachers and sometimes it's sink or swim too. I've been doing a little more of this ... backing off and giving them more ownership." The feeling of ownership in the plan was mentioned by the teachers as well.

### **Implementation of the Plan**

The teachers credit the principal with initiating a school-wide theme of "a voyage of learning" which has helped to set the school's tone for improvement. As well, increase in teacher release time, creative timetabling where classes are combined, and the librarian being involved in team teaching - have all enabled "more teacher cooperation" and allowed the plan to be implemented. Sue felt that increased teacher cooperation resulted in positive feedback for teachers and therefore they were "more adventuresome" in the classroom. Cooperative planning was also mentioned by Marg as

helping teachers to implement new ideas.

Modelling of teaching techniques during the staff meeting had also helped implement this plan. In addition, the staff believed guest speakers to the school during both staff meetings and professional development days had reinforced the goals.

Teachers attend workshops and conferences outside the school. They make application to the "pro d committee" which is composed of a primary and intermediate teacher, the department heads and the principal. After attending workshops, teachers return to the school and share information with fellow staff during meeting times. The teachers at Nightingale have become involved in committee work outside the school which the principal felt had spurred on the plan's goals. He pointed out, "Sometimes you have to keep lighting little fires at staff meetings to remember our goals." When discussing what happens during this type of ongoing implementation, the teachers mentioned, "you get caught up in it."

### **Evaluation of the Plan**

To the teachers at Nightingale Elementary, positive feedback from students, peers, and the principal let them know they were on

the right track. The principal also felt feedback was an important evaluation component. He was in the classrooms a lot this year because he had many teacher reports to write. However, these frequent visits allowed the principal to fully appreciate "the great teachers" he had on staff and the teachers received a lot of positive feedback. All staff believed the "collegial and collaborative culture" that was present in the school, allowed increased feedback between teachers to occur. Feedback from parents was also seen to assist the plan.

The importance of end-of-the-year evaluation, was maintained by all staff interviewed. The grade seven teacher said, "At the end of the year we will look at what we decided at the beginning of the year and see what we did and review everything, what we did not do well and maybe see why and maybe look at doing it again." This type of evaluation was seen as important not only for feedback but also for future direction.

### **Outside Influences and Support of the Plan**

The current movement by the Ministry in B.C. has had a major impact on this staff. All mentioned the new Primary Program, the

Year 2000 Document, and the Intermediate Years have influenced the plan at Nightingale Elementary. They felt the school's direction needed to be tied into the Ministry's direction, at this time.

People from universities and district office providing the professional development for the staff were seen to be very important. The teachers felt these outsiders gave direction, support, clarification, and ideas that, "when you are teaching in the classroom you may not have the opportunity to obtain in other ways." The principal felt these people, "increased the consciousness and courage of staff members."

The principal also mentioned the importance of money from the district when you are trying to implement new ideas. He said it was, "kind of an external recognition" for the staff. For him, he appreciated the support which he received from senior staff, most specifically the zone superintendent. The support was seen as opportunities to visit other schools with similar goals and the discussion which followed. Certainly, at this school, individuals from outside the school played an important role in the plan's direction and also in creating support for it.

**Benefits of this plan**

Benefits of this type of planning were obvious to Sue. "You become more of a group, you're starting to think a little bit more as a group than that of an individual teacher ... you're not an entity unto yourself. You start to share more ideas and you're more comfortable with people walking in and out of your classroom. You think on a broader scope of drawing in more people. ...I think in the classroom maybe you're a little more adventuresome." Everyone felt a "collegial and collaborative culture" had been created. As was mentioned previously, the on-going focus resulted in staff members being "caught up with what's happening in the school and you involve your kids around that." This unity in focus was seen by all to happen in the school. "If people have selected a set of goals for the year and everyone is in agreement, then you're all working in the same direction and you can't help but achieve them," stated the principal. The results as seen by this staff then, were increased collaboration, collegiality, clear direction and focus on the school as a whole rather than in isolated departments.

## **Chapter IV Summary**

From the data collected through the interviews, there seemed to be common items addressed in each school. An important issue was how the plan actually began. This topic was one about which all those interviewed had a great deal to say. There was also specific mention of elements that described the plan itself – its purpose and components. Another focus was problems with the plan. From the data, the school staffs interviewed had very clear ideas about how and why problems developed or were avoided. An area which emerged from the data was plan implementation, how was the plan continued throughout the school year? All interviewees made comment on how the plan was evaluated in both the classroom and throughout the school. One final area which emerged was the support and/or influence that was placed on the plan from sources outside the school. All these areas become important issues that form the basis of comparison made in the following chapter.

## **Chapter V: Findings**

The School Improvement Plans described in the preceding chapter, had noted similarities and differences. They were at various stages of development or completeness, contained common characteristics as well as different features.

### **The Plan's Beginning**

Only the schools in the Merrill District mentioned improvement planning at the school level was a district expectation. In the other districts, Flora and Ocean Pacific, no mention of this factor came up in the interviews. Merrill District led the initiative for this planning whereas in the other districts school principals were the initiators.

In the Merrill District, although there was a pressure to do this type of planning, there was no difference in the way the schools began developing the plans. Across districts in every school studied, the principal led the process of developing the plan. There was usually another person who assisted the principal in the workshop when the plan was developed. In some instances, it was a district office person - Maitland, Glen Oakes, and Edgemont. In one school, Court, it was the vice principal who assisted in the development. In Garden Meadows Elementary, it was a district office person and the

vice principal. At Fir Grove and Glenside Elementaries, a teacher on staff was the assistant. At only two schools, Northbend and Nightingale, did the principals begin on their own. This may have been due to the fact they were both new to their schools and neither had a vice principal.

In the two Junior Secondary Schools studied, both principals had seen an opportunity to tie their plan into a district pilot program. Both pilot programs had a large amount of money as part of the program. The refocused plan was developed between the school administrators and district office personnel and then taken to the staff for ratification. At Maitland, staff members were invited to take part in the project, "We indicated to the staff that this was a non-compulsory sort of thing but we had certain things that we were looking at doing." At Edgemont, staff members decided by majority vote that they would be participants. Bud said, "The principal was involved to the extent that he liked the idea and sponsored the idea to staff and facilitated a vote on it." At both secondary schools, therefore, part of the plan's focus came from outside the school.

In all elementary schools studied, the plan began with the principal along with the entire staff, looking at where the school was



and where it should be going. Input from staff came in the form of surveys, as was the case at Court and Northbend, and/or a goal-planning session where the whole staff sat down together and generated ideas about what needed to be the focus of the plan. The use of stickers to vote on the areas of focus was used at Court, Glenside and Nightingale Elementary Schools. The staffs at these schools stated the procedure made the process very "democratic." Court's kindergarten teacher explained, "So it came from one person, was discussed as a whole group, and we used stickers to prioritize the goals and so everybody had their say." At the other elementary schools the staffs narrowed the focus through a process of elimination and then came to a "whole staff consensus." "We all agreed that it was important for children to do this and we all agreed on the focus, what it should be," recalled Garden Meadows primary teacher.

Planning had been done in September in four of the schools studied and in June in the other five. In Court Elementary where the planning had been continuing for five years, staff planned for the next year, in June. Their reason for this was to already have their focus clear. The primary teacher remembered, "Goals for the year are

looked at in April and last year I know that they were in place by June so that we were well on our way to looking at them and being able to get down to practicalities of using the goals in September."

At Fir Grove Elementary and Glen Oakes Elementary, the planning was also done in June. These schools thought it was important to have focus before the school year began. Glen Oakes librarian outlined the benefit of early planning, "Well we do the goal setting in June. Teachers meet together ... and talk about our goals for the next year and how we'll work together as a school. It helps to have this in place to save time in September when everything is so busy." New staff at these schools had a chance to be part of the planning when time was taken in September to revisit Fir Grove's goals, "We'll go into retreat again in September because we want to get new staff on board and we will further refine the goals and people who will take responsibility for those goals."

Another school that did planning in June, Northbend, did so because the new principal wanted to have an idea about the school's direction before he actually came in September, "This is my first year here. Every school is like a subculture and I needed to know where the school was at and together with staff come up with a

focus for the next year." It was the new principal along with the staff who worked together to assess the school and plan their future direction. In three of the four remaining schools ( Glenside, Edgemont, and Nightingale) although the plan began in September the schools were now going to reassess and plan for the next year in June.

### **Characteristics of the Plan**

All but two of these schools had Improvement Plans in writing. Edgemont Jr. Sec. and Northbend Elementary, both in the Ocean Pacific District, had plans that were in action but not in writing. Northbend Elementary's plan was seen by the staff to be a plan in development however that of Edgemont had been in place for two years.

The overall purpose of having a plan, whether written or not, was explained:

- to allow for, "consistency of effort on behalf of children from the point of view of the total staff" (Court)
- "We have an objective which is to seek new and varied teaching strategies that will work well in trying to convert to a child centered curriculum." (Maitland)
- "I think it's a direction plan that has some sense of where we

want to go" (Garden Meadows)

-a plan based "on the school's beliefs and tying everything together." "When you set your goals you take those goals and hold them up against your mission statements and say does this match?" (Fir Grove)

-"Our main objective is to improve our effectiveness as a school." "It's ... goals and objectives that drive our operation."  
(Glen Oakes)

-"The main objective of our plan is to give our school direction throughout the school year." (Glenside)

-"It's a staff improvement plan, plain and simple - to improve the quality of teaching." (Edgemont)

-"We are trying to make this the best school in the whole district so we look at specific things that would improve quality." (Northbend)

-"The plan is the focus of what we do this year." "It's important for us to be able to work as a group." (Nightingale)

It seems that the purpose in all the schools was to have the staff working together as a whole, going in a common direction and in this way improve the school. The focus in all these schools was

definitely to improve the whole school. At no time was it mentioned by a staff member that I wanted to do something but rather we wanted to do something.

### Plan components

The actual components or parts of the plan varied from school to school although they were comparable (see Table 5.1). For example, all schools had stated goals, sometimes long as well as short term goals. Strategies for reaching those goals were evident in seven of the nine schools. There were no strategies stated in the interview or written in the plan at Northbend or Maitland, however the use of created time was seen by the observer as a strategy for implementing the goals. All plans included resources, (money and/or personnel), to assist in goal attainment. Northbend and Nightingale Schools did not have financial resources as part of their plan. Timelines were included in six of the schools' plans and an evaluation component in only four plans. Professional development opportunities were included in all school plans. These opportunities included attending conferences, having outside facilitators come into the school to do inservice or both.

	Court	Mait.	Gar. Md	Fir Gr.	Gl. Oak	Glen.	Edge.	North	Night
Goals	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Objective	•	•		•					
Strategies	•		•	•	•	•	•		•
Resources	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Timelines	•			•	•	•		•	•
Progress	•								
Evaluation	•	•			•	•			
Prof. Dev.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Creative time	•	•	•			•	•	•	•
Purpose		•							
Mission state.				•	•	•			
Person resp.				•	•	•			
				Plan Components					
				Table 5.1					

Creative timetabling was evident in seven schools. In two of these schools, Court and Glenside Schools, the time was provided by the principals teaching in a room and freeing up staff to work together. In Northbend the time was created by the principal, but in this case the principal took all the primary and then all the intermediate students for an assembly thus freeing up entire groups of teachers. In both junior secondary schools, creative timetabling by lengthening each teaching block and reducing time between classes and noon hour, meant there was an extra block of time each week to be used by all staff to work together.

This restructuring of the school day was also done at Garden Meadows however the 'found' time was used for a variety of things as well as working on the school's overall plan. At Nightingale

Elementary, an idea which they called "twinning" took place. Each primary class was twinned with an intermediate class. When primary teachers wished to meet to discuss their goals, the intermediate teachers took all their students. This process was reversed in order for the intermediate teachers to meet. Creative use of time became an important consideration therefore, in six of the nine schools.

There were two other components only seen in the Merrill School District. All schools had a philosophy statement and/or a mission statement to which they tied their plan. As well, in each of these schools there was a teacher responsible for each of the goals or for particular goal strategies. For example, at Glen Oakes specific teachers were responsible for, "setting up a publishing centre, a professional library or a yearbook", to mention but a few. At Fir Grove, teachers were committed to one particular goal and worked on it as a committee having one teacher in charge. The intermediate teacher claimed, "The person in charge of the cooperative learning, will talk to us about it and she goes to individual teachers to see if there are any problems or concerns."

At Glenside teachers buy into one goal. The primary teacher said, "It was explained to them when they made their three choices that whatever choices emerged, the popular ones, that they would be asked to buy into one to which they would make a commitment." The goal is then broken down into strategies and a person is responsible for each strategy, for example,

"theme charts - Miss Evans

developing strategies for primary writing - Mrs. Booth

teaching keyboarding - Mr. Newfield."

This inclusion of a person responsible for particular strategies was seen only in one other school outside the Merrill District - Court Elementary.

The plan's components varied then among the districts and certainly among the schools. Very clear in all the plans were goals, resources and professional development activities. Strategies for reaching the goals (7/9), timelines (6/9), and creative timetabling (7/9) also were included in many of the plans. Most noticeable by its absence was the evaluation component, seen only in four plans. On one plan, Glen Oakes, most of the evaluation column was left blank alongside the goals.



### **Problems with the Plan**

When schools begin to do improvement planning, there may be some problems that need to be overcome. In six of the nine schools studied, the staffs maintained there was no problem coming to consensus about their plans. Four of these schools attributed this fact to "teacher professionalism" (Fir Grove, Glenside, Edgemont, and Northbend). Two schools, Glen Oakes and Nightingale, credited lack of problems to "teacher cooperation." Teacher "input into the plan" as a reason for few or no problems was mentioned in all the elementary schools sometimes as well as teacher professionalism and/or cooperation. The two schools where input wasn't mentioned were the Junior Secondary Schools. Both those plans had been influenced by the district.

The three schools that did find the plan's beginning to have a few problems, were all in the Flora District. The fact that Maitland's plan was seen by staff as being "top-down" did cause "suspicion." The suspicion was overcome when, according to Greg and Blair, "The teachers realized the school district wasn't going to mandate what we were going to do," and "we were going to have a great deal of financial resources that we would not ordinarily have. It just

seemed like an excellent thing to do."

At Court Elementary, the principal recalled, "In that first year there was a bit of resistance because the vice principal and I were new." Teachers wondered, "What is this that's going on?" The resistance was overcome when teachers realized they had input. "Once you've filled in the sheets and then you recognize that it's become part of a plan and then you have the opportunity for input into it," the teachers concerns were relieved.

At Garden Meadows Elementary although they maintained there was no problem getting the plan, the principal felt, "If there was a problem it was deciding what we wanted to do." It took two years for the problem to be resolved and an improvement plan to actually be put in place. It was when a vice principal, who had expertise in the direction the total staff identified, was hired that this plan forged ahead. According to the teachers, "We had an excellent vice principal who coordinated it all for us." The staff then went together to a workshop on cooperative learning and this activity was mentioned by all interviewed as "cementing" the plan.

There were some problems mentioned as organizational factors when developing the plan. For example, change of staff was noted at

Maitland and Garden Meadows. At Maitland, Greg mentioned, "A very big change in our school has been the staff turnover. We have had, for various career reasons, a number of people leave us who were important to us and they have been replaced, by and large, by younger teachers. That made it important for us to spend time integrating those younger teachers into our culture and trying to actually make them part of the creation of a culture." At Garden Meadows, a change in an administrator caused the plan's momentum to decline. Mary recalled, "The vice principal was very good at organizing and she's not with us now. I'm sure the other teacher said it before, you don't realize how much work they actually did until they're gone."

Additional organizational problems were mentioned at various schools as well as ways of solving the problems:

1. problem: the size of the plan was too big.

solution: end-of-the-year review, "When we got to the end we discovered that we really determined to try to do too much so we cut it back." (Court)

2. problem: a more detailed plan is needed - "I think we need more of a map."

solution: "We communicate problems by making suggestions

during block x meeting time." (Maitland)

3. problem: pacing during the plan, "That first year was very intense." "I think there were times when we just overloaded, totally."

solution: "If there is monitoring along the way and as long as there is honesty, I think you can solve it." (Garden Meadows)

4. problem: some goals take longer than planned to be implemented.

solution: "The action plan includes ... the date for completion and at the end evaluation to see whether it's effective." (Glen Oakes)

5. problem: "lack of formality in the plan."

solution: "putting in writing what we want to do." (Northbend)

6. problem: "time needs to be taken to develop the plan."

solution: "I will spend the entire first professional day on this, not half, the whole thing." (Nightingale)

The problems outlined here, along with their solutions were either start-up problems or organization problems. What is important are the ways these problems have been overcome.

## **Staff Involvement throughout the Plan**

### Teacher involvement

As was mentioned earlier, all the elementary schools had all teachers involved right from the beginning of the plan. At the two Junior Secondary Schools however, the staff was informed about the plan and then asked to come "on board" (Maitland) or to vote on acceptance (Edgemont).

The continued involvement of teachers across school sites had many similarities (see Table 5.2). There were seven ways staff members had on-going plan involvement. Goal committees were formed. Teachers attended conferences outside the school, sometimes on a professional development day but not always. There was time set aside to share this newly acquired information. Regular meetings were held to discuss the plan. Peer coaching reinforced new practices. Other types of committees were set up to have input into the overall plan. As well, people from outside the school gave school workshops or classroom assistance.

The schools studied used a variety of these strategies. In some cases they used as many as six strategies (Garden Meadows, Glenside, Edgemont, Nightingale). Some schools (Court, Maitland, Fir Grove, and

Northbend) used five strategies. The other school, Glen Oakes, used only four of the strategies.

	Court	Mait.	Gar. Md	Fir Gr	Gl. Oak	Glen.	Edge.	North	Night	
Goal committee	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	
Attend conf.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Share conf. info	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	
Reg. meet. time	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Peer coaching		●	●	●		●	●	●		
Special commit.	●		●				●		●	
Sch. inservice	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
			Implementation Strategies							
			Table 5.2							

In order to give the reader a sampling of the types of things said that led the researcher to believe these strategies were being used, quotations from the transcripts of the first three schools on the list follow.

a) Court Elementary

-“People, when they go to workshops, also at staff meetings, come back and give a little talk of what they did so we know what’s happening.” (Attending conferences and time for sharing the information)

-the plan “sets up committees to take on these areas that are in the goals. So it goes from a whole down to very specific areas with everybody in the staff really involved in at least one committee.”

(Goal committees are formed)

-“Usually a chairperson is decided upon and that person calls the meetings and from there we sort of go and work on our own and then report back to the staff at the staff meeting.” (Regular meetings are held to discuss the plan)

-“The school's Collegial Council gets together in May and we look at the school goals as put forth in the plan by the staff. We look at how we attained them. Then we look at where we want to go from there and we formulate a plan that we take to the staff at the staff meeting.” (Other types of committees set up to have input)

b) Maitland Jr. Sec.

-“Everybody on this staff has been to at least two major workshops put on by Johnson and Johnson, Joyce and Showers, The Bennetts, Glickman or Leithwood.” (Conferences outside the school)

-“The school supplies the money to give you the release time to go to these conferences then you come back and share what you have learned and share materials and everything else.” (Sharing new information)

-“In our block 'x' teachers pay us back by doing inservice.” (New information shared at scheduled time)

-“Our plan includes a block 'x' where teachers get together

every Tuesday afternoon and share ideas and learn new things we're focusing on." (Regular meeting times held to discuss the plan)

- "Groups of three or four work together or have their best friend or the teacher across the hall into their room. We use the whole Joyce and Showers notion of peer coaching." (Peer coaching)

- The district supports us "by providing us with our own inservices team that regularly comes into the school and model these things." (Outside people give inservice in the school)

c) Garden Meadows

- "We went to an evening workshop by the Johnson Brothers on cooperative learning." (Attend conferences)

- "A lot of teachers did side-by-side teaching, which I have done also and I have found very useful." (Peer coaching)

- "After workshops, we had time then to talk about it, what was going well and what was not going well. We had a chance to practice some more and get back together and talk about it again during staff meetings and regularly planned pro d days." (Sharing information and regular meetings held to discuss plan)

- "There is a staff development committee that meets on a regular basis (once a month). All ideas are then discussed with the



staff at the staff meeting" (Other types of committees for input)

- "We have tended to use cooperative groups in the staff meetings as well. We go into groups of three, hash some of this stuff through and figure out what's best and what we are going to do next and so on." (Regular meetings held to discuss plan)

- "I think we've had some outstanding demonstrations by Donna (district person). She would come in first of all at a half professional day and introduce a new strategy. ...The next week she would come in and demonstrate it in three or four different classrooms and everybody would have a chance to look (at it) at least once and observe how this was used." (Outside people give inservice at the school)

Many of these same quotations were used in the school portraits found in the preceding chapter. The purpose of including these quotations, although not from every school, is to provide a flavor for the type of quotation used to glean information.

End of the year staff involvement in plan review was mentioned in all but Maitland Junior Secondary School. At both Court and Edgemont, this end of the year focus was preceded by committee assessment - the Collegial Council or Staff Development Committee.

"The Collegial Council looks at the school goals as put forth by the staff from the year before and we look at how we attained them. We formulate a plan that we take to the staff at the staff meeting," said Court's grade two teacher. Jim, Edgemont's new teacher said, "The Pro D Committee deals with those issues (the plan) and formulate what we're going to do for next year and then we'll take it back to the staff."

In the other six schools, the plan became a focus in June on a professional day or at a staff meeting. Very representative of statements made of staff involvement at this time was Chris from Garden Meadows, "At the end of the year, as a whole group, we sat down and we evaluated the program for the year and then re-established what it was we were going to do for the next year."

Court's kindergarten teacher, "At the end of the year, we go over the goals again and see how well we have covered our overall plan."

"Normally I would take my staff into retreat in June and we would look at where we are and start to flesh out the type of thing we want to do," according to the principal at Fir Grove Elementary. From Glen Oakes' grade seven teacher, "We go back in June where we take every one of our goals, one by one, and very exhaustively in a large group

come up with what we think are the strengths of what we have done." These statements indicate teacher end of the year involvement. It was obvious in all eight schools.

Most importantly though, teacher involvement varies amongst teachers. Within any improvement project, "Some teachers will take things on in great gobbs of it. I have several who are so into what they are doing they're just gobbling it up and some are a little hesitant. So it's at different levels," maintained Fir Grove's principal.

On three staffs - Court, Maitland, Fir Grove - both principals and teachers noticed there was one or in some of the larger schools a couple of teachers who are "skeptical" or find that because of their personal lives they just cannot be as involved at that time. "It's been very powerful with everyone except one woman who is getting married ... and is just too overworked," remarked Fir Grove's staff associate. One of the Maitland teachers said, "There is still a core there, a few, who are never going to change but there is nothing we can do about them. We can just move ahead ourselves." Court's principal believed, "To suggest that in any staff development plan, you know for goals, that you're going to get everybody, it's not the

way it works out." Very importantly the teachers who were not involved did not block what the others wanted to do. Involvement of teachers in the plan, "doesn't mean that we're all equally involved but we all have involvement," said a Fir Grove teacher. This point was made repeatedly.

### Principal Involvement in the Plan

The principal too is involved throughout the plan but his/her role is somewhat different than that of the teachers. According to the data, the teachers see the principal's role to be that of a supporter, democratic leader, monitor, initiator, organizer - as well as showing commitment for the improvement plan (Table 5.3).

	Court Mait	Gar. Md	Fir Gr	Gl. Oak	Glen	Edge	North	Night
Supportive	•	•				•	•	•
Open-minded	•				•	•	•	
Monitor			•	•		•	•	
Initiator	•	•				•	•	
Commitment	•							•
Organizer	•	•	•			•	•	
Principal Involvement in the Plan								
Table 5.3								

Mentioned most frequently was the support which the principals give their teachers as they are working through the plan. At Court it was sometimes, "...telling people how well they are doing

and taking note and giving them a sense that they are really doing a good job for kids." Sometimes the support was financial. "The administration has believed in it and has been prepared to put money where it needs to be put," maintained Maitland's senior teacher. Support by working in the class was noted many times. At Edgemont, "The principal and vice principal are very cooperative in covering classes if need be and in providing us with materials or resources that we need in implementing these things," stated Bud. At Northbend another form of support was noticed. Interviewed teachers here felt their principal kept, "the lines of communication open to everybody, hearing their concerns and responding to them...." Nightingale teachers felt support in another way. "You get encouragement from the principal." Repeatedly, teachers made the comment, "The principal is very supportive."

As well as the role of a supporter, the principal was also seen as being democratic. This openminded principal sought input from the teachers. For example at Court, the principal, "asks us for our input and we give it and we are not backward about it at all because he is very open and he wants the suggestions." Glen Oakes' principal is seen to be, "very open to input and feedback from teachers. He very

seldom does things in an authoritarian manner." "Nothing is imposed from above (at Northbend). It's all collaborative." Edgemont's principal said, "Never, ever do we institute anything that hasn't been run past the staff first and has their endorsement because I know that the strength comes from the teachers not in our forcing something." The staff here agreed this was so. One teacher commented, "If we decided not to do it, he would have gone along with it, so he sought staff approval for the idea." The word "open" was used numerous times to describe the principals.

The principal was often seen monitoring the plan. Garden Meadows principal asks teachers, "How is it going?" In some schools, such as Fir Grove, monitoring was done through communication with the goal chairpersons. "I talk with my task force leaders and they tell me what's going on." At Northbend, the intermediate teacher said, "The two department heads meet with the principal for a breakfast meeting most Thursday mornings. I provide the principal with all the results and the primary person does a similar thing." Teachers at Glenside believed, "The principal keeps track of the goals and he has them really in his head. He monitors them." Teachers were very aware that the principal was monitoring the plan and this

fact was always seen by staff as a positive not a negative factor.

Initiator was a role played by all these principals but in various ways. The two secondary principals aggressively sought district resources by tying into pilot projects. Both linked what was already happening in their schools to something the district wanted to happen. "I began to push our Director of Instruction. I could see the staff was ready to move into something new," stated Maitland's principal. Edgemont's principal recalled, "We (the principal and district coordinator) went to the school board office and asked for support - inservice support and money support."

In elementary schools, principal as initiator was seen in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was creating time for teachers to work together such as happened at Northbend. "The opportunity to work together was initiated by the principal," or initiating the development of an improvement plan. "Even in the first year when we're not supposed to do too much in change ... I introduced one." The role as an initiator was used to get financial support for Glenside's plan. "The principal solicits support from some of the community groups like the Kiwanis...." "I'm not sure where it was but I know the administrator would write various proposals up to all kinds of

places, and get money that maybe other schools aren't able to get," recalled Mary from Garden Meadows. Being a principal initiator was seen by staff as assisting school-based improvement planning in both elementary and secondary schools.

Principals were also seen to be committed to the plan. In fact Court Elementary principal felt, "there has to be an enthusiasm and a commitment and a belief on their (administrators) part before anything ever happens." It was the principal's actions that stated very clearly their commitment. Because the principal taught for teachers, sought funding or helped create ways staff could work together, teachers could sense, "The principal is very into this."

Organization was the final skill observed which assisted principals working on an improvement plan. According to Garden Meadow's staff, "If you want it to happen, you have to make sure it happens and plan strategies that make it happen." This they felt was part of the administrator's role, "The administrator was very good at organizing those things." Teachers at Edgemont felt, "Our principal is enabling us to do this. One way he is doing this is to juggle the timetable so certain people are free then we can go into other peoples' classrooms and help them." Reorganizing the timetable to



create a block "x" at Maitland also allowed meeting time.

Bob, a Northbend teacher said, "We also have something that is unique in my twenty years teaching, the principal takes an assembly on Monday and an assembly on Friday - half the school each time. At that time the intermediate staff meet together to talk about goals." Organizing time for teachers to plan was also noted at Court. The principal and vice principal both release teachers by teaching for them. "The principal is in my class twice a week. They split the school in half, so they teach an awful lot," explained the grade two teacher. Organizing time for plan implementation was seen positively by all staff.

The role of the principal then in a school-based improvement plan is different from that of a teacher. From the teachers point of view, principals show support, openness, monitoring, initiative, commitment and organization when working on school-based improvement planning.

### **Plan Implementation in the Schools**

All the schools had practices in place in order to keep the plan moving forward and allow implementation to occur. Some of these methods were identified in the previous section, "Staff Involvement

throughout the Plan," however a closer look at these items will add further clarification. For example, there are seven schools where committees are formed to focus on the plan's goals.

### Committees

At Court, the purpose of these groups was explained by the grade two teacher. "The committees have met several times during the year and they put forth things that they feel are important and ideas for the whole school." Glenside staff said, "We formed small groups to work on the goals that were isolated as the school's goals. Then as small groups we work on the various strategies that would help us put the goals in place." "The teachers use committee time to work on areas related to a specific goal, for example, the Primary Program," maintained staff at Northbend.

Sometimes the groups were formed to look at a specific goal. For example at Fir Grove, "We have a discipline committee and they work on certain things," said the grade six teacher. At two schools a group of teachers, primary and intermediate staff, met to look at all the plan's goals. This happened at both Glen Oakes and Northbend. "There are weekly meetings for the primary teachers. We're all quite up front and we talk about how we will develop these (goals)."

### Sharing Information

There is a forum for sharing plan information on a regular basis. At all elementary schools this time was provided during staff meetings. Such statements as, "We will sit down at a staff meeting and the principal will ask how are we doing in achieving the goals" (Glenside). At our staff meetings, "we spend sixty minutes on a discussion about school goals or school issues" (Northbend). Teachers who attend a conference, "return to the school and inform us during the staff meeting."

Sometimes as well as the staff meeting time, there is other time created for regular meeting times for teachers to work on the plan. At Northbend, for example, this "time was created by the principal taking all the students for a weekly assembly." Nightingale teachers use a process they called "twinning." "Today the primary teachers wanted to get together so the intermediate teachers took their kids." Glen Oakes teachers use after school meeting time on a regular basis to look at their goals. "There are weekly meetings for the primary staff, biweekly meetings for the intermediates as well as the monthly staff meetings," indicated the librarian."

Both junior secondary schools created a weekly meeting time for teachers by reorganizing the timetable. Extra time was added to each teaching block. Time was reduced between classes and at noon hour in order to dismiss students early once a week. According to staff at Maitland, the new found time is used, "for matters of reflection, workshops, collegial activities or whatever seems to be appropriate for our plan." To make valuable use of this time, cross curricular groups were formed at Edgemont and within these groups there was "goal focussed discussion and exchange of ideas," as well as "planning to do observations." At both these schools, staff meetings were not used on a regular basis for plan discussion.

#### Professional Development

Professional development relating to the goals was mentioned by all schools. There was more inservice done outside the school than inside the school (Table 5.2) Both types of ongoing development were seen to be an important aspect of the plan's working.

##### a) Outside the school

Tying conferences to the plan was seen as important. At Nightingale, for example, the staff pointed out, "When people individually make application for professional development money, it

has to match the goals pretty well rather than just, it's a great conference and I want to go to it." All teachers at Maitland had, "been to at least two major workshops put on that relate to our goals." School staffs were "encouraged to attend different workshops towards a goal," according to Glenside teachers. Attending a conference as a whole staff enabled Garden Meadow's plan to push forward. "It was at that time that a cooperative learning workshop was available in Vancouver. Somebody mentioned it in the staff room and it was just automatic, everybody but one went to this evening session. We were sold on the idea and it was very soon after that we decided to implement it." Outside conferences then play an important role in implementing the plan's goals.

b) Inside the school

School-based inservice was used in eight schools identified on Table 5.2. Teachers at all schools using this strategy found it very useful. Staff at Garden Meadows said, "Jane would come in and work in our classrooms at different levels and we would watch her teach our children. ...If you get to see it with your own kids or with someone close to your level, then you feel like for a teacher, you're more secure." Having inservice at Fir Grove, the teachers believed

was very helpful because, "We see it first and then we try their sample." Maitland's new teacher felt, "Our own inservice team that regularly comes into the school and model these things - that's been a big help." This sentiment was typical of staffs participating in school-based inservice.

### Peer Coaching

Peer coaching was noted as a strategy to help implement the plan's goals at the classroom level in six schools; Maitland, Garden Meadows, Fir Grove, Glenside, Edgemont and Northbend. The benefits of peer coaching were acclaimed by all. At Maitland, staff felt changes were made, "by asking people into their classrooms to see what's going on and what it is like. You know I would never have dreamed of having people in my classroom three or four years ago and now you ask people to come in and see what's going on and you get invited into other people's classrooms. That spreads really quickly."

A Garden Meadows teacher claimed, "We had the opportunity to go into each other's classrooms, I would go in and watch the grade sevens do this and say, 'Wow, look what they've done with this.' This would inspire me to say, 'let me see, how can I get the kindergarten kids to think about these things?'" Having a partner at Fir Grove

allowed the teachers to, "reflect upon the success by talking about what's happening with my coaching buddy." At Edgemont, "observations with one another's classes facilitated ... better learning of the techniques." Within the schools which identified peer coaching as a strategy to help implement their goals, teachers felt this technique had really made a difference.

### Special committees

Special committees, other than goal committees, are used in four schools - Court, Garden Meadows, Edgemont and Nightingale. The purpose of these committees in the schools vary. For example at Court, the grade two teacher said, "In May, the SCC (Staff Collegial Council) get together and we look at the school goals as put forth by the staff from the year before and we look at how we attained them. Then we look at where we want to go from there and we formulate a plan that we take to the staff at the staff meeting."

This same process is used by the Pro D Committee at Edgemont. Jim explained, "We (Pro D Committee) have just sat down and formulated what we're going to do for next year and then we'll take it back to the staff." Garden Meadow's staff used the Staff Development Committee to obtain feedback about the plan. "They've done things

like sent out questionnaires - what do we want to do and then it's compiled and they take the information from that to plan ahead what we are going to do."

The Professional Development Committee at Nightingale meets ahead of the regular staff meeting in order to, "plan and have a few things in mind and then bring them to the staff." As well it is this committee which decides if applications to attend conferences will be approved. Only those which "match the goals" are funded. These other committees play a variety of important roles in the implementation of the plans at these four schools.

### Parents

The role of parents in helping the plan to go forward was mentioned at four schools. In Garden Meadows and Fir Grove staff members put on workshops for these parents. "We have done evening workshops on a voluntary basis to show the parents what we do with their children and what we have learned in our professional days." The principal at Northbend keeps parents informed about the goals by using the forums of the monthly newsletter and parent meetings. As well, he, "had a formal needs assessment for parents to seek input into the goals." At Glenside, "The chairman of our parent association



was involved in developing the plan." Parent participation in the plan was in the form of information at some schools while at others it was to seek input.

### Money

Money was mentioned quite frequently as assisting in the plan going forward. The two Jr. Sec. Schools used the money to provide a lot of professional development for the teachers. "Everybody on this staff has been to two major workshops...." The school-based staff associate at Fir Grove had a \$13,000 budget which she used, "to buy books for teachers that are the references that they need in their own rooms, to go to conferences together in order to get a common language, and to provide release time - which costs money." Teacher release time was also bought with the \$4,500 the Glen Oakes teachers received. "One day all our primary teachers all got subs and they went together to visit another school and meet and talk about the program." This use of money for release time was also seen at Garden Meadows where, "we've had maybe half the staff ... go to somebody's house for lunch together and then work through the afternoon on various strategies. Yes we have spent money and we haven't been bashful about that either."

Money also bought release time for Glenside teachers to receive inservice. "We've come up with substitute time to send teachers to other schools or to workshops so they can observe other teachers and we've taken the bill for that." In addition though, Glenside staff used money raised from community groups to provide material rewards. "We take them swimming for students that reach a certain standard." "We buy A pins for the students." These rewards were used in Glenside's goal, "to improve the overall appearance of the school," for students who do, "after school clean-up patrol" or win a, "school pride poster contest." Money then is seen as important in six of the schools. The source of that money is dealt with under the section Outside Support for the Plan.

### **Evaluation of the Plan**

#### **Classroom Evaluation of the Plan**

Evaluation of the plan can be divided into classroom evaluation and school evaluation. In the classroom, teachers at all schools felt their own observations let them know whether or not a particular strategy was successful. "You see lots of kids involved in what they're doing," believed Garden Meadow's grade seven teacher. The intermediate teacher at Fir Grove said, "Just watching kids and

seeing how they work and seeing the change - to see that they're doing different things than they used to." Or from Edgemont, "You can see kids on task more." The Grade Seven teacher at Nightingale maintained, "You can see they are thinking ... and you think, oh good. They're catching on."

Other methods of evaluating the plan in the classroom varied from school to school. Four schools' staffs felt principal observations could tell them how well they were doing (Table 5.4). The principal at Garden Meadows noticed teachers were, "less front and centre. You see kids involved in their learning groups ... a great deal of the time." Principal observation was also used at Fir Grove. "What you'll see in every classroom is a lot more student participation, a great deal more than what we've had before. You see kids involved in their learning groups ... a great deal of the time." Glen Oakes principal gives teachers feedback about his observations. "The principal has noticed that during assemblies the younger children ask questions that are much more focused." In these schools, the principal had observed changes in students. Their observations were believed to be a form of evaluation.

	Court	Mait	Gar Md	Fir Gr	Gl. Oak	Glen	Edge	North	Night
Tchr observations	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Prin observations			●	●	●				●
Peer coaching		●	●	●			●	●	●
Outside feedback	●		●			●		●	●
Student marks		●					●		
Teacher talking	●	●	●	●			●		
Research				●		●			
Classroom Evaluation of the Plan									
Table 5.4									

In addition to observations, the use of peer coaching at six schools was seen as a classroom evaluation technique because it gave teachers feedback. "Teachers are asked for their feedback. They will sit down and debrief the activity and it's excellent, just great," exclaimed one Fir Grove staff member. At Glenside, the primary teacher felt feedback from a peer like, "Boy what a great idea and they say, 'That would be something good to show at a staff meeting'," really let her know she was on the right track. "Teachers could always use as the basis of discussion that activity which they were mutually knowledgeable - 'you know whenever I have a situation that's not working, I might try this idea'," felt Edgemont's new teacher. The resource teacher at Northbend claims, "...collaborative planning and peer coaching going on helps because everything they do they bounce it off each other." In the schools that used peer coaching, it was seen to assist evaluation of what was happening in

the classroom.

Feedback from outside sources other than staff members also helped teachers know their new strategies were working. The primary teacher at Court said, "I also get feedback from substitutes and other people who work in my class. They say the students are very cooperative and how they work." Parents and district staff also, "See what our children are doing and they write us (Glenside staff) letters." The parents at Nightingale are also a source of feedback, "There's a lot of things, notes and calls, from the parents, a lot of feedback," claimed Marg.

At only two schools were student marks used to measure the plan's classroom effectiveness, at both Junior Secondary Schools. At Edgemont, "I'm seeing the marks increase because of the strategies that are happening." One Maitland teacher said, "We do have in place, certain very rough measures of student achievement such as marks." There was however, no planned pre or post testing done by the teachers within the classroom at either school.

Teachers talking together was mentioned as assisting in letting them know how well the plan was working in the classroom and the school in five schools (Table 5.4). "There's more talking about what's

going on in the classroom," Maitland teachers felt. "I know it's working too because of the increased dialogue that's occurring between and among teachers," maintained the principal at Garden Meadows. Teachers at Fir Grove said, "I can talk it over. I can reflect upon the success by talking about what's happening with either my coaching buddy or other people on staff." "Teachers talk about different teaching strategies ... even outside of our Tuesday afternoon meetings," Edgemont's new teacher pointed out. Talk between teachers seemed to be an important method of obtaining feedback at these five schools.

At only two schools was any type of research or tracking done to see if a new method of teaching was working in the classroom. The grade seven teacher at Fir Grove taught a Spelling Unit using the, "same old method that she normally did. And then she taught one using a cooperative learning strategy and she was just amazed at the difference particularly in retention levels a week later." Glenside's measurement of student's keyboarding skills recorded student entry levels and then their ongoing results. These were the only two examples of in class research done at this or indeed any of the nine schools studied.

### School-wide Evaluation of the Plan

Noted at all schools but Maitland was the end-of-the-year plan review. "In June, we went through the entire document and everybody became involved," at Court. Likewise at Garden Meadows, "At the end of the year, as a whole group, we sat down and we evaluated the program for the year and then re-established what it was we were going to do for the next year." "We sit down and have a look at it (the plan) and what's good about it and what's bad, you know things like that and maybe this goal or objective is going to be ongoing or that will be a maintenance one," recalled Glen Oakes' principal. Glenside staff also take part in year-end review. "We'll look at the plan and say do we continue with this goal or are we finished with it?" Nightingales' teachers planned, "At the end of the year we will look at what we decided at the beginning of the year and see what we did and review everything." All respondents representing eight schools made similar comments.

At all nine schools there were regular meetings during which all staff evaluated the plan's ongoing progress. At six schools (Table 5.5) this evaluation took place during the staff meeting. "We have staff meetings about it (the plan) and we talk about it," maintained

Fir Grove's intermediate teacher. Bob described how the process occurred at Northbend. "The staff knows what is working in the plan when we have our monthly meetings-when the whole staff is together to react to items ... and we have the opportunity to express our concerns."

	Court	Mait	Gar Md	Fir Gr	Gl Oak	Glen	Edge	North	Night
Staff meetings	●		●	●		●		●	●
Other meetings	●	●		●	●		●	●	
Year end review	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Measurement		●		●		●			
Need to measure			●		●			●	
Discipline		●	●	●				●	
Tchr complaints				●					
Stud enrolment							●		
Tchr eval prin								●	
School Evaluation of the Plan									
Table 5.5									

Within three of these schools - Court, Fir Grove, and Northbend - ongoing evaluation is also done during another meeting time. Goal committees at Court, for example, "...monitor ourselves a lot. We keep track of it. We know we've got the plan and we've got our timelines." This type of committee also works at Fir Grove. "We have a discipline committee and they work on certain things. What they do is they think of the most important things and they bring it back to the staff meeting," maintained the grade six teacher. At Northbend committees met weekly. The purpose of those meetings



was explained by Bob, "We do meet as a primary group and intermediate group to discuss goals. When we come together, more specific concerns are already ironed out before we come to the general meeting." These meetings are therefore used in addition to monthly staff meetings.

In three schools - Maitland, Glen Oakes, Edgemont - ongoing evaluation is carried on only during a scheduled meeting other than a staff meeting. Block "x" at Maitland allowed for ongoing review. "We do it (evaluate) regularly ongoing on a regular basis in block "x." Glen Oakes' librarian claimed, "We see that something isn't working because there are obvious glitches and then we try to address them.... We do this at our weekly primary meetings." Edgemont staff also used weekly meeting times to evaluate. "So the teaching strategies are the focus and everybody is required to participate in the group and give feedback." These regularly scheduled meetings allow staffs at these schools to assess particular strategies of the plan on an ongoing basis.

Actual measurement of the plan using a definite method was indicated at one school, Maitland. Maitland had a form of measurement done by persons both from inside and outside the

school. There was tracking of some students' achievement. "We have a teacher involved in what we call an integrated program.... She has been given an extra block in time in which she tracks these students to see how they do outside her rather sheltered environment." In addition, also at Maitland, a UBC professor and the vice principal, "have some base line data from when we started and he is collecting data and doing interviews." The principal hopes this technique will give them accurate evaluation of their plan.

Four schools noted discipline was a factor in knowing how well you were doing. "Kids rarely get to suspension now because how we deal with the kids has become a different approach," maintained Fir Grove's kindergarten teacher. Garden Meadows staff had extended the classroom teaching strategies onto the playground. "There are not as many discipline problems at this school because we use the cooperative learning strategies on the playground." Classroom discipline also changed. Maitland's new teacher said, "A lot of my time, in the past was spent on maintenance of classroom discipline and order. This doesn't happen any more." Actual tracking of numbers of suspensions or problems had not been done in any schools.

Three schools, Garden Meadows, Glen Oakes and Northbend, felt they needed some type of an evaluation in order to let them know how well they were implementing the plan. Garden Meadow's principal explained, "We used to use the CTBS on a regular basis ...we're not sure what to put in its place. So we've had a lot of talk about that." The principal at Northbend believed, "That's a good question because we haven't looked at pre and post testing. Our evaluation procedure has turned out to be just looking at what we've done, that's probably the part we haven't done as well yet." This sentiment was echoed at Glen Oakes. "The ongoing evaluation of a program like that is important and we don't do a lot of ongoing evaluation in a formal way." These three school staffs knew they needed to use some type of definite measure but they had not come up with an answer. The other school staffs did not mention this need when being interviewed.

There were other things singularly mentioned as means of evaluation. Few teacher complaints were noted at Fir Grove. An increase in the number of students wanting to come to Edgemont had changed in two years. "We've turned the tide from fifty to sixty kids wanting to leave the school, to forty to fifty kids wanting to come here." This fact was seen by the principal as a way of evaluating how

well the school was doing. At this same school, the number of the students on the honor role was also seen by the new teacher on staff as a method of plan evaluation. The principal at Northbend had circulated a report card on himself to be completed by the teachers. "I gave them a three page report card on my goals for the year, the school's goals and asked how far they think we've come on both of these." In this way, he had in writing an evaluation of himself and the plan's beginning.

Methods of evaluating the plan varied among schools but some strategies were used at all schools studied. Within the classrooms the method used was teacher observation. Evaluation of the plan within the school was done through ongoing regularly planned meetings throughout the year. There was really only one evaluation of the plan that was being carried out by using student grades and that was happening at Maitland.

### **Outside Sources that Influence the Plan**

All schools believed there were sources outside the school that influenced their plan. The influence happened at various times. At present there were two sources identified most frequently as influences - the Ministry and the District.

### Ministry Influence

The Ministry was mentioned in five of the schools as influencing their plans. A Court teacher believed, "The latest focuses in education from the Ministry affect us. We are aware of them so that those can be considered when we do our staff goals and planning." "Part of our plan was externally driven with the change in curriculum and focus," stated Northbend's intermediate teacher. Sue from Nightingale maintained, "The new Primary Program had to be a focus - we had no choice." It was indicated, "to the intermediates that as the new program was coming down the pike, the focus had to be there too." "It is something that has come about because of the pressure," believed the other Nightingale teacher. In these schools, the influence from the Ministry took place when the staffs were developing their plans.

The influence also affected the plan during implementation. At Glen Oakes, the intermediate teachers had increased their meetings from monthly to biweekly to deal with a subject that was not part of their plan. The grade seven teacher said, "That (the intermediate program), by the way, is not a stated goal for this school, but resulted from the pressure of the Year 2000 initiatives...." A Ministry

Directive to mainstream all students meant that during the year, a student with many individual needs, changed what was happening in a room and therefore influenced the plan's implementation. At Court, "We have three wheelchair students that are integrated in another class. ...So that affects the program."

These Ministry influences did not seem to appear in a negative light but rather as a reality of what happens within schools. The principal at Maitland, for example, said, "The Royal Commission, The Sullivan Report, A Legacy for Learners, Year 2000—all influence our plan. ...I expect that there are going to be a number of changes.

...Some of the concepts have helped us immeasurably in pursuing our ideas because they seem to be the sorts of things that are on the leading edge." As well, staff at Nightingale referred to the Ministry as "writing the Bible," but what was important to them was taking some of the pieces of the Bible and working with them. "It's really nice if some of the pieces you're taking are part of the philosophy of the school...." Although the Ministry was definitely influencing what they were doing, Nightingale staff felt the direction was, "part of their philosophy." Overall the Ministry, at this time, was seen as an important influence in the plan's of five schools studied.

### District Influence

The influence of the District was mentioned by all but Northbend and Nightingale. At the two secondary schools, this influence in the schools' plans was obvious. Maitland's principal said, "I knew if we were going to take the next step, designing units across departments to have cooperative planning, I needed a substantial supply of money. ...At the same time the district was looking for someone to do a pilot program designed to keep kids in schools." Tying into a district's pilot program allowed Maitland to continue their original focus but they also added another focus. This same scenario occurred at Edgemont. "The district consultant wanted a pilot school to implement a program on student team learning." It was this project that Edgemont's principal tied into.

One of the elementary schools, Court, noticed the influence because of Flora District's current focus on accreditation. "This year has been a very busy year because we have been involved in accreditation. That's taken a lot of time. If we weren't doing that then you would be more involved in these (pointed to the plan) things." Within this same school district, Garden Meadows staff needed help implementing their plan so they turned to the district.

The district person who assisted them was seen by all as a real influence on the plan. "The outside person was crucial. The person that you get is really important.... I think it's the 'who' that's important." The influence of the district was seen differently in these instances than in another district - Merrill.

All schools in the Merrill District maintained the importance of the District in influencing the plan. Here however, it was seen in a different way. The Merrill District had begun the process of school-based improvement planning ten years earlier by taking a group of administrators to Lake Washington to visit a district where this type of planning was in place. The administrators observed, "the tremendous goals that they were achieving ... so we adopted their plan." "A district task force was set up and led by the chairman of the board and the superintendent," Fir Grove's principal remembers because, "I sat as an administrator on that task force." It was at this time that Merrill District central office administrators set policy for schools to do school improvement planning.

Within all Merrill's schools studied, all the staff interviewed realized there was a district expectation that school-based improvement planning be done. Quotations from the principals of



each of the three schools confirm this influence. (Fir Grove) "Our school goals are required by the end of October so those are worked on by the staff." (Glen Oakes) "They (the District) have their missions and goals and that kind of stuff and we have to be hooked in together." (Glenside) "We have pressure put on us to make goals. The board office wants to know what our goals are. We go in and talk about our goals and show them what we are going to do." Although the expectation was clear, the schools had leeway as to how this would be done. "It's the district that sets the structure within which we operate and gives us the freedom to develop our own plan," pointed out a Glen Oakes' teacher.

At the end of the year, each school principal in the Merrill District must return to district office for a meeting with district senior staff. During this meeting, the principal and usually some staff members present their plan. Glenside's team presentation was outlined by the intermediate teacher, "We went to the school board office, one of us representing each of these goals, went with the principal and vice principal, to a meeting where we sat down ...and presented our goals step by step to summarize what we are doing."

This fact was mentioned by Glen Oakes staff, "We review our plan with district office staff." Fir Grove principal said, "Each year we go over what we've done in the school. We go to the School Board Office and present our summary." Only the schools within the Merrill District mentioned this type of district influence and very importantly, it was all of the schools in the Merrill District that mentioned it.

#### Parents Influence

Parents were seen as an outside influence in only three schools, Fir Grove, Garden Meadows and Glen Oakes. They were seen as having power at Glen Oakes. "...Your parents too, through the Parent Advisory Committee, let us know what's going on and we respond quite quickly to what they say." This fact was mentioned by only one person at the school.

At the other two schools the parents were seen as a group that needed to be included in the implementation of the plan. "They want to know what's this cooperative learning stuff that's going on? So that's another group that we had to inservice as well," recalled Fir Grove staff. Garden Meadows principal also remembered doing parent inservice on their plan. "Parents had been listening to all these new

strategies and wondering what was going on. So we had three sessions where teachers led the sessions and led them through some strategies themselves. The parents were the class and the teachers taught them." Both these schools did parent inservice as part of their overall plan.

### Other Influences

Two other points were made by one individual only but are valuable when looking at outside influences on the plan. The role of the union, a teacher at Court felt, now influenced the way things were done in schools. She said it was currently important to show that "...this decision has come from the teachers not from administrators." A final influence mentioned was the radical shift in a school's population which may influence a plan. During the last year Court had received many new students who could not speak English. As a result, the focus of the plan changed as this new population created another focus which had to be addressed. "We had a big ESL, (English Second Language), population come back. ...So now we have an ESL class. Just with the ESL, Learning Assistance has changed. ...We have all had to sort of change a bit for that." Although these points were not addressed more than once, they could influence

the direction the plan at any school takes.

### **Outside Sources that Support School-based Planning**

Without a doubt, clearly identified by every school studied was the importance of the School District's support when a school was undertaking any type of an improvement project. Support was seen to come from many district people in a variety of ways.

#### District staff working in the school

Very important to these schools were the district office staff who came to the school and gave workshops and/or demonstration lessons. Inservice of this type was seen to be beneficial by staff in a number of ways.

##### 1. In Flora District

Court staff believed this type of support, "gives you a new focus and makes you realize you're on the right track. "It encourages you to go on." "It keeps us alive and vibrant in the school." The Learning Services Team working in Maitland have been, "a sounding board for what we are doing." "We're in contact with them frequently and they encourage us and guide us." The District Consultant who worked so closely with staff at Garden Meadows, was "crucial" to the plan's success. "She worked with us on a three year commitment. It

was really wonderful to get her expertise. It was just great!"

Support of this type in Flora District therefore gave teachers focus, encouragement, energy, feedback, guidance and expertise.

## 2. In Merrill District

When referring to the inschool support by the Director of Staff Development, the staff at Fir Grove said, "She encourages us a lot. She's been the one coming in to give us examples and we go in and observe her teaching a class." "The Director has much more expertise in that particular goal we are seeking ... so she was the person we would turn to." Glen Oakes staff believed, "The district provides an awful lot of support for us in terms of personnel ... to help us through these sessions. They (the presenters) provide expertise ... that goes along with your goals." Glenside staff did not identify any district office staff working in this type of way in the school. At the other two schools, however, district support through school-based inservice was seen to provide encouragement and expertise.

## 3. In Ocean Pacific District

At Edgemont, Jim made comments about the role of the Director of Instruction. "He's really spurred a lot of people on ... and been in here observing and giving people help and information and being

really supportive in people trying these things. "It kind of gives validity that it's something that's recognized outside the school by somebody at the school board and by the superintendent."

District staff coming to Northbend were seen to have, "very practical, very useful inputs.... In a relatively short time, (they) can bring you right up-to-date and refresh you on new techniques and new directions." Nightingale teachers felt the same type of support from district personnel working in the school. "They give us ideas especially about the Primary Program." "They clarify so that you know that what you decided as a staff is fine...." "I think it's mental support to know you're on the right track." All schools studied in the Ocean Pacific District thought district staff working in the schools were very supportive. Overall, this support was seen to give recognition, practical ideas, up-dating and approval for the school's project.

In general then, district office staff working at the schools helped teachers with parts of their plan. They were seen in all districts as a very important source and method of support. The reasons for this belief may vary slightly between schools or districts but the overall message is one of importance. The fact that

Glenside staff did not comment on having district people working in the school may be attributable to their in-school expertise. One staff member was a leading provincial expert in 'developing critical literacy in children.' "One of the teachers you talked to is an expert. She's going all over the province. We have other experts on staff too so the teachers are getting the inservice from each other." As one teacher said, "It's such a capable staff. You just have to know them to realize it." This factor then may have accounted for few district people working at the school level.

### Money

The District was also seen as supporting the schools in other ways which helped their improvement plan. For example, all schools studied with the exception of Court maintained the importance of money to their effort. It showed Maitland teachers, "that professional development is important to this school." To one of the teachers it meant, "My worth as a person, who is in this for a lifetime career is being valued and I think many people feel that way." Money at Garden Meadows paid for teacher release time. "The money paid for us to have a sub come in. You didn't feel the stress of your classroom being there."

Within the Merrill School District, "The first year, the money is important. It's the carrot that gets teachers involved," claimed the teacher in charge of professional development at Fir Grove. Money at Glen Oakes means, "special funds for speakers, for inservice for professional activities that go along with your goals." At Glenside, district money facilitated goal achievement. "We were given a lot of money to implement this particular goal." Staff members interviewed in the Merrill District believed money assisted their plans.

The importance of money was also maintained by Ocean Pacific staff members. Money that went along with the pilot program sent, "teachers to workshops and bought release time..." at Edgemont. Northbend had school improvement money. "We've used that money for such things as sending teachers to other schools, going to conferences, buying materials and buying time." Money can let you know you're on the right track. Nightingale's principal said, "We got some of that school lead money and that was kind of an external recognition." In all these Ocean Pacific schools studied, staff believed financial support from the district played an important role in their school improvement plans.



### Involvement of District Senior Staff

At two schools within different districts, the involvement of district office senior staff in the plan legitimized what the schools were doing. The principal at Court felt it was important to have, "a person from the school board office involved so they know what we're doing and what our progress is ...how we're making out. So we hand this (the plan) in each year to the board office. It keeps a legitimacy to it.... If you're going to be doing all this stuff, let's be recognized for it." In this district, there was no district mandate to do this type of planning.

Within the Merrill District where there was a mandate to do school-based improvement planning, principals and some representative staff members actually present their plan to members of the district office staff. Teachers at Glenside felt this procedure gave them positive feedback. "We presented our goals to the district, the superintendent, assistant superintendent and they thought our goals were wonderful and gave our school good direction." This staff was returning to District Office in June to provide an update on how the school had progressed on the overall plan. All schools in the Merrill District go through this process.

It is interesting that in one district, involvement by district staff through informing them about the plan is sought by the principal whereas in another district, Merrill, this involvement is required by the district. Most important is the perception of the principals within the Merrill District. "We go in and talk about our goals and show them what we are going to do. We get a lot of positive encouragement - all sorts of verbal and written encouragement from the district - saying what they liked about what was going on and that sort of thing," felt Glenside's principal. This same point was made by the Flora District principal at Court. "We get a lot of support from the board office who know about our plan and about what kind of work we are doing here." The feedback let them know, "how we're making out." Whether sharing the plan with central office administrators is sought or required, it seems the end result is the same. These principals felt involvement by district office senior staff gave them support.

### Parent Support

Parents were identified as another outside source of support for school staffs as they worked through their plan. This support source was mentioned at four schools; two in the Flora District

- Court and Garden Meadows - and two in the Ocean Pacific District  
- Northbend and Nightingale. At all these schools it was the positive feedback which they received that was important.

Garden Meadows teachers believed parent support made teachers feel good. "Support, whether it be just quiet support from parents ... just coming up and saying, 'You're doing a wonderful job.' It's great!" Court's principal also noticed the effect of parent feedback on staff. Parents make, "Statements that they liked the atmosphere of the school. That kind of external input was very valuable to us."

Similar comments were made by staff from the two Ocean Pacific District schools. Teachers at Northbend pointed out, "We have a very positive and active parent group." "They feel the tone of the school is positive and the kids like coming here. They let us know that." Also at Nightingale, "There's a lot of things from parents, a lot of positive parent feedback."

At no time during the interviews did any staff members from either Jr. Sec. School mention parents being involved in any way in their plan. In all the elementary schools, parents were mentioned at some point but only as a support in the four schools identified above.

### Community Support

Another outside source of support was identified at Glenside - it was the community. "The principal solicits support from some of the community groups like the Kiwanis that support us and provide us with some money so that we can buy A pins." He lets the groups know what is happening in the school and this, "makes them more aware of what's going on in the school and what we're trying to do with the children." The support from the groups was shown by the money they gave the school.

### Ministry Support

Financial support from the Ministry was noted at Garden Meadows. It came a few years previously when there were Funds for Excellence. This was the only mention of Ministry support of any type.

Outside sources of support for school-based improvement planning, according to these school staffs, comes mainly from the district. Parents as well though do give support in over half the elementary schools studied.

### **Flexibility of the Plan**

The staff at every school saw a need for any plan to be flexible.

Similar thoughts were repeated. "The plan is constantly changing...." "Along the way there is a lot of talking and a lot of modifying and adapting the program." "I think it has to be flexible." "We did have a clear sense of what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go but ... we were quite prepared to take side trips off along the way and investigate things that seemed to be interesting." "You have to be flexible and say this works, that doesn't - forget it." The importance of plan flexibility was clearly stated at all schools studied.

Specifically some strategies needed to be flexible, according to the respondents. For example, "...the timeline here (at Court) is not etched in stone so that if we don't accomplish it, we don't get into a turmoil." Glenside's principal agreed with this, "If something on here is going to take far longer than we thought or it starts and it isn't working, you don't just go through the motions, you scrap it or adjust it." At Fir Grove they felt, "It's important to have the components (of the plan) but it's okay to constantly change them." The plan then was seen as a guiding document rather than "etched in stone" and it was all right to vary from it rather than "...go down a straight path to our destination."

## **Benefits from the Plan**

### Ownership

Due to the type of process used in developing and implementing a school-based improvement plan in these schools, all elementary school plans experienced a feeling of ownership by teachers.

Repeatedly statements were made about this factor although no question during the interview addressed the topic of ownership. "We made the plan and we want it to work. We're interested in these things and we work towards them because you want to. It's your interest - you've invested," claimed Court teachers. At Glen Oakes the grade seven teacher pointed out, "What goes into the goals or the evaluation genuinely comes from teachers. ...It's a good process and ...everybody gets input. They feel the plan is theirs." Once again from a Glenside teacher, "The whole staff together generating those goals and then after generating those things we felt they were things we actually wanted to work on. We had ownership." Garden Meadow's primary teacher explained, "People had input. "People were given an opportunity to respond so we had ownership." Nightingale's teachers agreed. One said, "Everyone buys into it and takes ownership for the goals." In every elementary school studied, teachers' ownership in

the plan was mentioned.

In the two secondary schools where the plan had been developed and then taken to the staff for approval, ownership was mentioned at only one school- Maitland. Staff said, "Everyone on our staff feels a sense of ownership in the project and has no hesitation in providing input whether it was asked for or not. It's our project so we can talk about it." On the other hand, no statements were made about ownership at Edgemont during the interviews. It was at Edgemont where the initial plan was taken to the staff and they voted to accept it. In comparison, at Maitland the plan was taken to the staff and they were, "invited to come on board." Individual teachers did not have to participate if they chose not to. Maitland's plan began with a group of about ten interested staff and then others joined in as they saw the plan progressing.

Overall then, when plans were developed with staff input from the beginning, these plans all resulted in a feeling of ownership on the part of teachers. When teachers were not consulted prior to the development of a school-based improvement plan, the results indicate there is a fifty percent chance that they will result in ownership.

### School Focus

Emerging from the data as another benefit is the plan's ability to focus the direction of the school. "What the plan has done has been to give us a good solid line to go in. Its given us direction for our school year...," maintained Glenside's primary teacher. Focus was mentioned by Court teachers. "It (the plan) gives us a focus for the year and it makes sure we're including everyone and that we are focused... Without it, I think we each tend to go our own way."

Sometimes this clear focus was stated by a principal. Nightingale's principal felt, "If people have selected the goals for the year and everyone is in agreement, then you're all working in the same direction and you can't help but achieve them." Having the school staff focussed in the same direction was clearly a benefit to school-based improvement planning.

Jim, Edgemont's new teacher, felt plan direction helped him become organized in his classroom because, "It's very focused, not sporadic. Having a clear focus helped when hiring new staff members at Glen Oakes. "So in our hiring, we're always looking at our goals and telling people here's what our goals are. Here's our plan." Having a clear direction then helps in the classroom and even in teacher



selection thus matching teachers and school goals.

### Institutionalizing the Plan

According to the teachers, along with providing clear direction for the school, the plan actually becomes part of the teaching world. It becomes ingrained in teachers' minds. Nightingale's grade seven teacher said, "I think it's the type of plan that's in the backs of our minds all the time and becomes what we know - those are the goals that we're working towards." Because teachers are focused on the plan's goals, the improvement plan gives curriculum direction. "Because you're aware of what your plan is for the year, a lot of the teachers try to incorporate these plans into their monthly planning, their yearly planning. So you try to bring it right into your core curriculum and tie the curriculum areas into it," explained Glenside's primary teacher. The kindergarten teacher at Court agrees with this. "When teachers are aware of a particular focus like ...a multicultural focus then they would note that in their preview." The improvement plan then becomes part of the daily happenings within a class and is not done as an isolated topic on a particular day.

### Collegiality

A further benefit of school-based improvement planning

happens because through the process, the teachers become more collegial. There is more sharing, exchanging and planning between class teachers. This fact was noticed by both teachers and principals. Typical of the type of teacher comment is that from the new staff member at Edgemont. "There is a lot of sharing among the staff. People are just really keen. The talk in the staffroom isn't about fishing, it's about what's happening in class." Principals too notice increased sharing. "They do an awful lot of sharing between classes, even between primary and intermediate. ...They're not afraid of change." All this results in "...the exchange of ideas. You have the change and appreciation of the other person's job."

Planning together was noticed by many. Northbend's resource teacher found, "There's a lot of more communal planning, teachers working together much more than they ever did before - that's happened without anybody saying that there had to be more collaborative planning." At Glen Dakes the librarian also noticed this change. "There's been a lot more co-planning and dialoguing between the teachers." The new teacher at Nightingale found a real change in this aspect. "For me, there's been a lot of planning among teachers that at my other school you just didn't get."

Continual sharing, planning and exchanging made these teachers feel very comfortable with each other. According to Edgemont's experienced teacher, this type of planning, "...opens up their classrooms. It makes their class more accessible to other teachers. They don't mind if another teacher is there. They can try something and if it doesn't work, it doesn't really hurt. You don't feel as closed off and isolated as disempowered as they have in the past." This same sentiment was expressed by a Northbend teacher. "It's really easy to go in and out of each others rooms and start working together. We've always liked and trusted each other but we did our jobs separately before and now we're going back and forth a whole lot more so we're finding the stress is greatly relieved a whole lot more that way." Teachers believe working collegially really helps them feel in control and less pressured.

#### Class Focussed Teachers become School Focussed Teachers

Teachers feel that working collaboratively gives them an interest outside their classroom. At Edgemont they continue to talk about the plan's strategies, "...even outside of our Tuesday afternoon meetings. I'll sit down in the staff room and somebody will come up to me with a lesson plan and ask me, 'Hey, what do you think about

this,' and it'll be something I haven't seen before." Working together means you're part of a group. Garden Meadows' primary teacher felt, "We have a commitment to each other to say, 'Well let's stop and spend ten minutes talking about how we can make this work for kindergarten or grade one'." "Without something like this (the plan) you sort of stay splintered and just stay in your own little world," believed the grade two teacher at Court.

With the focus of the staff on the plan a new phenomena begins to happen. It was expressed best by the primary teacher from Nightingale. "You become more of a group. You're starting to think ...as a group rather than that of individual teachers.... You're not a little entity unto yourself. So you rely on people more. You start to share more ideas and you're more comfortable with people walking in and out of your classroom. You think on a broader scope, drawing in more people." Another teacher explained it as getting, "...caught up with what's happening in the school."

From what those interviewed said, because the plan provides a focus and opportunities to work together, collegiality is increased. When collegiality increases the teachers begin to look outside their rooms, into other classrooms and at the school as a whole. Teachers

are no longer doing their "jobs separately" but are looking at the school as "a family." "Everybody sees this as their place and everybody's always interested in making it better all the time," remarked the resource teacher from Northbend.

#### Empowerment in the plan - building teacher efficacy

The word empower meaning to authorize or enable came up during the interviews. There was in all schools empowering done by the principal. There was someone or a group other than the principal who became the plan leader during the early stages of the plan. At many schools this role was filled by a committee. For example, Court's was the Collegial Council. At some schools it was a staff development committee, specific goal committees or primary and intermediate departments.

In some schools there was one person who was selected as the overall committee head. Fir Grove selected a school-based staff associate. The staff associate said of her job, "It wasn't so much that I was the fertilizer for the garden but I was sure the gardener checking that all the plants were coming along fine." Maitland had a person in charge of the staff development committee. Other teachers believed, "The head of the committee ... was sort of the push and

catalyst that kept it going last year. When Steve moved on, Greg has kept it pretty much going this year." Although the Garden Meadows vice principal was just a member of the staff development committee, she actually "was a very strong influence" within the plan. She did a lot of the organizing to help implement the plan. Teachers recalled, "...you don't realize how much work they actually did until they're gone." What is important in all these instances, is someone or a group of people other than the principal took over the leadership role and was encouraged to do so by the principal.

Empowerment of this type resulted in teachers believing in themselves. Teachers noticed that because of what they were doing within their improvement plan, a feeling of being in control was evident. "I feel very fortunate to be in this school (Maitland) because ...my worth as a person who is in this for a lifetime career is being valued and I think many people feel that way." Another teacher from Edgemont said, "They feel more empowered, that they have a chance. They feel they can learn something." The teacher who headed the Maitland's staff development committee said, "We want to make teachers better at what they do and empower them to feel that they can make significant changes ... in their classrooms. As a direct

consequence of that ...is that students will benefit directly in terms of learning." Having teachers involved and giving them power resulted in teachers believing they were important, they could direct the path the school was taking and they could make changes in their classrooms.

### **Time as a Factor in the Plan**

The word time kept popping up all through the interviews and therefore needs to be included in this chapter. Time was mentioned when staff were reflecting back upon what they had or had not done throughout the plan. Nightingale's principal wished he had taken more time to do the initial planning. "I should have spent the entire first professional day on this (setting goals and the following planning) not half - the whole thing!" Time was needed for reflection itself and just getting used to new strategies at Garden Meadows. "We did so much that now it's time that people can catch their breath and look back on what they have done."

Time was also mentioned in terms of being realistic. The plan has to be feasibly possible in terms of teachers' time. Glen Oakes' librarian made this point very clear. "We can be meetinged to death. We're all very busy. We're all really involved.... There comes a point

that you have to say if you do any more then you're going to be on a downward slide."

As well staff must realize that things don't happen overnight. "It hasn't been drama. I mean I don't think anything this big and this long range happens very quickly," pointed out Glenside's intermediate teacher. Northbend's new principal had to come to terms with this fact. "I wasn't satisfied until a couple of months ago because I was quite impatient about how things were going here." Time is a factor then in setting reasonable expectations and in understanding change as a process not an event.

Time was also created during the working day at three schools, the two Junior Secondary Schools and Northbend. The purpose of creating this time was to provide the teachers with the opportunity to work together to help implement the school's improvement plan. This factor must have been important to staff because in all three schools, the teachers referred to this time continually as the factor that made their plan work. At Northbend there's an, "opportunity that's provided for each department, primary and intermediate, to meet each week as we've just done our half hour planning together. We're moving more rapidly than we thought into the new curriculum."



"The plan was for us to have time set aside so ... that we could have school time to get together in groups," recalled Bud at Edgemont. In Maitland, "I think during all of those Tuesdays we went well beyond the hour. We would start at 1:45 and rap up at 4:30 - 5:00. It was communication more than anything else." Each teacher interviewed at these three schools mentioned the use and value of their created time on an average of four times during the interview.

### **Summary**

Each plan was perceived to work well within its own context. There were many similarities between plans. At the same time, there were also differences between them. It is possible to distinguish elements that some of the plans contained that can be recommended to others undertaking school-based improvement planning. These recommendations are made in part from the data and part from the literature.

## **Chapter VI: Interpreting the Findings**

For those people wishing to undertake school-based improvement planning, much advice can be gained by interpreting the data from the schools studied. The experiences of these school staffs can form helpful suggestions for undertaking this type of project but there is no specific recipe. Although it is now possible to make suggestions about how to get started, how to keep the plan moving forward, the role of the principals and district, it must always be remembered that the actual plan must be school specific.

### **How to get started**

It is the school principal who must *plan* for school-based improvement planning to occur. There must be opportunity for the entire staff to meet and look at where the school is and where it should be going - goal setting. This process can take place in either June or September. Many of the staffs studied now found formulating direction in June lets them get started right away in September. If there is a large staff turnover, one principal felt it was best to do the planning in September.

Tied into this process is the actual plan. Goals are first identified and then procedures for achieving them addressed. The areas which need to be included in planning are strategies for goal attainment, resources required (money and personnel), timelines, professional development opportunities, person(s) responsible for goal or strategy, and evaluation. Why these topics need to be addressed in the plan was aptly put by Glen Oake's librarian, "It's all pie in the sky if you haven't articulated the means by which you can obtain it."

Very important in the plan's development is the recording. In the seven schools where the plan was written, staff members referred to it throughout the interview and were more direct with their answers. A written plan provides everyone with a reference point and acts as a calendar for what will be happening in the school that year as well as a focus for evaluation. Staff at the schools that did not have a written plan felt they needed one.

Once again it is important to stress the need for flexibility. The purpose of the plan is to guide and therefore along the way some

items may need to be modified or adapted. Timelines, for example, sometimes need changing. Staff development activities may be added in order to attend a conference which had just been discovered. The plan then must not be "etched in stone" but rather guide the staff towards their goals.

### **Keeping the Plan Moving Forward**

Fullan's research showed, "...the principal plays a fateful role in the implementation and continuance of any change proposal..." (Fullan, 1982, p. 140). In the schools studied for this thesis, it was the principal who did keep the plan moving forward. Principals used a variety of strategies to maintain the focus and involve all teachers in plan discussion. One way all principals continued the momentum and involvement was to have scheduled meetings throughout the year at which time the goals of the plan were discussed by all staff members. At some schools it was during the staff meetings, at others it was a created time during the school day. These entire staff meetings occurred at least once a month and at the most once a week.

Another strategy used frequently in the elementary schools was to have a set time for groups of teachers to meet to discuss the plan. These groups were either divided into primary and intermediate teachers looking at the entire plan or cross grade groups formed to focus on a particular goal. The information created by these specific groups was then shared with the whole staff during staff meetings.

Both types of meetings provided opportunity for plan directed discussion. Little maintains that in the schools she studied where, "Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice..." the practice led to shared language adequate to the complexities of teaching and effected teacher collegial work and experimentation with teaching (Little, 1982, p. 331). Providing the opportunities for teachers dialoguing about the plan during regular meeting times then results in not only continued focus on the plan but also increased teacher collegiality and risk taking.

Including a professional development component meant that in all schools studied, teachers' professional development was plan related. This included attending conferences or workshops outside

the school as well as the inservices held within the school. Peer coaching was another implementation strategy used in some schools. At all the schools using peer coaching, the teachers believed the process helped facilitate "...better learning of the techniques." Guskey's research found, "For most teachers, having a chance to share perspectives and seek solutions to common problems is extremely beneficial. ...What teachers like best about inservice workshops generally is the opportunity to share ideas with fellow teachers" (Guskey, 1986, p. 10)

Two other factors helped to move plans forward - money and parents. Money was important because it provided release time for teachers to attend conferences, visit other schools or classes, or time to meet together to work on parts of the plan. This factor, money, was addressed in eight of the nine schools studied. Because of its importance in implementation, it should be included as a plan component.

The other factor, parents, was never addressed in any of the plans. However, parents helped implementation when they were included in the overall process. At the schools that gave the parents

inservice about the schools' plans, parents became strong supporters of the school. Garden Meadows parents were so impressed that they used parent raised funds to give teachers release time to pursue the plan's direction. It appears therefore, that parents as a factor, should be included.

Overall, the strategies used for keeping the plan moving are regular, ongoing meeting times, professional development, money and parents. All these strategies need to be considered when any school is undertaking school-based improvement planning.

### **Evaluating the Plan**

Although all schools had ongoing discussion and input during their meeting times which allowed them to modify their plan, the plans lacked formal assessment. This fact was noted by three of the staffs studied. "We haven't looked at pre and post testing. Our evaluation procedure has turned out to be just looking at what we've done, that's probably the part we haven't done as well yet," Northbend's principal commented.

Some plans did include an evaluation component but the evaluation consisted of observations, for example, "keyboarding

taught," rather than "keep a record of student's keyboarding entry level. Record monthly scores." Instead of "observe that peer coaching is ongoing," have "record the number of peer coaching interactions." At present then, the plans didn't allow staffs to know how well they were doing.

Within the classrooms once again the teachers in all schools believed their observations gave them feedback. However, even when they felt on task time had increased, no formal evaluation had been used such as recording student on task behavior before and after a particular strategy. Sirotnik (1987, p. 53) explains that, "Evaluation... is the production of critical knowledge, by and for those who use it, enlightened by experiential data - quantitative and qualitative...." It was the experiential data that was missing within these plans.

The reason why evaluation needs to be included is that teachers need feedback to know if various strategies are being effective. Guskey's (1986, p. 7) research showed, "...that significant change in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers is contingent on their gaining evidence of change in the learning outcomes of their students." Furthermore, "...learning outcomes of students generally precedes and



may be a prerequisite to significant change in the beliefs and attitudes of most teachers" (Guskey, 1986, p. 7). If the school-based improvement plan is to be completely successful then, it needs to include a measurable evaluation component. Fullan's research supports this point. "Gathering information and using it for altering the program is central to effective change" (Fullan, 1982, p. 177).

The ongoing monthly and end of the year reviews allowed for some changes to be made. For example, it was during this time that Glenside staff reworked their plan and made decisions regarding its future, "You don't just go through the motions you scrap it or adjust it." What has been suggested by these researchers, however, is that the process of review would be more effective in directing the future plan and changing teachers beliefs and attitudes if there was some hard data on which to base decisions.

It should be remembered that data can be collected in many forms. Questionnaires and surveys can be used to collect quantitative data (Sirotnik, 1987, p. 51). Feedback from parents and students, can be obtained using these instruments. Information gathered would add to the production of Sirotnik's "critical

knowledge" and let staff know how well the plan was working.

### **The Role of the Principal throughout the Plan**

As has been alluded to previously, the principal plays an important role in school-based improvement planning. It is his/her energy that is necessary to initiate and implement such a plan. It is through the principal's careful planning that staff involvement continues throughout the plan and specific components such as timelines and staff development are included.

According to the data collected here, from the teachers point of view, it is most important that teachers see the principal as being supportive of them as they work through the plan. This support is shown by providing materials, encouraging teachers through feedback, as well as listening and responding to their concerns. In addition to support, teachers identified other characteristics of principals which they felt assisted them as they worked on the schools' plan.

Teachers appreciated an "open" principal who allowed them continued plan input. Principal as initiator was important in order to create time for teachers to work together and obtain funding to assist plan implementation. Principal commitment to the plan was

shown in these ways as well as by teaching in order to free teachers and allow them time to work together. Teachers also saw the principal as the plan's monitor and organizer.

Overall, teachers identified many principal characteristics that assisted the plan - supporter, open-mindedness, initiator, monitor, organizer and showing commitment. These characteristics are what Blase classifies under, "Follow-through" in his study of teachers' perceptions of effective principals (Blase, 1987, p. 600). These principal characteristics not only assist the plan to move forward but also teachers believe these qualities are typical of effective principals.

### **The Role of Outside Sources on the Plan**

Two outside sources greatly influenced the school-based improvement plans at the time this research was done. School staffs identified both the ministry and the district as influences. At this time in B.C., there are many changes being made in curricular areas at all grade levels. As a result, these changes were mentioned repeatedly as causing the focus of the schools' plans to change both at the planning stage and during the implementation stage.

District administrators changing their focus to include school accreditation or seeking school staffs to begin pilot projects also influenced a school plan. A district focus on school-based planning had spurred all the schools in one district to take part in this type of planning. These schools were held accountable for doing the planning by taking their plans at both the beginning and end of the school year to district office in order to consult with senior district administrators. Holding the schools accountable in this way did insure school-based improvement planning was done and that it was communicated to the district.

Although the schools saw both the ministry and the district as influences on their plans, they saw only the district as being supportive of it. District support was most beneficial when it was in the form of personnel coming to the school and working right in the classrooms with the teachers - showing them how a particular plan strategy could be used in the classroom. Support through these people came as expertise, guidance, feedback, energy, encouragement, practical ideas, as well as recognition and approval for what the teachers were trying to do. The study done by Huberman and Miles

(1984, p. 113) also showed that effective assistance was user-oriented and achieved similar effects such as providing teachers with reassurance and support.

District money also is seen as support of the school's plan. It is the money that gives approval and allows teachers to pursue the professional development activities needed to implement the plan. Professional development may be within the school having teachers working together, outside the school visiting other classrooms or attending inservice. These types of activities were noticed in all schools studied and according to Fullan, "Research on implementation has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that these processes of sustained interaction and staff development are crucial regardless of what the change is concerned with" (Fullan, 1982, p. 67).

For schools, staff development costs money. Therefore, schools doing school-based improvement planning need to have financial support in order for continued professional development to occur thus allowing the plan to go forward.

It is from the district that schools find the resources required to carry forth their plan. Support in both the form of personnel with

expertise and money for implementation is required from the district.

### **Benefits of School-based Improvement Planning**

School-based improvement planning as suggested in this thesis has many benefits to the school and therefore to the students. Firstly, this type of planning is based on participative decision making, involving the teachers through their input. It increases teacher ownership. They believe, "We made the plan and we want it to work." According to Owens, "Such involvement is motivating to the participant, and thus it releases his or her own energy, creativity, and initiative. ...This sense of 'ownership' also encourages people to accept greater responsibility for the organizations' effectiveness" (Owen's, 1987, p. 284).

Another plan benefit is due to the focus which school-based improvement planning gives the school. It means, "You're all working in the same direction and you can't help but achieve them (the goals)." (IX-19) Working together in the same direction, "...not only creates a sense of solidarity around a shared purpose, it is also a source of motivation and reward in itself" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 33). Working together by focusing on the plan then not only gives the

school direction but also gives teachers positive feelings.

The findings in this study also show that the plan becomes ingrained in teachers' minds. It's "...in the backs of our minds all the time and becomes what we know...." It becomes, therefore, not only the focus of the school but also becomes the focus in the room. Teachers, "...incorporate these plans into their monthly planning, their yearly planning." In this way the plan becomes institutionalized.

Because opportunities are provided for teachers to discuss what is happening in the school on an ongoing basis, there is more sharing, exchanging and planning between class teachers. Teachers become more collegial. "There's a lot more communal planning, teachers working together much more than they ever did before," according to Northbend teachers. McLaughlin & Yee's study found that in schools with, "...high levels of collegial interaction, discussion among teachers centers more around instructional planning and improvement of practice" (1988, p. 35)

This same finding was observed in schools in this study. "The talk in the staffroom isn't about fishing, it's about what's happening in class." Most importantly, research by Little (1982, p. 338) reports

that schools which, "share expectations (norms) both for extensive collegial work and for analysis and evaluation of an experimentation ... are the most adaptable and successful of the schools we studied."

School staffs participating in school-based improvement planning showed a change in focus from looking at only their classrooms to looking at the school. They said, "You become more of a group." You get, "...caught up with what's happening in the school." When teachers have this school focus rather than a class focus, LaRocque maintains, "...the staff is likely to share the norms of collegiality and continuous improvement" (LaRocque, 1983, p. 206).

This study showed that teachers' collegiality and school focus did increase using school-based improvement planning. According to LaRocque school focus turns to collegiality and Little maintains collegiality leads to continuous improvement. That is what school-based planning is all about - continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is shared by all staff in these schools studied. They said, "Everybody sees this as their place and everybody's always interested in making it better all the time."

Teachers in the schools studied also felt they had more control.



"They feel more empowered, that they have a chance. They feel they can learn something." McLaughlin and Yee call this feeling, "level of capacity" or "power" and this is one of two aspects, they maintain that, "shapes a teacher's sense of career and satisfaction" (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988, p. 28) Teachers in this study did feel they had that power.

Rosenholtz's work showed, "When principals relinquish their need to control, trusting faculty with discretionary decisions,... teachers tend to become more unstinting contributors to the workplace" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 144). Principals using school-based improvement planning did turn over that power by constantly seeking whole staff input, and turning over control to committees or teacher committee leaders, "The head of the committee...was sort of the push and catalyst that kept it going last year."

As well, when teachers believe "that they can make significant changes ...in their classrooms," it affects implementation of school changes. "Research on teaching efficacy suggests that teachers are more likely to adopt and implement new classroom strategies if they have confidence in their own ability ...." (Smylie, 1988, p. 6) The

teachers in this study, believed they were in control, that they could make a difference. "It's such a capable staff. You just have to know them to realize it," commented a Glenside teacher.

Planning of this type results in positive benefits. The school will improve on a continuous basis. Schools as described here are adaptable and successful. Teachers in these schools feel motivated and committed, "The family aspect takes over. You become more of a group."

### **Conclusion**

The principal is the key player in school-based improvement planning. It is at his/her initiative that the process will be put in place whether or not it is mandated by the district. Finding methods to begin and maintaining momentum throughout the plan are the principals' responsibility.

It is through careful planning that the principal creates time for teachers to work together with a focus on the plan and teachers therefore partake in ongoing plan discussion. It is through resourceful connections that principals find methods to tap into financial resources in order to help move their plan forward. It is

through the use of this money that time is bought for teachers' continued professional development focused on plan goals. It is through the creation of the plan itself that all components are included in order to insure that important pieces such as evaluation and parents are not forgotten. And it is through an openmindedness when principals listen to the input of teachers and empower teachers to use their expertise to lead the school's improvement plan that the plan will move forward. Using these techniques, the principal will ensure not only the plan's success but the overall success of the school.

## Appendix A

Mr. A. Fliton,  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Merrill School District,  
Gertrude, B.C.

Dear Sir:

I am requesting your assistance with a thesis I am currently undertaking at S.F.U. My topic is "School-based Improvement Planning" and the question I am hoping to answer is, "What makes a good school growth plan"? In order to answer this question, three districts which encourage planning at the school level and who have been identified by other lower mainland districts as having a good school-based improvement planning model, have been selected for data collection.

I am asking each of the districts to identify two or three schools which district staff consider have exemplary plans in place. I would then like to look at the plans and do a follow-up interview with the principal and two staff members focusing on the process through which this plan was developed, implemented and evaluated. The time required by school staff members for this project will be very minimal. To give you further information about the thesis, a copy of my proposal is included.

I would gladly meet with you to discuss this plan. I have already contacted Nola Black as a source in my district identification process and have spoken to her about the possibility of using District 112 as a source.

Thank you for considering this matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Lynda Haylow

c.c. Ms. Nola Black

## Appendix B

April 6, 1990.

Mr. A. Fliton,  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Merrill School Dist.,  
Gertrude, B. C.

Dear Mr. Fliton:

I would like to thank you for your response to my request to use schools in Merrill School District in my thesis research on, "School Improvement Planning." Your assistance in contacting the schools on my behalf resulted in a friendly reception when I later contacted these same schools.

Arrangements have been made to do the interviewing on a date and time selected by the school principals in consultation with participating staff members. The dates selected are:

Fir Grove Elementary	April 11
Glen Oakes Elementary	April 17
Glenside Elementary	April 18

I will keep you informed as to my progress and let you know when I have completed the interviews. When all the information is compiled, I will forward you a copy of the results and conclusions.

Thank you once again for your assistance. It has been invaluable.

Most sincerely,

Lynda Haylow

## Appendix C

## SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent by Subjects  
To Participate in a Research Project

Having been asked by Lynda Haylow, graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, to take part in a research project, I agree to participate in the form of a personal interview conducted by the above-named researcher regarding school based improvement planning.

The interview will take place at \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

I understand:

- a) the procedures to be used in this research project.
- b) that I may withdraw my participation, in part or in full, at any time.
- c) that my responses will be maintained in strictest confidence.
- d) that I will remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of this study.
- e) that the school in which I work and the district in which I am employed will also remain anonymous.
- f) that tapes and written transcripts of the interview will be destroyed upon completion of the study.
- g) that I may register any complaint I might have about the research project with the chief researcher named above or with Robin Barrow, Director of Graduate Programs, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University.

NAME (Please print) : \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE : \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS : \_\_\_\_\_

DATE : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me a little about your school's improvement plan?
2. How did you develop this school improvement plan?  
Who was involved in developing the plan?  
Was there any problem getting the plan?  
(If yes) What kind of problems? How were these problems overcome?  
(If no) Why do you think there weren't any problems?
3. What kind of plan is it?  
What would you consider to be the main objective of your school plan?  
What else does the plan contain?  
Do you think it's important to have this information in the plan? Why?
4. What changes have been made in the school ('s programs) this year?  
How have these changes been made? (How do you know these changes are being made?)  
Who is involved in making these changes?  
In what ways are they involved?
5. How does the plan affect teacher activities in the classroom?  
How do you know how successful you are when trying parts of the plan?
6. How do you know how well the overall plan is working?  
Who has input into how well it is working?  
In what ways are they involved in finding out how well the plan is working?
7. How satisfied are you with the plan?  
Could the plan be made better? How? (Why do you think these changes are important?)
8. Are there any influences outside the school that help make the plan work?  
(If yes) What are they? Why do you think these outside sources are important?  
(If no) Are there any outside influences that you think might make the plan work? What are they? Why do you think they might be important?



## Appendix E

**Codes Used**

Pl beg	Plan beginning
Pl char	Plan characteristics
Pl invl	Plan involvement
Pl prob	Plan problems
Pl impl	Plan implementation
Pl eval	Plan evaluation
Pl flex	Plan flexibility
Pl ben	Plan benefits
Pl ti	Plan time
pur	purpose
comp	components
Out inf	Outside influences
Out sup	Outside support
prin	Principal
prin in	Principal initiator
prin sup	Principal supporter
prin op	Principal openness
prin mo	Principal monitoring
prin com	Principal commitment
prin org	Principal organizing
tea	Teacher
tea in	Teacher input
Prob av	Problem avoidance
Prob res	Problem resolution

Comite	committees
shar info	sharing information
pro d	professional development
peer co	peer coaching
Min	Ministry
Dist	District
Par	Parents
sch eval	school evaluation
cl eval	classroom evaluation

### Using the codes

Codes were usually used together and placed in the right hand margin. For example,

"There are the goals and each of the strategies that we put down under the major goals have staff component, resources, the person specified to be responsible for a certain component of it and then sometimes there's a budget attached to it."

P1 char  
comp

This passage was coded:

P1 char	(plan characteristics)
comp	(components)

Appendix F

June 1, 1990.

Mr. John Jackson,  
Principal,  
Maitland Jr. Sec.

Dear John :

Please find enclosed the "portrait" I have outlined from the interviews that I did with yourself and two of your staff members, Greg and Blair. As I explained on the phone, in order to understand exactly what your improvement plan is and how it works, I found that this was an important step in my analysis. At this point, I would really appreciate it if you would read over the portrait and give me a reaction to it. If you would like to make notes on the outline, feel free to do that. You may call me at 458-6778 and give me your reaction or send me a letter. If you would like to share this portrait with the teachers interviewed, and get their reaction to it, that would be great.

I realize this is a busy time of the year for you but I would really appreciate your input as I want all information used to be absolutely accurate. As you will see, all names of teachers, schools and districts have been changed in order to ensure your confidentiality. The numbers beside certain quotes indicate to me the interview section from which the quote was taken.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Lynda Haylow (Mrs.)

Appendix G

April 19, 1990.

Mr. A Fliton,,  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Merrill School District,  
Gertrude, B. C.

Dear Mr. Fliton:

The letter I sent to you on Apr. 6/90, outlined the dates that I would be in the Merrill District interviewing at the three schools selected by central office staff on my behalf. This letter is to inform you that all those interviews have now been completed. All interviews took place on the planned dates. Both principals and participating staff members were most helpful and eagerly shared their expertise.

Thank you for your part in this process. I hope to have all information collected and analyzed by the end of June. Once it has been defended as a thesis, I will forward a copy of the results to you.

I will be returning to my principalship in the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows District on Aug. 1/90 and hope we will be able to continue this type of sharing between districts.

Thank you once again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Lynda Haylow

Appendix H

June 19, 1990

Mrs. Lynda Haylow,  
61 1st Ave.,  
Pitt Meadows, B.C.  
S3Y 1L7

Dear Lynda:

Thank you for your "portrait" of Garden Meadows. I shared it with Chris and Mary who found it very interesting. Time constraints have not allowed us to discuss it in depth.

From a personal point of view I felt that it reflected the Garden Meadows situation accurately. It was interesting to learn of the others' perspectives and it provided further confirmation of the extreme complexity of a staff development project.

I hope that the information about Garden Meadows was useful for you and that your paper will finally provide you with satisfaction and success.

Yours truly

---

Ken Watts

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