Action Research: School Development at the Intermediate Level

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I would like to dedicate this thesis
to my family whose love
and support encouraged me
throughout this amazing journey.
I appreciate you, and I thank you.

ABSTRACT

This thesis describes an action research study of the effectiveness of the school improvement project at an intermediate school in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. The school improvement project implemented had two goals: 1) to augment student motivation and engagement, and 2) to encourage communication and collaboration among teachers. The project consisted of implementing interesting workshops to students that were grounded in curriculum outcomes. The participants in this study involved both the student and teacher populations. Students completed an on-line data survey while teachers completed a questionnaire. Four follow-up interviews of teachers were conducted. The results from the students' responses indicated that the school development project was effective. Eighty-seven% of the students surveyed confirmed that they enjoyed being able to learn about subjects that interested them. The school development project was also successful in increasing teacher communication and collaboration. Eighty-five % of teachers surveyed responded that the project provided more time for collaboration with colleagues.

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CHAPTER ONE

Over the past decades, school improvement has taken many forms. Its ultimate purpose is to increase student learning (Guskey, 2000). While the government in Prince Edward Island (PEI) has supported school-based professional development plans, self-selected activities ranged from dodge ball to subject specific study groups. Although many chosen professional activities were worthwhile, but with no tangible connection to teacher development or student learning, they were not measured to determine meaningful change. Guskey explains, "Many good things are done in the name of professional development. But so are a lot of rotten things" (p. 17). These types of activities are costly endeavours and the quality of professional development offered to teachers and the connection they have to student learning are questionable.

During the 2004/2005 school year, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results identified that PEI's students fared poorly in comparison to students in the rest of the Canadian provinces. During that same year, the Department of Education announced a School Improvement Planning (SIP) initiative. According to the Department of Education (2004), "It was acknowledged that although the PEI public school system does school improvement planning, practices are varied across the province" (p. 2). The department recognized that "There is not a consistent approach to monitoring and reporting the results of implementing improvement strategies in schools" (p. 2). The Department of Education launched the SIP project:

> for the purposes of improving student learning outcomes and increasing student success, while at the same time satisfying legitimate

> demands for public accountability. Other benefits to the public education system will be: increased accountability, increased identification of school improvement best practices across the province, increased understanding and use of evidence informed decision making, increased professional development opportunities for educators, improved professional teaching practice, and increased capacity to improve school performance. (p. 2)

Partners in this project include the Western School Board, Eastern School District, La Commission scolaire de langue française and the PEI Teachers' Federation (PEITF). Ten schools volunteered to pilot this initiative. Subsequent to our principal and Professional Development Chair attending information sessions on the School Improvement Project, my intermediate school decided to take part in the pilot project. From there, our school's Professional Development (PD) Committee became involved, assuming the responsibility for the SIP initiative.

An informal survey of the school instructional staff gathered perceptions about what was going well at school for teachers and students, as well as suggestions for change. Results from the survey were categorized into themes identifying areas of need. The two themes that emerged from the feedback from surveys were student motivation and teacher communication and collaboration. The committee brainstormed ideas that would address as many of the needs as possible. Our ideas were flowing, building on one another, leading to our "aha" moment when the birth of our project occurred. We knew it was "the" plan. Its interconnectedness offered the potential for relevant teacher professional development and authentic learning opportunities for our students.

Our project was named Opportunities for Wow Learning at School (OWLS). Our plan was to implement innovative programs to motivate student learning by providing opportunities to learn curriculum outcomes through interesting sessions with multi-age groups of students. It also encouraged teachers to work together using their curriculum documents to plan and map their sessions identifying cross-curricular outcomes for each session. Teachers brought forth their own areas of expertise and interests, as well, students identified their interests. From these data, teachers met together and planned sessions. This was how approximately 26 topics were developed. Among others, the diversity of these topics included: creating a filmed documentary about our project, global education awareness, small engine repair, creating and recording music, fashion design, Rubrics Cube, healthy living, and stock market. Once these sessions were planned, our staff met during one of the professional development (P.D.) days and matched all possible curriculum outcomes from all subject curriculum documents from grades seven to nine. This created curriculum maps for each session grounding our project academically. Parents and community members were involved in several of the sessions. According to Kushman (2000), "Helping students see the connections between school and life can be accomplished by an interdisciplinary curriculum rooted in real-world topics that are exciting and timely" (p. 1).

Through an Action Research method, I hoped to discover if our school-based initiative was effective in responding to the following inquiries.

1. Will the level of student motivation and engagement increase through our School Improvement Project?

2. Will the School Improvement Project encourage communication and collaboration among teachers, leading to meaningful professional development?

I chose an action research approach for this inquiry because it fits naturally with the scope of the project. The reason we created OWLS was to increase the effectiveness of our school. Through data collection, evaluation of the data, and reflection on our practices, we will be able to determine if this project is successful in meeting our goals. Creswell (2005) explains that the key characteristics of action research are "a practical focus, the educator-researcher's own practices, collaboration, a dynamic process, a plan of action and sharing research" (p. 560). The interconnectedness of these characteristics are integral in our school based project.

Significance of the research problem is evident for the following reasons:

1. This research is an exploratory study to find out if the implementation of the School Improvement Planning initiative increases student motivation and heighten teacher professional development.
2. The political backdrop to this initiative is the desire to increase student learning. This research recognizes the necessity to motivate students in their learning in order to increase learning.
3. This research may extend an understanding of the interconnectedness between effective schools research and research of learning communities.
4. This research has the goal of contributing to the training of the teachers at our school.

The results of this action research study of the School Improvement Project at our intermediate school may provide significant contributions for validating authentic school improvement and the government's initiative.

CHAPTER TWO

Effective Schools

This chapter provides a literature review of effective school research and the challenges that educators may face when implementing changes for improvement in their schools. The effective school research studies the following components: school climate, leadership, parental involvement, and student motivation. The literature on the various challenges that educators experience looks at the different stages of change to be expected in school improvement.

Lezotte (2005) states, in no uncertain terms, that there are only two kinds of schools--improving schools and declining schools. Schmoker (2005) explains that in order to achieve sustained improvements in teaching and learning, educators must come together as members of a professional learning community, committed to becoming an effective school. Research on effective schools has identified common themes. In order for a school to be considered effective, it must have a climate that is welcoming to all stakeholders, and emphasizes the importance of academic achievement (Brewster & Fager, 2000). In addition, the school must be led by an administrator who practises a facilitative leadership style where teachers share in the decision making process (Brewer, 2001). The effective school fosters a positive relationship with parents which values their support and expertise (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). And equally important, a school that is effective is able to motivate its students by engaging them in authentic learning experiences (Carter, 2004).

School Climate

One indicator of an effective school is a school climate which focuses on student success. Both DuFour (2004) and Lezotte (2005) are adamant that in order for a school to be effective, it must create a climate of high expectations for success. Lezotte explains that it is imperative that all members of the learning community firmly believe that all children are able to learn. DuFour adds that in effective schools, the most evident commonalities is that the staff is committed and focused on the founding purpose of the school -- high levels of learning for all students. When students understand that academic achievement is a priority, they are more likely to take their learning seriously (Brewster & Fager, 2002). The climate needs to express that learning is important and valued by all members of the learning community. Brewer (2001) adds that "a focus on instruction is a focus that puts children first. It is a focus on teaching and learning"(p. 30). When all stakeholders make instruction a priority, students feel supported and valued (Brewster & Fager).

Brewster & Fager (2002) identified another aspect of school climate that contributes enormously to the overall effectiveness of the school. They explain that the climate must value and welcome student differences. If students feel a sense of belonging, they are more willing to participate in classroom learning as well as school activities. These findings are confirmed by Vibert and Shields (2003) who reported that students who do not feel accepted by the school community have a lower success rate than those who do feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, students who are unable to identify with the curriculum material are at risk of becoming disengaged from their learning. Hudley, Daoud, Hershberg, Wright-Castro, & Polanco (2002) add that teachers

must provide a climate in their classrooms which is a nurturing and respectful attitude towards students which demonstrates a personal interest and expectations for success. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) explain that schools who foster a climate where students do not participate in decision making and are viewed as being irresponsible and untrustworthy, have lower achievement records than those schools who have a climate where students are not alienated, and are welcomed as valuable members of the learning community.

A healthy school climate is essential because it is associated with higher student achievement. The school climate must involve setting high expectations for success, establishing a sense of belonging among students, and allowing students to be involved in decision making. Creating a healthy school climate requires leadership that recognizes and understands the importance of the school climate in establishing an effective school.

Leadership

Research shows that effective leadership is a clear indicator of an effective school. DuFour (2004) believes that the principal's leadership is a critical element of an effective school. The principal must be committed to empowering staff and delegating leadership responsibilities. Brewer (2001) explains that administrators must share decision making with all stakeholders. They must welcome ideas and opinions from all members of the learning community. When the principal is the sole decision maker, staff members feel alienated and powerless.

> Leaders in schools with strong professional communities...delegated authority, developed collaborative decision-making processes, and

> stepped back from being the central problem solver. Instead they turned to the professional communities for critical decisions (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996, p. 193).

According to Guskey (2000), there is not one particular leadership style that works for creating an effective school. He explains that the most effective principals rely on diverse leadership styles according to their own knowledge, staff needs and the situation at hand. Barth (2003) states that the nature and quality of the teacher-principal relationship is absolutely central to the capacity of the school to become a community of learners and leaders. He believes that a school must have a collaborative culture where teachers and administrators support each other. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Karhanek (2004) propose that even though principals must practise shared leadership in order to bring the learning community together, they must also be able to handle conflict that may arise among staff. Principals will be faced with situations where they need to be the "boss" in order to ensure that the professional learning community is not jeopardized. In the event that a team is in conflict, and takes the matter to the principal for mediation, the principal needs to address the problem, and put an emphases on the concepts of the professional learning community. If principals fail to do this, they are sending out the message that they are not committed to sustaining the professional learning community.

DuFour et al. (2004) understand that teams almost never start out as cohesive, strong teams. This stems from teacher isolation. Fullan (2001) adds that, "Confronting the isolation is a tall order. It requires intensive action sustained over several years to make it possible both physically and attitudinally for teachers to work naturally together" (p. 7). Schmoker (1999) suggests that effective teamwork is action research which

requires experimentation of new practices followed by assessment. He explains that in order for teams to be truly effective, they need to avoid rushing into implementing new practices to solve problems. Instead, they need to carefully select a solution that is backed by research to make a real impact on student learning. In addition, they need to rely on the team's expertise in judging whether an idea merits further investigation, and finally, effective teams need to engage in active listening practices. Schmoker is confident that this team approach will have a high payoff in student learning.

Guskey (2000) reminds us that teamwork can be a roadblock to school improvement just as easily as it can be an enhancer of the process. Dufour and Eaker (1998) express the view that teachers need training and support in order to be effective collaborators. They add that without the proper training, the efforts put forth in the name of collaboration can be in vain. The most important aspect of collaboration is that it must have a focus directly related to teaching and learning. Fullan (2001) and DuFour and Eaker claim that in effective schools, principals collaborate with teachers in creating a vision, along with goals that highlight instructional objectives. This allows teachers to focus their improvement efforts on the shared goals and agreed upon directives.

Chrisman (2005) found that successful schools have strong teacher leadership. These teachers share in making decisions about teaching and learning. Schmoker (1999) presents the idea that schools have a much higher success rate for systemic change when principals team up with teachers. He believes that schools can develop leadership by first designating and cultivating talented teacher leaders. Schmoker explains that these leaders need to be selected because they are competent and respected members of staff as opposed to being popular or high on the seniority list. Second, paying these leaders a

reasonable salary. Schmoker states that "leadership is not free" and that there should be compensation for the hours they put in. Third, providing teacher leaders with release time. He adds that teacher leaders require regularly scheduled time so they are able to successfully carry out their duties. Four, including the leaders in administrative training, and finally, involving the staff in creating the criteria for teacher leaders as well as in selecting the staff members for these positions.

DuFour et al. (2004) promote the idea of a collaborative team process where teachers practise fluid situational leadership. A teacher who has expertise in a certain area steps up to assume the leadership role when that area of expertise is required.

Fullan (2001) firmly believes that in effective schools, standards and opportunities for continuous improvement and lifelong learning are connected to collaboration. He states that, "It is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than individual enterprise and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve" (p. 125). As a result, teachers are more likely to trust and value the expertise of their colleagues. This will ultimately increase the frequency of teachers seeking advice from one another and offering help to each other.

Chrisman (2005) discovered that effective schools valued the teacher's voice when it came to selecting professional development. She found that when teachers are provided the opportunity to reflect, they are able to recognize areas where they need support. By having a say in selecting their professional development, teachers have control over their own learning, and the professional development becomes more meaningful. This has a direct effect on student learning.

Fullan (2005) explains that one of the problems with schools that are not moving forward is fragmentation and overload. Teachers are asked to attend professional development sessions that are not connected to a vision or a plan. Guskey (2000) agrees that in the past, professional development has been perceived as random events that took place only a few days during the school year. He adds that these events were rarely relevant to the teacher's needs in addressing student learning. Guskey states that "true professional development is a consciously designed effort to bring about positive change and improvement. It is a deliberate process guided by a clear vision of purposes and planned goals"(p. 17). Guskey proposes that there is a strong need to evaluate professional development in order to have a better understanding of the dynamic nature of professional development, recognition of professional development as an intentional process, the need for better information to guide reform efforts, and increased pressure for accountability" (p. 7).

Guskey (2000) suggests that professional development must be intentional, ongoing and systemic. In order to ensure the intention of the professional development, it is necessary to establish worthwhile goals that are able to be assessed. To make sure that the professional development is ongoing, it needs to be embedded in everyday practices. For professional development to be systemic, it needs to include all levels of the organization. In other words, in order for true growth to take place, teachers, administrators, and board members must all be on the same page working towards improving student learning. Guskey states:

> One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of

> professional development. At the core of each and every successful educational improvement effort is a thoughtfully conceived, well-designed, and well-supported professional development component (p. 4).

An effective leadership recognizes the value of providing time for teachers to meet regularly. Chrisman (2005) describes administrators who replace staff meetings with team time as not valuing teacher collaboration. Chrisman and Barth (2003) believe that it is essential that the principal actively participates in reflective practices with the staff and regularly attend team meetings. This provides valuable dialogue that enables the staff to work together to continually improve the school.

Administrators who truly value teachers working together will build in time in the schedule even if that means hiring substitute teachers. Barth (2003) says that creating a collaborative culture takes teachers out of their isolation. This empowers them to take risks, to try new ideas, and be creative. Being able to share, discuss, and plan together allows teachers to continually improve their practice. Schmoker (2005) states, "The right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting" (p. xii). He further explains that teachers learn most effectively from other teachers.

Leaders in an effective school need to have a vision of a professional learning community. They need to share their vision, beliefs, and intentions through their conversations with all stakeholders of that community. These leaders need to radiate their commitment to high quality teaching practices and high expectations for student

learning (Sparks, 2005). Successful schools need leaders who are willing to share authority, participate without dictating and promote a collaborative culture. Leaders of effective schools also need to understand that in a professional learning community, the stakeholders are not only the teachers and the students, but also the parents and community members.

Parental Involvement

Research has identified parental involvement as one of the indicators of effective schools. Brewster and Fager (2000) affirm that "Active parent involvement has been associated with numerous benefits for students, including increasing student motivation and engagement in school" (p. 17). Berkowitz and Bier (2005) proclaim that the "single best predictor of student success is the level of parental involvement in a child's education" (p. 66). They found that with a high level of parental involvement, students had reduced absenteeism, improved behaviour, and higher success academically. Coleman (1998) proclaims that:

> Student commitment to schooling (or engagement in learning) is primarily shaped by parents through the "curriculum of the home"; but this parent involvement is an alterable variable which can be influenced by school and teacher practices (p. 11).

Dorfman and Fisher (2002) expose current research that studied the correlation between student's academic success and family participation in their children's

education. They found that the type of family involvement could be categorized into four categories: parental academic aspirations and expectations for children, participation in school activities and programs, home structure that supports learning, and communication with children about school. Dorfman and Fisher explain that the current research found a strong home structure that supports learning is more effective in student academic success than family involvement in school activities. Cotton and Wikelund (1989, as cited in Dorfman & Fisher, p.3) stated that:

> There are strong indications that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities in the home. Programs that involve parents in reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers, show particularly impressive results.

Barth (2003) believes that parents who are lifelong learners are excellent role models for their children. He suggests that parents communicate what they learned at work that day, instead of simply asking the age old question, "What did you learn at school today?". When children see that their parents are continuously learning new things, they will not only learn more about their parents, but they will also understand that life is a journey of learning.

Marzano (2003) notes that strong communication between the school and parents is one of the defining elements of effective parent involvement. He clairifies that this

does not imply that schools should provide an open forum for parents to criticize because that has been proven to have a negative effect. Marzano explains that it is not the parent's responsibility to initiate communication with the school. Therefore, schools must take the initiative to communicate with parents, and create a climate where parents desire that communication. Marzano proposes three action steps to promote effective involvement of parents. He first suggests that schools establish vehicles for communication. Next, he believes that schools need to establish a variety of venues for parents to be involved in day-to-day operations of the school. Finally, Marzano feels that schools need to establish governance vehicles that allow for parents to participate in the decision-making policies that affect school planning.

Brewster and Fager (2000) also promote the importance of teachers communicating with parents not only to report how the child is progressing, but also to discuss ways that they can support their child's learning at home. It is important that the parents understand what the teacher's expectations are of them and their child. By working together, the child has a strong support system to guide him or her through the learning process.

Berkowitz and Bier (2005) argue that communicating with parents about their child is simply not enough. They believe that this role for the parents is too limiting. Parents need to be actively involved at the school and at home. Dunst (2002) confirms that there are currently practices in schools that are "family allied" but not "family-centred" especially in the middle and secondary schools. He explains that in order for a school to be "family-centered" it must:

> Hold beliefs and practices that treat families with dignity and respect; individualized, flexible, and responsive practices; information sharing so that families can make informed decisions; family choice regarding any number of aspects of program practices and intervention options; parent-professional collaboration and partnerships as a context for family--program relations; and the provision and mobilization of resources and supports necessary for families to care for and rear their children in ways that produce optimal child, parent, and family outcomes (p. 139).

Fullan (2001) draws attention to the fact that teachers, parents, and students working together makes all the difference. He believes that involving parents is crucial to making a greater educational impact on student achievement. Parents are the students' first educators. They are important stakeholders in their child's education, and that needs to be respected.

Parents are able to provide a great deal of support at the school. Schools need to reach out and find innovative ways to involve parents in the school community. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) add that teachers and students would benefit from parent's expertise in academic and cultural areas. As guest speakers, parents could bring a new perspective broadening the education experience for all students involved. Berkowitz and Bier further explain that parents would also be valuable on field trips and other school functions. By including parents as partners, the school community has created a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

Increasing Student Motivation

An effective school has students engaged in their learning. When students are engaged in their learning, they experience increased academic success. Unfortunately, according to Carter (2004), engagement typically drops as students progress through school. Brewster and Fager (2000) explain that there are two types of motivation: Extrinsic and intrinsic. When students are extrinsically motivated, they are striving for a reward, or avoiding a consequence. Students who are intrinsically motivated to learn are actively engaged from curiosity, interest, and enjoyment. They found that students who are intrinsically motivated are more successful academically. Wolk (2001) states "When our learning is driven through intrinsic motivation, we own that learning. It comes from within us and is deeply purposeful" (p. 57). Carter adds that students are naturally motivated intrinsically. It is human nature to want to explore and discover, yet, as children progress through the school system, their intrinsic motivation decreases. Why is this happening to our students and how do effective schools challenge this phenomenon?

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) explain that students are not motivated because the school has failed to present the curriculum in ways that are clear and stimulating. Vibert and Shields (2003) expressed quite bluntly that "students, like teachers and community members, are engaged in schools when schools are engaging places to be" (p. 221). Student engagement is possible when students are interested in what they are learning. Students know the difference between busy work and real learning. Wolk (2001) explains that when students are engaged in real learning experiences, their curiosity is piqued, they are focused and they willingly put in effort. In another words, they are intrinsically motivated to learn. Brewster and Fager (2000) claim that when

students are intrinsically motivated, they are more apt to take risks, feel more confident, select tasks that are challenging and are more likely to see the task through to the end.

Marzano (2003) presents four steps that schools can take to increase student motivation. The first step is to provide students with meaningful feedback on their learning. The second step is to provide students with authentic learning experiences that are engaging. The third step is to provide students the opportunity to create and work on projects. The fourth step is to teach students about the dynamics of motivation and how they affect student's learning. Kushman (2000) explains that teachers need to help students make the connections between school and life through an interdisciplinary curriculum grounded in real life topics that are exciting and current. Students' learning needs to be relevant to real life situations. They need to be able to make meaning out of their learning. They need to make connections to their past experiences, and to the real world outside of the classroom. When students are engaged, there is increased time on task which means that there is less time wasted in the classroom. This allows for more self-directed work with less time on behaviour issues and more time on learning. This directly results in increased academic success (Wolk, 2001).

Brewster and Fager (2000) explain that students are more likely to become engaged in their learning when the classroom environment is supportive. When teachers take the time to build relationships with their students, they create an environment of trust and respect. Students become more engaged when they feel safe and are more willing to take risks in their learning. Wentzel (1998) discusses the impact of interpersonal relationships on student motivation in her research. She found that student motivation in middle school was sensitive to the student perception of support and caring from parents,

teachers and peers. Students who felt a sense of social well-being had higher levels of educational aspirations and goals, as well as a healthier sense of self-esteem. Fullan (2001) explains that:

> Treating students as people comes very close to living the academic personal, and social educational goals. Involving students in constructing their own meaning and learning is fundamentally pedagogically essential -- they learn more, and are motivated to go even further (p. 162).

Willms (2002) eloquently states that "what matters most is that a child is cared for throughout the day by warm and responsive caregivers, in an environment rich with opportunities to learn" (p. 348). Engaging students in their learning is possible, and effective schools find ways to tap into their student's intrinsic motivation.

Challenges

Current research on effective schools exposes the benefits to all stakeholders involved in professional learning communities. Knowing what those benefits are and implementing effective school practices, however, are two different things. Dufour et al. (2004) explain that there are challenges to schools becoming and sustaining a professional learning community. The first challenge that these authors recognize is developing and applying shared knowledge. The second challenge is sustaining the difficult progress of change, and the third challenge is transforming the school culture.

Dufour et al. (2004) explain that developing and applying shared knowledge is one hurdle that educators face when attempting to become a professional learning

community due to the lack of understanding of the concepts and practices of effective schools. Fullan (2005) states, "There is a growing problem in large-scale reform; namely, the terms travel well, but the underlying conceptualization and thinking do not" (p. 10).

Stoll and Fink (2003) explain that a key component to becoming an effective school is to provide educators with current research. Even though educators have little time to sit down and read books, there are other methods to expose them to the research. For example, Stoll and Fink suggest that teachers could read shorter summaries of key findings of effective school research and teach them to each other using cooperative group learning techniques.

Another method would be the use of effective schools questionnaires. Stoll and Fink (2003) believe that the indicators within these questionnaires provide detail on the concepts. They further explain that these activities would act as springboards for discussion and reflection regarding what is happening at their school in relation to what the research says happens in effective schools. Through these discussions, teachers are able to identify the areas where their school needs to improve. Stoll and Fink explain that attempts at school improvement have failed in the past due to the lack of respect accorded to teachers. They state that teachers have not been seen as professional educators and leaders, and have not been involved in the planning of changes. As a result, teachers did not feel valued and found little personal meaning in the planned changes. In order for change to be successful, teachers need to be involved in the decision making process.

Once the areas needing improvement have been targeted, it is essential that the learning community establish a shared vision. Stoll and Fink (2003) state that, "Vision

helps schools to define their own direction and to develop an attitude that says we're in charge of change" (p. 51). From that vision, staff are able to establish goals and action plans. Without this school improvement plan in place, the staff will lack direction. Schmoker (1999) explains that goals give teamwork meaning and direction. He states that clear, meaningful goals motivate and energize effective teams.

Dufour et al. (2004) propose that educators must develop a solid understanding of effective schools concepts and practices, and then must commit to applying those concepts and practices in their own schools if they are to become an effective school. They claim that even the best school improvement plan requires more than just adopting new mission statements, and launching strategic plans. It requires sustaining the hard work of change which is the second challenge to schools becoming professional learning communities.

DuFour et al. (2004) explain that after the implementation stage of the school improvement plan, educators need to be prepared for the work and effort required for sustainability. Stoll and Fink (2003) add that during this phase of the change process, it is imperative that educators understand that "people have to understand the change and work out their own meaning through clarification, which often offers through practice. Changes in teacher behaviour may, therefore, precede rather than follow changes in belief" (p. 45).

Fullan (2001) explains that during the change process, teachers may feel frustrated and anxious as they leave their comfort zone. Marshak (1996) states that resistance, loss, and grief are important characteristics of the emotional experience of school change. He explains that, "human beings react to change itself-that is, newness,

novelty-by resisting it, by seeking to maintain the status quo, to retain a felt experience of equilibrium" (p. 73). Marshak understands that change involves loss as well as gain. Although the loss of an ineffective practice may seem insignificant compared to the gain of a more effective practice, the loss is still a loss to the teacher experiencing it. Marshak further explains that with each loss, we experience grief. He describes grief as "a complex synthesis of emotions that can include sorrow, longing, anger, anguish, regret, fear, guilt, shame, and helplessness" (p. 75). Marshak believes that the resistance educators experience to change is really a manifestation of grief. He suggests that through support and communication, teachers and administrators can help each other work through these feelings, increasing the success of the change process.

Stoll and Fink (2003) support Marshak's (1996) findings by stating that stress and anxiety are common during the change process. They feel that it is very important that the needs of the teacher be addressed. Stoll and Fink also believe that because effective change takes time, it is crucial that educators be persistent. They must understand that there will be "times of activity and times of consolidation" (p. 46). Through hard work, communication, encouragement, training, and follow-up support, educators can sustain the school improvement plan.

The third challenge that successful school improvement offers is transforming the school culture. DuFour et al. (2004) state that real transformation requires more than changes in programs and policies, it requires a culture that sincerely believes in the fundamental concepts of effective schools. They explain that:

> Principals and teachers can be placed in new structures and go through the motions of new practices, but unless they eventually

> develop new competencies and new commitments that lead to true school reculturing, they will continue to be under the inexorable pull of their traditional practices and the assumptions that drive them (p. 11).

Schmoker (1999) adds that successful school improvement is only possible if there is hope and optimism among the stakeholders of the learning community. They must believe strongly in each member's ability to contribute ideas and solutions to everyday challenges. In addition, each member of the school community must believe that trial and error will lead to improved teaching and higher learning. Schmoker believes that schools must celebrate their efforts to help maintain the hope and optimism needed to transform the culture of the school.

Conclusion

Research shows that effective schools are successful because they possess a climate that promotes high expectations for academic success. Their focus is on student learning which is conveyed through the commitment of the administrators, teachers, parents, and students. All stakeholders are involved in supporting the learning experiences of the students. In a professional learning community, administrators lead through a shared leadership approach which allows teachers to be leaders in their own right. Collaboration replaces isolation among staff. Parents are valued as members of the learning community and show a strong participation level at the school. Furthermore, in effective schools, students are engaged in their learning because it is connected to their previous knowledge as well as to the world outside of the classroom.

In order to achieve the status of a professional learning community, educators must be aware of the challenges that await them. First they must understand that all stakeholders of the school community must understand the fundamental concepts of effective school research, and create a plan to become a more effective school. Second, educators must be prepared to work hard to sustain the changes that have been implemented. Finally, educators must be willing to transform the school culture so that all stakeholders share the same beliefs and expectations regarding effective schools.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Design and Methodology

The goal of this research was to discover the effectiveness of the school improvement project at an intermediate school in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. Summerside is a coastal town with a population of approximately 12,000 people. Prince Edward Island is a small province with three school boards. Summerside falls under the Western School Board jurisdiction. The intermediate school involved in this study draws its student population from both rural communities surrounding Summerside, and students from the town itself. It is a school with a dual track system, meaning that it has a French Immersion program and an English program. It is an intermediate school with grades 7 to 9. There is a population of 609 students and 36 teachers. This school has recently undergone major renovations. The school improvement project that was implemented has two goals: 1) to augment student motivation and engagement; and 2) to encourage communication and collaboration among teachers. Therefore, the participants in this study involve both the student and teacher populations.

I am a Grade 9 teacher at this school teaching English Language Arts and Core French. Throughout my career, I have been involved with professional development and school improvement projects. In 2005-2006, I took on the responsibility of chairperson for our Professional Development Committee. Our group assumed the responsibility of designing a school improvement plan for the Department of Education pilot study. Our project was grounded in effective schools research, and we were excited about the

potential of our plan. I have been excited about previous school improvement projects such as implementing a multi-age program at an elementary school in New Brunswick. This was an incredible journey working with a team of eight teachers, guiding them from the beginning resistant stage all the way to the implementation and celebration stages. The feedback was positive from students, teachers, and parents. The program was still in place four years after I left that school. I believe that school improvement plan was effective; however, I do not have any evidence. I wanted to have concrete evidence that demonstrates whether or not our goals are being met through the OWLS project.

I chose an action research design to complete this inquiry because this design is a natural fit for the scope of this project. Tomal (1999) defines action research as a systematic process for studying educational problems in a way that leads to substantial improvements. He claims that numerous issues facing schools today such as student achievement, community relations, and staff development can benefit from this approach.

Cunningham (1993) explains that action research is a scientific research process which involves theorizing, experimenting, and implementing, while being rigorous with some steps, and flexible with others. According to Creswell, "Action research provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on their own practices. Within the scope of a school, action research offers a means for staff development and for addressing school wide problems" (2005, p. 550). The nature of this design allows for participation of the researcher (Dick, 2000) and encourages collaboration with colleagues. Cunningham adds that "action research encourages the researcher to experience the problem as it evolves. The researcher must be able to access real-life data in real time" (p. 5). He continues that

"the action researcher is not looking for something to experiment upon, but responds to the provocations in the field" (p. 5).

Sagor (2000) believes that guiding school improvement with action research is an empowering process because it helps educators be more effective at what they care most about -- their teaching and the development of their students. When teachers have convincing evidence that their work has made a real difference in their students' lives, the countless hours and endless efforts of teaching seem worthwhile. This is the exact situation in which I find myself engaged. In collaboration with the members of the Professional Development Committee, we identified two problem areas in our school, created a plan to improve both problem areas, implemented the plan, reflected and evaluated what worked well and what needed to be improved. Hatten, Knapp, and Salonga (2000) describe the action research spiral developed by Zuber-Skerrit (1995) as a continuous process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. It is a continuous cycle of improvement of practice and growth of personal and professional knowledge.

In order to discover if our project was indeed positively affecting student motivation and teacher collaboration and communication, it was necessary to move into the next stage of the action research. Data needed to be collected from the participants. I decided to use qualitative research methods. Dick (2000) states that "Action research consists of a family of research methodologies" (p. 1). To answer the question, "Did students become more motivated to learn because of OWLS" I used qualitative data from on-line surveys. To discover if teachers experienced more professional dialogue and increased collaboration due to OWLS, I collected data in the form of a questionnaire. This was followed up with qualitative data through interviews.

Measures and Procedures

Student population

The Department of Education in Prince Edward Island has hired an on-line data collection agency called "Tell Them From Me" (TTFM). Doug Willms, Professor and Director of the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), is the creator and founder of this agency. He, along with his colleagues, have developed both student and teacher surveys based on effective schools research. The student surveys measure five student outcomes: 1) self esteem, 2) sense of belonging at school, 3) participation in school activities, 4) long-term aspirations and expectations, and 5) the value placed on schooling outcomes. Willms (2005) explains that "these outcomes are especially relevant to the success of vulnerable youth. Youth who are disengaged from school tend to gradually withdraw from school activities, and display negative attitudes towards teachers and other students" (p. 2). This survey is made up of approximately 80 questions in Likert format, and open-ended questions.

The TTFM survey data are collected with a double-blind procedure. Neither the school staff nor the TTFM staff is able to identify the responses from a specific student. During the data uploading process, student's personal data is encrypted into an indecipherable code, and stored on the TTFM server. Each student is assigned a PIN and a password. The survey takes approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. An "opt-out" permission letter was sent home with every student. There were no parents who wanted their child to opt-out. It was decided that we would have one half of the student population (302 students) complete the survey before the implementation of OWLS, and the other half of the population complete the survey in May, after the last OWLS session.

The timetable at our school has two sides, each mirrors the other. Each side is equally comprised of French Immersion, English, and resource students. The home room classes are named as follows: 7a,b,c,d,e,f,g 8a,b,c,d,e,f,g, and 9a,b,c,d,e,f,g. Those students in home rooms a,c,e,and g completed the survey in December. The remaining students completed the survey in May.

With permission from TTFM and the Western School Board, I used the data collected from the open-ended question created from our school included in these student surveys to determine the success of our OWLS project in increasing the students' level of motivation to learn.

Teacher population

The qualitative data gathered from all teaching staff came from a questionnaire. Through an in-depth review of the literature on effective schools combined with my own personal experiences, cross-sectional questions were developed to discover teachers' perceptions of the success of the OWLS project in terms of increasing teacher collaboration and communication. The questionnaire was comprised of four questions with a yes or no response option and an opportunity to explain their response. At the end of the survey, there was a place where teachers could indicate if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Creswell (2005) states that survey research is a popular method for collecting data in education. He explains that surveys are commonly used to determine individual opinions, beliefs, and attitudes.

The questionnaire (see Appendix A), and an introduction letter(see Appendix B), , along with a stamped addressed envelope was placed in each of the 34 teachers' mailboxes at school. The introduction letter explained the purpose of this research and

the methods that would be used to collect data. It also informed them of their rights including their right to withdraw at any time during the study. Once teachers completed the surveys, they placed them in the prestamped, preaddressed envelope and mailed them to my home address. Some teachers placed their completed surveys in my mailbox at school. After one week, I placed a follow-up note in all teachers' mailboxes.

The responses from the 26 questionnaires returned directed the development of the interview questions. These qualitative interview questions were open-ended, allowing the participants to supply the response. Creswell (2005) states that open-ended questions allow the interviewee to respond naturally without being confined by the questions. He further explains that "open-ended questions allow the participants to create responses within their cultural and social experiences instead of the researcher's experiences" (p. 364).

Analysis

Student surveys

TTFM sent a comprehensive report to our School Coordinator. This report was a complete quantitative analysis of the students' responses. Each student outcome (self-esteem, sense of belonging, participation in school activities, long-term aspirations and expectations, and the value placed on schooling outcomes) was analyzed and represented on graphs showing the mean and the standard deviation for each. Willms (2006) explains that HLM was used to estimate the reliability at the school level. For the student measures he used the traditional approach, and the Cronbach's alphas were as follows: Self esteem: 0.87; Sense of belonging at school: 0.83; Participation in school activities:

0.78; Long-term aspirations and expectations: 0.84; and Value placed on schooling outcomes: 0.84.

The open-ended responses to the questions were included with the report. One of these questions was created by our school. This question which represents the focus of the student data in this action research, asked the students what they thought of the OWLS project and what would they change it to make it better. These responses were read through to obtain a broad sense of the material. Then, text segments were located and assigned a code label. Finally, the text was coded for themes to be used in the final report (Creswell, 2005).

Teacher questionnaires and interviews

Each question from the questionnaire was assigned a categorical value along with each possible response. These were inputed into the SPSS software program to create a database. Each question was analyzed through the SPSS program for the frequency and percentile rank. The results for each question were reported in the final report using graphs and tables.

The interview responses were first transcribed and organized into file folders. "Organization of data is critical in qualitative research because of the large amount of information gathered during a study" (Creswell, 2005, p. 2, 332). Analysis of this data began with several readings of the material in order to obtain a general sense of the responses. The next step was to code the responses and locate themes that could then be presented in the final report.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to proceed with this research was granted from the Western School Board, TTFM and the University of Prince Edward Island. In order to assure anonymity of the participants, questionnaire packages were placed in each teacher's mailbox at school, however, completed questionnaires and consent forms were mailed back to me in the preaddressed, stamped envelope with the exception of those teachers who chose to submit their questionnaires in my school mailbox. Each participant was provided with a consent form instructing him or her on his/her rights, including the right to withdraw at anytime during the study.

Interviews were held confidentially, and interviewees were given a letter as an identifier. All participants were given the option of receiving a copy of their transcribed interview. This would allow the participant the opportunity to verify that their words were properly recorded. All forms of data collected during this study were monitored carefully and secured in a locked cabinet which was accessible only to the researcher. The data will be destroyed after five years.

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, my role varied throughout the different steps of this study. During the first phase, I was not physically present while the participants were completing the questionnaire. They completed the questionnaire on their own time and mailed it along with the consent form to my home address, or placed it in my school mailbox. In the next phase, I assumed the active role of interviewer during the follow-up

interviews. Four interviewees were selected in order to have a representative from each grade level as well as administration. Berg (2004) informs that:

> Stratified random sampling is used whenever researchers need to ensure that a certain sample of the identified population under examination is represented in the sample. The population is divided into subgroups and independent samples of each stratum are selected. Within each stratum, a particular sampling fraction is applied in order to ensure representativeness of proportions in the full population (p. 35).

The names of those teachers who were willing to participate in the interview were categorized by the grade level they taught. One name for each grade level and administration was randomly drawn. Each interviewee completed a consent form (see Appendix C) for the interview. During the interviews, I created a safe, supportive environment where participants were encouraged to share their thoughts.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In the fourth chapter the research findings are presented. A cross-case analysis was used to compare data gathered from the 26 respondents who completed the teacher questionnaire. Four interviews (see Appendix D) were transcribed and coded to identify emergent categories and themes. The four interviewees represented each level at the school: Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9, and administration. Many themes discussed by interviewees complemented the data gathered from the questionnaire, and were compiled beneath relevant graphs. In order to clarify the sources of data, I referred to those who participated in the questionnaire as respondents and those who were interviewed as interviewees or participants.

The data gathered from the Tell Them From Me student survey was both quantitative and qualitative. In the first snapshot of the online survey, 258 students completed the survey. In the second snapshot, 249 students completed the survey. The data collected from the two snapshots are presented in graphs created by Tell Them From Me. In total, 220 students responded to the school-based open-ended question which was included in the second snapshot survey. These responses were analysed and coded for common themes. These themes are presented in this chapter.

Background Information

During the 2005-2006 school year, Prince Edward Island had 10 schools participating in the School Improvement Planning pilot project. Figure 1 shows the number of schools that were high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools.

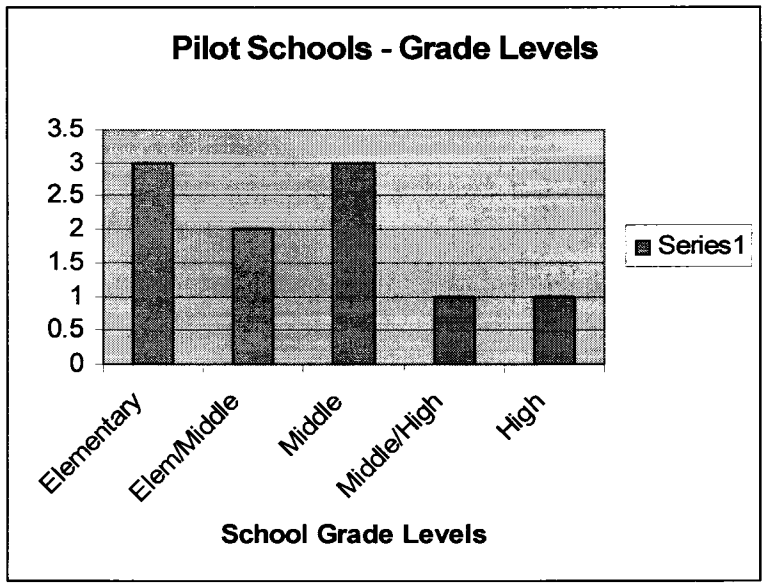

Figure 1. Pilot schools – grade levels

Figure 1 shows that 3 out of the 10 pilot schools in Prince Edward Island were elementary schools with grades 1 to 6, and 2 out of the 10 pilot schools were schools that had grades 1 to 9. In addition, 3 out of the 10 schools were middle schools with grades 7 to 9, and 1 school with grades 7 to 12. Only 1 out of the 10 schools was a senior high school with grades 10 to 12.

In Prince Edward Island, there are three instructional programs: English, French Immersion, and French. Those schools that offer both English and French Immersion programs are called Dual Track schools. Figure 2 shows the percentage of pilot schools offering each program.

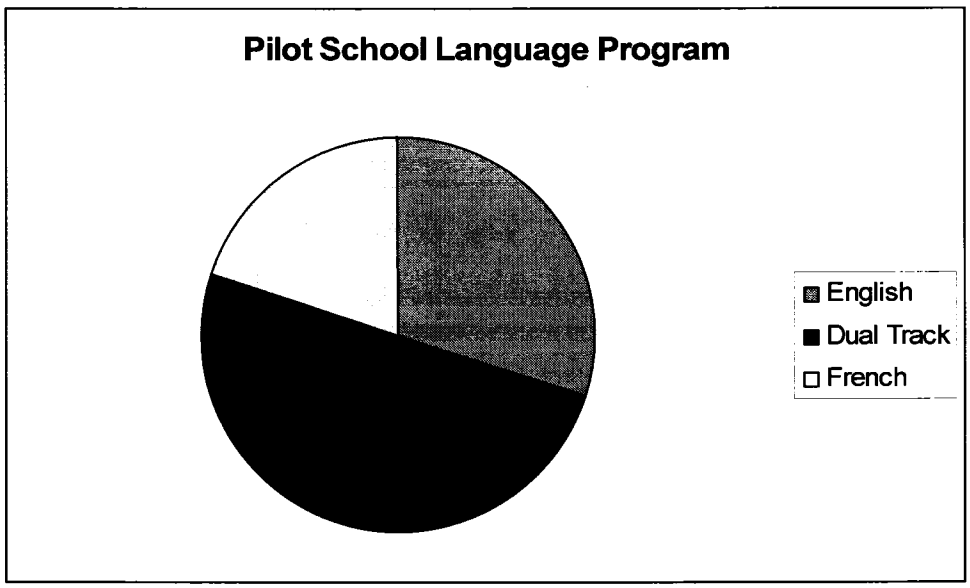

Figure 2. Pilot school program distribution.

Figure 2 indicates that 2 out of the 10 pilot schools are French schools, 3 out of 10 schools are English, and 5 out of the 10 schools are Dual Track.

Figure 3 shows the student population in each of the pilot schools.

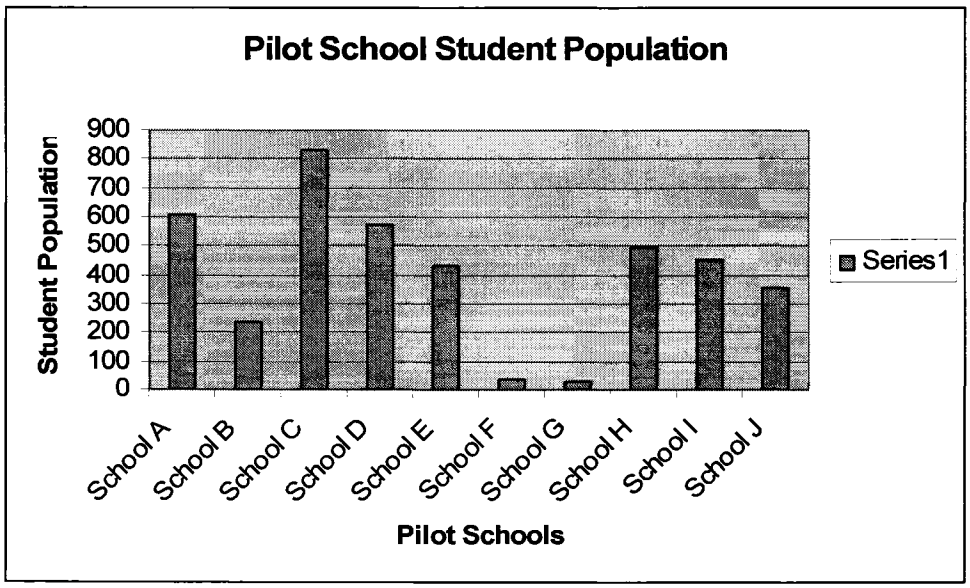

Figure 3. Pilot school student population.

Figure 3 shows that the student populations for the 10 pilot schools range from 30 students to 830 students.

The pilot school that is the focus of this study is an intermediate dual track school in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. Figure 4 shows the distribution of male and female students for grades 7, 8 and 9.

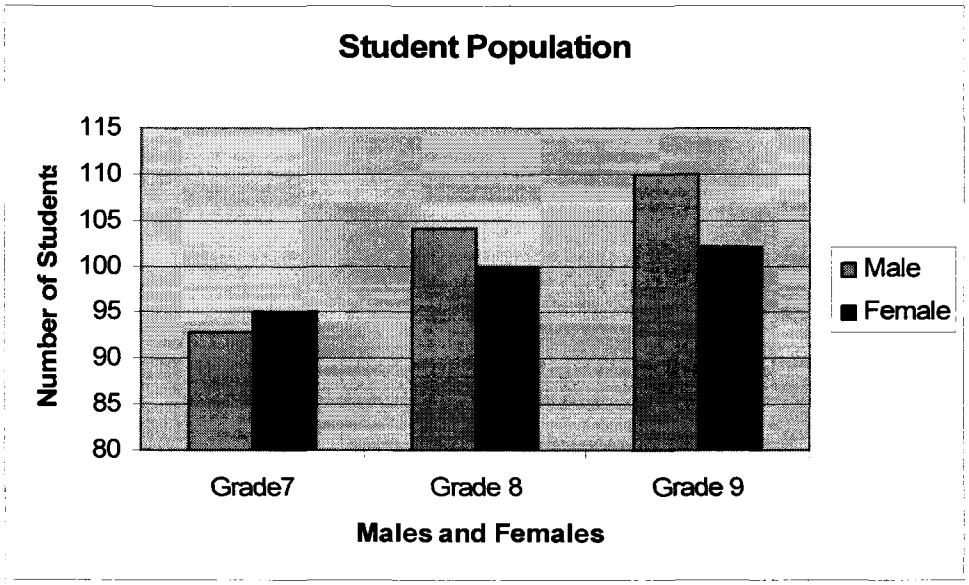

Figure 4. Summerside school – student population distribution.

Figure 4 shows that Grade 9 has the most amount of students with 110 males and 102 females. In Grade 8 there are 104 males and 100 females. In Grade 7 there are 93 males and 95 female students. The total number of students is 604.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of students in the English program and French Immersion program for each grade level at the Summerside school.

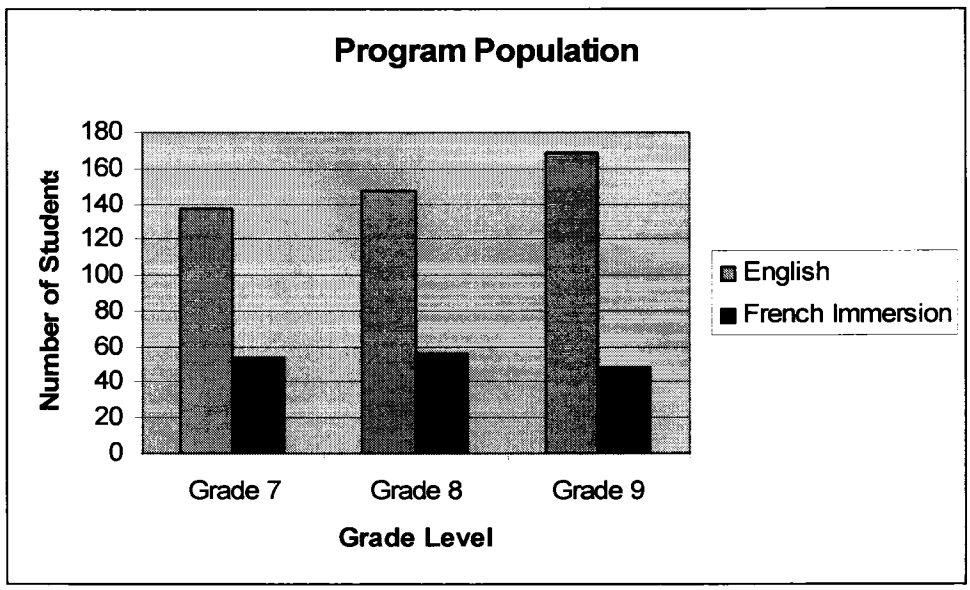

Figure 5. Distribution of students in English and French Immersion.

Figure 5 shows that in Grade 9 there are 169 students in the English program and 48 students in the French Immersion program. In Grade 8 there are 147 students in the English program and 56 students in the French Immersion program. In Grade 7 there are 137 students in the English program and 54 students in the French Immersion program. The total number of students in the English program is 453. The total number of students in the French Immersion program is 158.

Teacher Responses

Figure 6 indicates whether or not teachers had more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues through the OWLS project (n = 26).

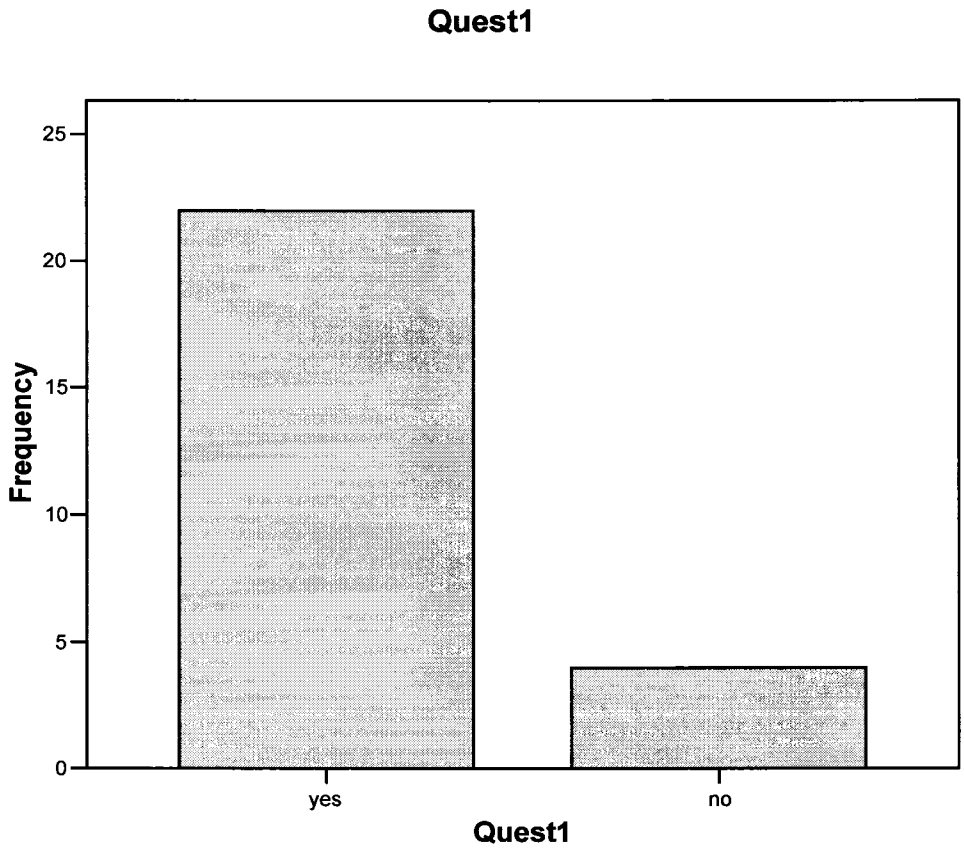

Figure 6. Respondents feeling regarding collaboration with colleagues.

Eighty-five % of the teachers surveyed believed that collaboration increased among staff members. Eight respondents stated that the OWLS project provided them the opportunity to work with staff members that normally they could not. Eight respondents stated that the planning sessions and curriculum mapping session provided them the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues. One respondent replied, "The experience is very rewarding and inspires you to collaborate again. It is very effective to work as a team

toward a common goal." The 4 "no" respondents qualified their answers. One "no" respondent appreciated collaboration during debriefing, project development and implementation, however, presented the session to students on their his/her instead of team teaching. Another "no" respondent stated that the teacher partner was not open to sharing ideas. The other 2 "no" respondents chose to work in isolation.

Three of the 4 interviewees stated that being able to collaborate with other colleagues was a benefit of the OWLS project. One participant said that his OWLS partner was a teacher who taught the same subject at the same level, but who had never planned together because the partner taught in French. This participant enjoyed the opportunity to get to know his partner and work with that person. Another participant added that it was great working with other staff members sharing ideas and strengths.

Figure 7 indicates whether or not the OWLS project provided opportunities to plan for regular subject lessons plans with colleagues.

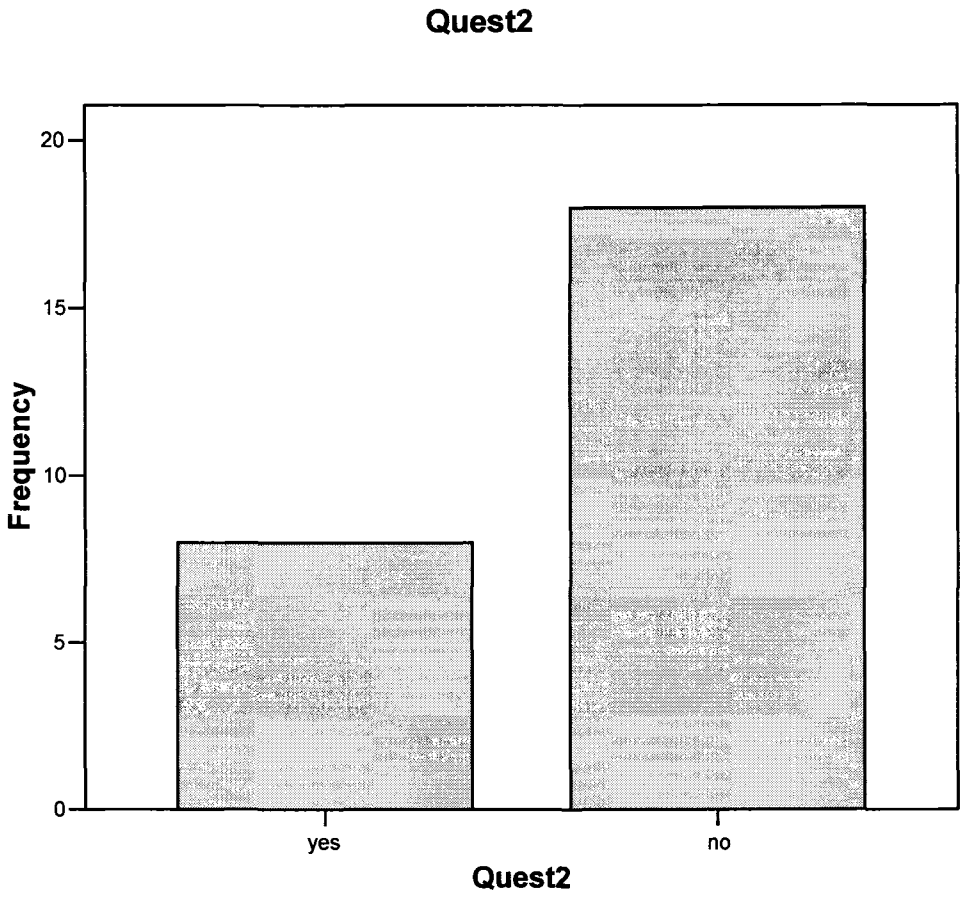

Figure 7. Respondents' feelings regarding collaboration on regular subjects with colleagues.

Sixty-nine % of respondents did not find that the OWLS project provided opportunities to plan and discuss regular subject lesson plans with colleagues. Three respondents explained that due to limited time, they were only able to discuss and plan for OWLS. Two respondents stated that their OWLS workshops were not related to their regular

subjects and their partners did not teach the same subjects. One respondent who answered "no" stated, "It has opened the lines of communication, so it is possible in the future to discuss subject lesson plans. I feel it has made all staff more open, inspired, and cross-curricular."

Three "yes" respondents qualified their response by stating that they were able to discuss and plan regular subject areas during the cross-curricular mapping day. Three other "yes" respondents explained that the OWLS project has provided opportunities to work and plan with other teachers. One "yes" respondent stated, "The OWLS project has provided a springboard for teachers to share about best practices. In order to fully attain more collaboration amongst teachers, time within the school week would need to be set aside."

Figure 8 indicates whether or not teachers felt they have increased their knowledge of their curriculum documents and those other subject areas through the OWLS project (n = 26).

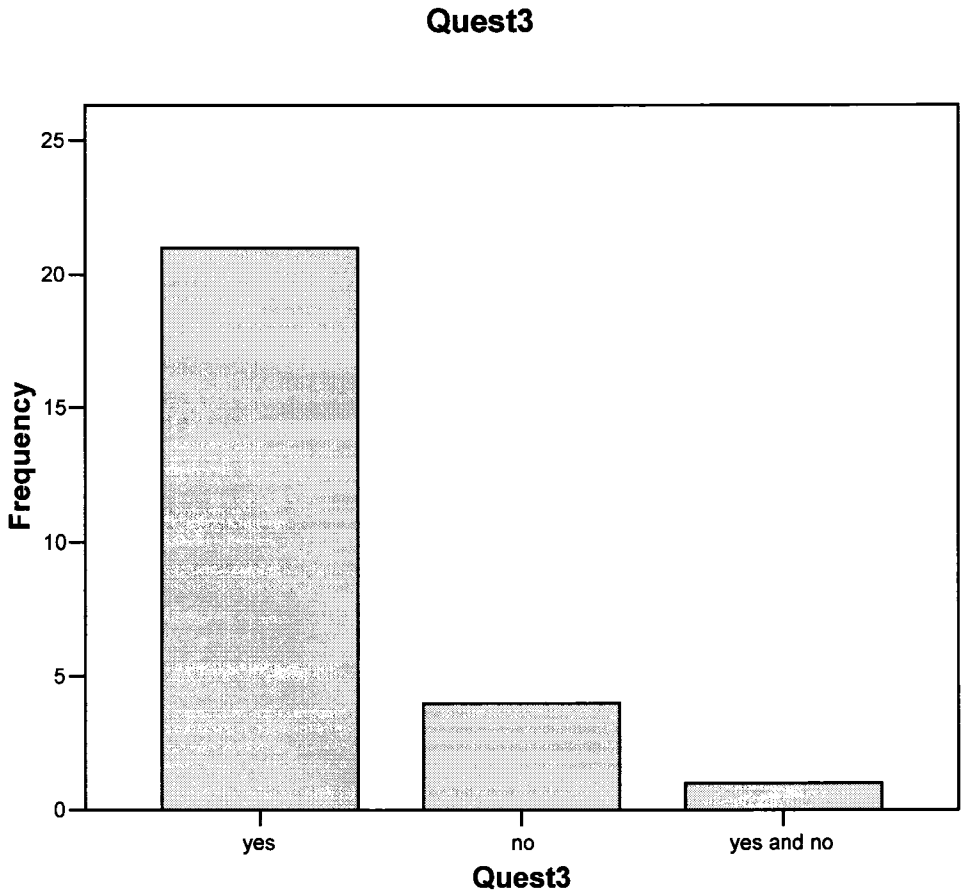

Figure 8. Respondents' feelings regarding increased knowledge of curriculum documents.

Eighty-one % of the teachers surveyed felt that they increased their knowledge of their own curriculum documents and other subject curricula through the OWLS project. Eleven respondents believed that the curriculum mapping session provided the opportunity to review their own curriculum documents as well as get to know the

curriculum expectations in other subject areas. One respondent stated, "I honestly never had the opportunity before to examine Math, Science, Social Studies, etc. before. Our mapping exercise was very worthwhile." Five respondents stated that the OWLS project showed how effective cross-curricular planning really is for teachers and students. One teacher explained that:

> OWLS fostered my understanding of the curricula outcomes in other subject areas and deepened my understanding of which outcomes were repetitive across grade levels and subjects, and OWLS clearly showed the opportunities for integrated teaching at the intermediate level.

Another teacher responded:

> If it was not for the OWLS project I would not have taken the time to enlighten myself of curricular objectives outside of this year's assigned courses. Isn't that sad when global planning would benefit the students due to connections and give them a stronger understanding through thematics.

Three of the 4 "no" respondents qualified their answers. Two respondents stated that they already knew their curriculum documents. One respondent stated that there was not a close connection between their subject curriculum outcomes and their OWLS activity. The 1 "yes and no" respondent explained that they did not increase their knowledge of their own subject curriculum, but that they did for another subject.

Figure 9 indicates whether or not teachers were able to build new relationships with fellow teachers through the OWLS project (n = 26).

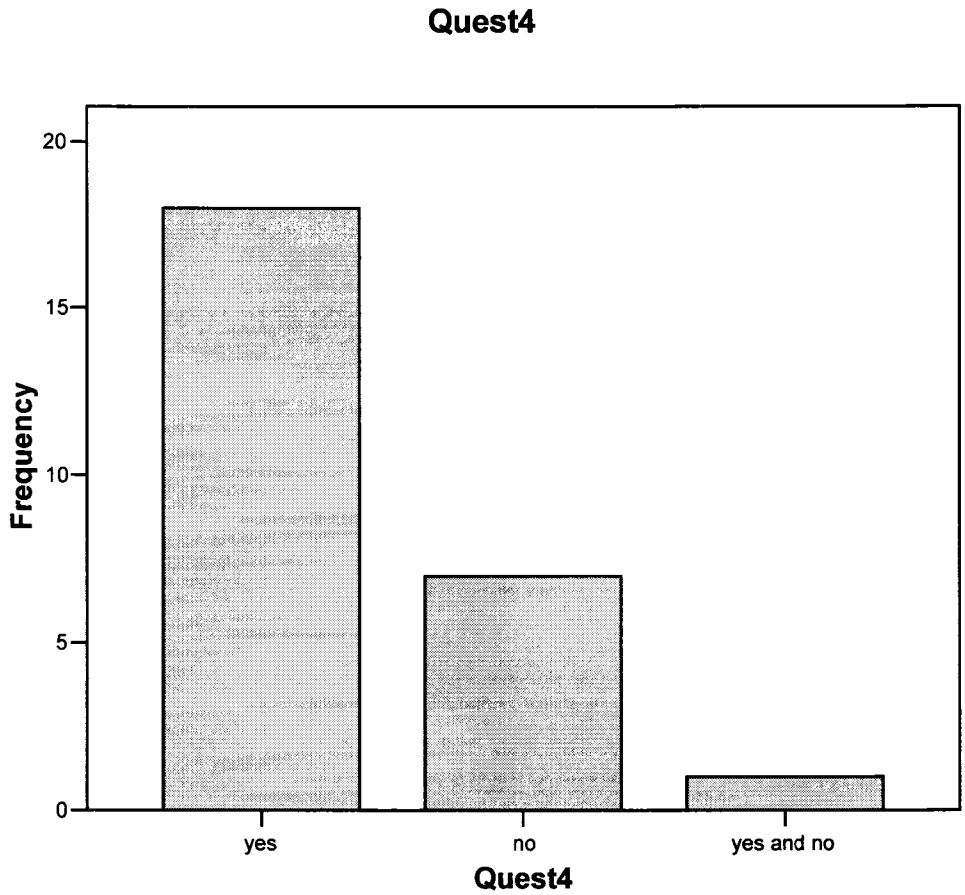

Figure 9. Respondents' feelings regarding building new relationships with colleagues.

Sixty-nine % of teachers believed that they built new relationships with fellow teachers through the OWLS project. Eight respondents explained that the OWLS project provided a common thread for all staff. This allowed for formal and informal conversations based on OWLS. One respondent stated, "I have learned a lot about my colleagues; their beliefs about learning, their personal strengths, their teaching practices. Also, having a common

focus has brought staff together in a real sense." Six respondents stated that it was a positive experience working with and getting to know other teachers that they normally wouldn't have the opportunity to work with.

Four of the 7 "no" respondents qualified their answers. Three "no" respondents stated that they worked alone on their OWLS session. One "no" respondent explained that his/her partner was someone he/she already knew very well. One respondent replied "yes and no". This teacher explained that the project brought about a sense of "togetherness and pride" in our school, but the people in their group were already close friends.

One interviewee noted that as a newcomer on staff who did not know anyone, it was a great opportunity to get to know other staff members right from the first day of school. It was nice having someone to work with toward a common goal.

During the interviews, three themes emerged from the conversations that were not covered in the questionnaire. One theme was the motivation of the students during the OWLS sessions. Three interviewees found that the students were energized and interested during the sessions. All three interviewees stated that the students enjoyed being able to choose their sessions. The students had a high level of interest going into the sessions. The students liked learning something that wasn't part of their regular school day. One interviewee added that during his session, two students who regularly did not hand in completed assignments for some of their regular subjects completed writing assignments for their OWLS session.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the multi-age grouping of students. Two of the interviewees stated that it was a benefit to both teachers and

students to participate in a session with mixed aged groupings of students. For teachers, the interviewees stated that it was nice being able to work with different students. It gave them the opportunity to get to know more students than their regular classes. For students, the interviewees explained that it was a positive experience for students to be learning with different peer groups. It was also mentioned that it was nice for students to be in a session with different students from the regular subjects because it gave them the opportunity to be away from their regular classmates with behavior problems. One interviewee stated that even the students who had behavior issues acted different when they were in a class with students from all three grade levels.

The third theme that emerged from the interviews was the logistics of the OWLS project. Three of the interviewees stated that the logistics getting the OWLS project up and running was an area that needed improvement. The interviewees stated that the sign-up procedure and booking of the facilities were areas that still needed to be worked out. Two interviewees stated that during the sign-up procedure some students were not able to get their top choices. One interviewee explained that it was sometimes difficult to book a facility because other teachers needed the same one, but in the end it all worked out. In addition, he/she stated that he/she recognized that this is a project that is still new and that it is continuously going to be improved with each coming year. Two interviewees stated that there was a need for more OWLS sessions. It was explained that the students need more choices, preferably more hands-on courses such as mechanics, electricians, etc. One interviewee stated that it would be great if we could get more community members involved that way, we could have more courses with more expertise available to our students.

Student Responses

The students at our school participated in the Tell Them From Me online survey in two snapshots. The first snapshot was taken in December 2005 before the implementation of OWLS, and the second snapshot was taken in May 2006 after the third session of OWLS. A total of 258 students completed the survey in the first snapshot and 249 students completed the second survey snapshot. The survey measured student perceptions of the following categories: Students' Self-Esteem, Students' Sense of Belonging, Students' participation in School Activities, Students' Long-Term Aspirations and Expectations, Students Valuing School Outcomes, Effective Classroom Learning Time, Disciplinary Climate of the Classroom, Teachers' Expectations for Academic Success, Positive Student-Teacher Relations, and Student Advocacy.

The school based question that was included in the Tell Them From Me Survey asked the students what they thought about the OWLS program, and what would they change to make it better. In total, 220 students responded to this question. Eighty-seven% of the students responded that they liked the OWLS program and thought that it was fun. Thirty-six students responded that they enjoyed learning interesting things in a fun way. One student replied, "I think OWLS was very fun. I also think that it was a good way to take a bit of a break from an afternoon school day but at the same time using school curriculum." Another student responded, "I think OWLS is a sweet new program at SIS. It's nice to get out of class and learn about different things that interest us. Also it's a nice break from doing the same old regular work."

Twenty-eight students responded that they did not like the OWLS project. Ten of the 28 students who did not like OWLS explained that they did not get into the sessions they had picked. One student responded, "I do not like OWLS because you never get what you want. I put 10 things down and did not get one of them." Another student replied, "I didn't really like OWLS because there were a lot of groups that some didn't want to go in. You were pretty much forced to go in it." Another student stated, "You never get to go to the things you want to."

Thirty-four students responded that they liked OWLS and would not change a thing. One student responded, "OWLS was fun and taught us new stuff. If I was planning OWLS I would change nothing." Another student replied, "I don't think there is anything that I would change about OWLS, everytime we've had it so far, I've learned something new. I don't think I would add or change anything, because I know everybody I talk to, seems to like it the way it is."

Twenty-five students responded that they liked OWLS but they would like to have it more often or longer sessions. One student replied, "I thought the OWLS were really useful and fun for me. If I were to make a change then I would make them either more times in the school year or the sessions to be longer so we could gain more knowledge of the subject." Another student stated, "I wouldn't change anything about the OWLS program, except for having it maybe eight times a year." Another comment made by a student was, "I think the OWLS day should be longer. If they are going to call it OWLS Day then they should back it up and make it the whole day."

Twenty-nine students responded that they liked the OWLS project but would like to have more choices in the sessions offered. One student responded, "I thought it was

awesome but we need more choices." Another student replied, "I really like OWLS, it's really fun and you learn new things. But I wish they had more sessions." Another student responded:

> OWLS is a good way to get out of class because you learn stuff in a fun way without knowing it. I like it because you get a change from what you're used to and you don't have to sit there with all your usual people that you learn with. You get to experiment with all different grades and people. It is kind of cool. But you should get more choices of what you want.

Seventeen students responded that they liked OWLS but they would like to see more hands-on activities. One student responded, "The OWLS thing is good because we get to learn stuff that's sometimes fun not all the time cause one of the OWLS out of three I actually had fun. The two that I didn't like I just sat there and did nothing what so ever. Well my last statement for this is that less talk more hands on approach." Another student explained, "Well some of the things are super cool but others are really boring. The things I would change about the boring ones is that instead of just listening to the teacher talk do something fun!!! I think a lot of people like to have fun and learn at the same time. Otherwise I learned a lot of stuff that was super cool to find out."

Thirty-one students responded that they would like to see a change in students being able to get in their first session choices. One student responded, "I think OWLS was really fun. I know there were a lot of students who didn't get the activity they chose, which disappointed a lot of people. I know they can't please everyone, but a lot of people would appreciate it if they tried a little bit harder." Another student replied, "OWLS is a

wonderful way of learning, but people complain that they don't get their first or second choice, and lately, the teachers will just stick us somewhere."

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this action research was to discover if the implementation of the School Improvement Planning initiative was effective in reaching the following goals:

1. Increase student motivation and engagement.
2. Encourage communication and collaboration among teachers.

The goals of the School Improvement project targeted both the student and the teacher populations, therefore, data were collected from both students and teachers. The primary source of data for both groups was in the form of a questionnaire. Four follow-up interviews were conducted with the teacher population in order to obtain an in-depth view of their lived experiences with the School Improvement project.

Chapter Five is organized to correspond to the two goals of the School Improvement Planning initiative. The data presented in Chapter Four is analyzed and connections are made to current research on effective schools. Also in this chapter, the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research are discussed.

Background

During the 2004/05 school year, Programme for International Student Assessment results identified Prince Edward Island students as ranking the lowest in Canada. During that same year, the Prince Edward Island Department of Education announced a School Improvement Planning initiative. My intermediate school was one of ten schools who volunteered to pilot this initiative. We felt that school improvement and professional

development go hand in hand; therefore, the Professional Development committee assumed the responsibility of the School Improvement Planning initiative.

After surveying the school instructional staff, two areas of improvement were identified. The first was a need to increase student improvement, and the second was a need to increase teacher communication and collaboration. Based on our knowledge of effective schools research, we created the OWLS project. What that meant was teachers created 26 workshops that were grounded in curriculum outcomes. These sessions were inspired by the students' interests as well as teachers' passions/talents. Our Professional Development sessions for the year were focused on the preparation of OWLS. This included collaboration time for teachers to plan and create their workshops as well to map curriculum outcomes for each one. Some of the workshops that were created were Rubric's Cube, Global Education, Multiple Intelligences, How to Create a Documentary, Art World, Fitness for Life, Learning Japanese, among others.

This year, we held three OWLS afternoons. During those afternoons, lunch began earlier than usual, allowing for a full two hours of OWLS. Most sessions were completed in one afternoon; however, a few sessions required more time such as the How to Create a Documentary workshop. Those sessions advertised that they were a two session commitment or three session commitment before the students made their choices. After each OWLS session, students completed a reflection sheet and submitted it to their homeroom teacher. This reflection sheet provided valuable feedback to the teachers about their workshops as well as provided accountability on the part of the students. Participation and completion of the reflection sheet were indicated on the students' report cards. Attendance for each OWLS session was carefully monitored. Although a slight

decline in attendance was recorded during the first OWLS session, this issue became non-existent by the third OWLS session as students had a clearer grasp of the OWLS program and looked forward to these sessions.

Student Motivation

One of the goals of our OWLS project was to increase student motivation. We knew that in order to increase their motivation levels, they had to enjoy learning. Learning had to be interesting and relevant. Wolk (2000) and Vibert and Shields (2003) reveal that students are intrinsically motivated to learn when they are interested in what they are learning. He explains that students are willing to put effort into their learning when they are engaged. Nordlund (2003) states that "academic instruction must be teamed with real-world situations in order to make learning meaningful" (p. 69). Eighty-seven % of the 220 students who participated in the questionnaire enjoyed the OWLS program. They commented that OWLS was fun and that it was nice to learn about things that interested them. Their comments reflected that they appreciated learning outside of the regular classroom setting with different groups of students. These are encouraging responses because it confirms the intent of our project.

Thirteen % of the students did not enjoy the OWLS program. The reason 10 of those students did not like their experience was due to the fact that they were never able to attend the workshops of their choice. This is a logistics problem that we identified as an area that needed improvement from the first session of OWLS. The sign-up procedure was, and still is, the most difficult detail to organize. Before the first OWLS session, students were given a brochure that advertised each workshop. From that brochure, students were to write down their top 10 choices with the understanding that their

homeroom teacher would sign them up according to those choices. For the first OWLS, we allowed the Grade 9 teachers to sign their students up first in order to ensure that they would be able to attend their first choice. We felt this was fair since they only had one year to experience OWLS. Although the grades 7 and 8 students did not receive their top choices, they understood that they would be able to get them during the next OWLS session. That did not happen for several reasons. When it came time for the next sign-up, some workshops were closed because they were multi-session workshops. This meant that those students who had picked them as their top choices were disappointed again. In addition to the closed session, some teachers did not sign up their students during the school day due to busy schedules, duty during the lunch break, and no preparation periods that day. Those students were then placed in sessions that still had room available, but again, not their top choices. This area of concern has been a focus, and we have a new plan for the sign-up procedure next year. The OWLS committee will take all students' choices and sign them up for all of the OWLS sessions for the upcoming year. It will be time consuming for the committee; however, it will ensure that all students are able to attend the workshops they choose. We will continue to work on this detail until we have it right.

Twenty-five students who responded that they enjoyed OWLS also stated that they would like to have either more sessions or longer sessions. We originally planned to have four OWLS sessions this year; however, we decided to postpone the implementation date in order to have the first snapshot of the Tell Them From Me survey administered to students and teachers. This delay meant that we were able to implement three OWLS sessions. Next year, we are planning to have four sessions, one per term. As OWLS

progresses, we are hoping to be able to implement more sessions. Currently, our school is receiving funds for being a pilot school for the School Improvement Planning Initiative, hence, future planning of OWLS will depend on availability of funds.

Twenty-nine of the students who enjoyed the OWLS program would like to see more choices in the workshops. They mentioned they would like to have more music, art, cooking, and physical activity workshops offered. Currently we have one music workshop, one art workshop, and two physical activity workshops being offered. A cooking workshop is planned for next year. With more of these workshops, a greater number of students will be able to get their first choices. This year, we were only able to recruit a handful of parent/community volunteers. This was both surprising and disappointing and is an area which needs improvement. With more parent/community involvement, we would be able to offer a greater selection of workshops to our students. At the beginning of this year, we introduced the OWLS project to our parents during the "Meet the Teacher" night. At that time, we asked our parents if they would like to become involved. We also attached a letter asking for parent participation in the OWLS brochure that was handed out to each student. We are hopeful that because our students have lived the OWLS experience, and discussed it with their parents, their parents will have a better understanding of what exactly OWLS is, and will be more willing to come in and participate. We will continue to work on this area because we believe that parent/community involvement is an important aspect of building a learning community. Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton and Kleiner (2000) explain:

> When learning alliances work, the payoff to businesses and schools can be extraordinary. Suddenly a company is in touch with children, whose parents

> become aware of the authentic effort being made in town. Employees discover a pride not just from volunteering but from describing their work to children, and thus making their workplace into more of a teaching and learning environment. (p. 516)

Senge et al. also add that parent involvement is one of the most powerful ways to help children learn. Educators must be relentless in insisting that parents actively participate in their child's education throughout their 12 years of education.

The OWLS workshops were created to provide students with exciting learning opportunities while still covering the curriculum outcomes. Through the reflection sheets that students completed, we were able to identify a few workshops that were not positively received by the students. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that 17 of the students who enjoyed OWLS would like all of the sessions to have hands-on activities. These students explained that they did not enjoy the workshops where teachers lectured for the two hours; however, they enjoyed the workshops where they had the opportunity to be actively involved. Since we were aware of this issue, we were able to address it before the end of the school year. According to Vibert and Shields (2003) "students are engaged in schools when schools are engaging places to be" (p. 221). Recognizing the need for professional development in best practices and beliefs surrounding how children learn, The Professional Development Committee has dedicated the upcoming year to in-servicing colleagues in these areas. DuFour and Eaker (1998) contend that in professional learning communities, teachers must be committed to implementing

instructional strategies which recognize individual learning styles so that students will be actively engaged in their learning.

The results from the students' responses show that 87% of the students are in favor of the OWLS project. This is an encouraging result that indicates that OWLS is effective in increasing student motivation. This research has also presented aspects of OWLS that need improvement. We will continue to work on improving OWLS in order to improve and enhance opportunities for student learning.

Teacher Communication and Collaboration

The second goal of the OWLS program was to encourage and increase teacher communication and collaboration. At our middle school, teachers are responsible for teaching specific subjects at specific grade levels. This setting does not lend itself to team teaching; therefore, many teachers find themselves teaching in isolation. For those teachers who did plan and work with another teacher, they still were in seclusion from other subject area teachers. For example, I taught Grade 9 Language Arts. Even though I planned and prepared my course with another Grade 9 Language Arts teacher, I had no idea what any of the other subject teachers were doing in their classrooms, or for that matter, what other Grade 9 Language Arts teachers were doing.

Through the OWLS project, we were striving to provide meaningful opportunities for colleagues to get to know each other's interests, plan together, teach together, and increase their knowledge of their own curriculum documents as well as the curriculum documents of other teachers. Schmoker (2005) believes that continuous teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching which positively affects student learning as well as professional morale in any setting.

Eighty-five % of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire responded that the OWLS program provided more time for them to collaborate with their colleagues. They commented that through OWLS they had the opportunity to work with colleagues that they do not normally get to work with. All professional development activities this year were focused on planning for OWLS. Time was allotted during most of the professional development days for teachers to get together and plan their workshops. It is difficult for teachers to find the time to collaborate with colleagues due to duty schedules, extra-help classes and extra-curricular commitments, therefore we felt it was important to provide time during the professional development days for staff to work together. Guskey (2000) believes that in order to have a collaborative culture, time must be built into the school day for teachers to meet.

When it came to finding out if the OWLS project provided staff opportunities to collaborate on their regular subject lesson plans, only 41% of the teachers surveyed felt that it did. Sixty-nine % did not have an opportunity to discuss or plan their regular subject areas with colleagues. Some of the teachers explained that because of the time factor, they were limited to planning their OWLS workshops. One teacher stated that time should be built into the school week for collaboration on regular subject areas. Now that the majority of our staff has indicated that they enjoyed working with others, we have requested and received permission to add time to our regular instructional day in order to be able to bank time. This banked time will allow us to take one day a term for a total of four days for teachers to work together. If we have the expectation for teachers to collaborate and team teach, then jurisdictions must seriously look at restructuring the school environment so it is conducive to teachers working in a collaborative manner.

In order to increase communication and collaboration among staff, we felt it was important that teachers get to know one another and build relationships. In our school, it is common to go days and weeks without seeing some of the teachers. Some teachers have classrooms located far from the staff room, and do not have enough time to make it down during the breaks. Also, with duty and extra-help classes, some teachers do not take a lunch break in the staff room. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) explain that the quality of the teachers' work relationships influenced the school's ability to improve. We felt that communication between teachers would increase if teachers had the opportunity to get to know one another better, and had a common focus to discuss and work towards.

Last June, after the students had finished school, our staff met to begin the first stage of planning OWLS. The activity that day was to match teachers' interests with students' interests. To begin that day, we created a BINGO activity based on information about our teachers. They had to mingle about the room asking questions to each other to find the answers. For example, one bingo square stated "find someone who has taught in a different province." After that ice-breaker, we asked teachers to brainstorm their interests on Post-it notes. While they were engaged, the committee posted the students' interests, labeled on chart paper, out in the hallway. The students' interests were compiled by the homeroom teachers before the students finished the year. Once the teachers had finished brainstorming, we asked them to take their sticky notes and match their interests to the students' interests in the hall. That activity generated a great deal of conversation and excitement. Some teachers were surprised to find out other teachers shared the same areas of interest creating more opportunity for relationship building. From that activity, teachers created their topics for the OWLS workshops. Teachers now

had a common focus to discuss during their breaks as well as during professional development days. The results from the questionnaire showed that 69% of teachers found that they were able to build new relationships with colleagues through OWLS. Some of the teachers who responded that they did not build new relationships explained that they already knew the people they were working with. One of the interviewees was a new staff member this year, and he felt it was a great way to join a new staff. He explained that the OWLS project provided a great opportunity to get to know others on staff, as well as work closely with others.

During our January 3rd Professional Development day, we planned a curriculum mapping event at the Superstore Community Room. The intent of that day was to map curriculum outcomes for each of the OWLS workshops. We made several copies of the subject specific curriculum documents. As well, we attached each workshop's lesson plan to a file folder. We then presented to our staff the What, Why and How of curriculum mapping. After the presentation, teachers teaching the same subject formed groups of three, one from each grade level. For each OWLS workshop lesson plan they cut out all outcomes that the workshop covered. Once they cut these out, they pasted them onto a file folder. Once finished, they moved on to the next OWLS workshop lesson plan. This continued until all workshops were mapped. This was a great day. Comments from the teachers during that day were positive, and they felt really good about gaining a more in-depth knowledge of their own curriculum as well as viewing what other subject curriculum documents contained. Not surprisingly, 81% of the teachers surveyed felt that they increased their knowledge of their own curriculum documents and other subject curricula through the OWLS project.

The results from the teachers' responses show that 85% of the teachers felt that the OWLS project provided more opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. The OWLS project was successful in increasing teacher communication and collaboration.

Reflections as Participant Researcher

Throughout this journey, I have experienced many highs and a few lows. The first high was experienced when our Professional Development Committee brainstormed the idea of OWLS. It was truly incredible to participate in such positive, intelligent, and informed brainstorming. That high continued through the proposal to our principal who supported us, and through the proposal to our colleagues who also supported our idea. I expected some barriers, some staff who would not want to go through the work involved, but everyone was on board with us. From there, the momentum continued with the students' response to the project. They were excited and thrilled. The students who would be moving on to the high school were upset that they would not have the opportunity to experience OWLS.

The Professional Development Day we planned at the end of June was inspirational. One of our goals through this project was to increase teacher communication. From the first activity where teachers matched their interests and passions with those of the students, I witnessed colleagues making new connections. I was thrilled to see our plan working immediately. I, too, was able to make new connections with staff members, and it felt great having conversations with people I worked with but never really knew. What a positive way to end the year.

Coming back from the summer holiday, I was energized and ready to get OWLS off the ground. The first low came on one of our first days back when our staff was planning their OWLS sessions. One teacher stated that change was not something they favored and wondered why we had to do this...what was wrong with the way we were doing things before? That comment floored me. I was not expecting it because all comments from staff up to that point had been positive and encouraging. I had to remind myself that this was only one comment from our entire staff. From my readings on Change Theory, I now realize just how fortunate we were to only have had one negative comment.

After that day, many of the conversations in the halls and in the staff room were focused on OWLS. I could feel the energy and excitement growing on staff and it was contagious. Everything was going as planned, we were all eager to start, when I was told that we might not be receiving the funds that were promised to us because someone was not sure if our project qualified as "school improvement." This was the second low that I experienced. My colleague and I immediately put together a proposal that was backed by Effective School Research and submitted it. Within a few days, the misunderstanding was cleared up and we were back on track with the funding. Without that funding, I realized how vulnerable our project was.

The next incident was both a high and a low. We were all set to implement our first OWLS session in the late fall when we were asked to stall because the school board was not quite ready. We wanted to have the TTFM survey in place before we began, and that was not able to take place until December. When I informed our staff that we would have to hold off implementing OWLS until January, I expected them to be pleased with

the time extension. I was quite surprised and thrilled that they were disappointed. Although it was disheartening to have to stall our project, it was uplifting to see our staff genuinely looking forward to OWLS.

The first OWLS went well for the first session. We learned that we needed to improve the student sign-up procedure to ensure that all students were accountable for being in a session. Instead of our staff losing interest or energy for this project, they offered ideas to help improve these logistics. I learned, once again, that our staff is dedicated and committed to serving our students.

The highs continued for me throughout the rest of the OWLS sessions. I learned that the Effective School Research works. Being apart of a staff that shares a common vision, is willing to think outside of the box, has a positive outlook, and is willing to give up the isolation is key to being able to improve our schools.

Conclusion

> So what if there was, right now, a fairly straightforward, well-established way to appreciably improve both teaching quality and levels of learning? What if evidence from numerous schools and the research community points to proven structures and practices that (1) stand to make an immediate difference in achievement and (2) require reasonable amounts of time and resources? The fact is that such structure and practice do exist and there is no reason to delay their implementation (Schmoker, p. xi, 2005).

This pilot project, Opportunities for Wow Learning at School, underlines the importance of supporting collaboration amongst staff members to strengthen school culture. By teachers co-planning, teaching and assessing relevant learning opportunities, schools move toward building professional learning communities. It is no longer acceptable that teachers work within the confines of an outdated factory-model education system.

It is essential that intermediate level students are provided the opportunity to become engaged in their learning. Students need to see a strong connection between what they are learning in school and what is valued in their own culture and within their community.

This action research confirms that the OWLS project is effective in increasing student engagement and motivation as well as teacher communication and collaboration. It is imperative that school improvement be an on-going and continuous process supported by all educational bodies. Projects such as OWLS will only be able to continue if government continues to provide leaders with expertise and adequate resources. If we want our youth to be compassionate to others, productive in the work force, and knowledgeable contributors to society, then all levels of education need to insist on academic rigor through authentic learning experiences.

Limitations

One limitation of this research is that the readers must decide whether their school would be ready for a school-wide integrated curricular project. The staff at my school had already spent time on team building and had established collegial relationships. They put students' needs first when decision making was required. If a school was not at the

level of readiness, their Professional Development committee would need to evaluate where to begin. Therefore, the reader must decide the degree to which this project would be generalizable to their specific school.

An unexpected limitation was that our school improvement plan was evolving faster than the school board was prepared for. Because we were ready to proceed, we applied for the money allocated for pilot schools; however, the school board had not yet developed procedures to dispense the funds. This inhibited our ability to proceed with our first OWLS session in the fall resulting in a break in our momentum. Parents, teachers, and students were disappointed. Retrospectively, it may have had a positive effect as this ensured that teachers had sufficient time to prepare and organize their sessions.

Recommendations for Schools Interested in this Type of Project

The key to our project success was our staff. The teachers and administration at our school share a common vision: We do what's best for the kids… period. Also, our staff, for the most part, are risk-takers. They are willing to think outside of the box, and give new ideas a go. They are also not afraid of hard work. This project took a great deal of time and preparation to implement. It also took commitment. When some of the logistics were challenging, our staff volunteered new ideas instead of throwing in the towel.

We were also successful because we had the support of our school board and the Department of Education. They provided the funds for the resources we needed to implement and run our project.

One of the biggest lessons gained from this research is the need for teacher collaboration. If we want to make a real difference in the lives of our students, we need to eliminate teacher isolation and embrace collaboration. By working together, students are able to benefit from the collective knowledge and creativity of the staff, as opposed to benefiting from the strengths of only one teacher for that school year. According to Willms (2002) there is greater difference between classrooms than between schools. We need teachers working together to ensure consistency in the education our students are receiving in a given school.

The biggest challenge to school improvement is teacher collaboration. Teachers from this study enjoyed working together, and were inspired to continue collaborating on regular subjects, however, time was a factor that hindered that process. From this study, our school applied for and received permission to bank time in order to gain four days throughout the school year for teachers to collaborate. These four days (one per term) will be used for common planning and common assessment of regular subjects. Although I am pleased with these four days, I see a greater need for more time. Guskey (2000) is adamant that in order for teacher collaboration to be taken seriously, time needs to be built into the school timetable to accommodate ongoing consistent teacher collaboration.

Suggestions for Further Research

Many valuable topics require further research:

1. Research specific to the learning needs of adolescent children. There is a great deal of research to support the developmental needs of young children, however, there is a gap in the research when it comes to the learning needs of students in the middle and high school years. McLaughlin and Blank (2004) reported that forty to sixty percent of all students are chronically disengaged from school. Students who are disengaged are at risk of dropping out of school. Current teachers and administrators could be educated on how to build relationships with students, how to present the curriculum in meaningful and interesting ways, and how to allow students to have a voice in their own learning. It is imperative that the new generation of teachers be equipped in being able to meet the needs of their adolescent students. University students in Education could be taught how to foster a sense of belonging in their students, as well as how to map their curriculum documents in order to create interesting themes to present to adolescent students. In addition, Education students could learn how to encourage student participation in deciding what they need to learn.
2. The correlation between authentic learning and student achievement. With adolescents becoming disengaged in their learning, research needs to focus on ways to deliver the curriculum in ways that enable the student to make real life connections, as well as in ways that are interesting and current. Project based learning is an exciting yet common sense approach to learning that should be

available to students. Teachers should have the opportunity to be professionally developed in this area, as well as university students training to become teachers.

3. The significance of parent participation in student success. Teachers and administrators could take a serious look at the level of active parental involvement at their school. It is time to tear down the barriers that keep parents at a distance, and we need to create ways to bring the parent community on board. Schools should encourage and support parents in creating a learning environment at home where schoolwork, reading and other educational activities have priority over video games and television.
4. The impact of professional learning communities on student achievement and teacher collaboration. The focus of any school is student achievement. By creating a professional learning community, administrators, teachers, students, parents, community members, board members and department members are all working together, respecting each other's voice in order to best meet the needs of the students. Eliminating teacher isolation allows students to benefit from a pool of shared knowledge and experiences.

The OWLS project is an on-going school improvement project. Data will continue to be collected which will guide decision making regarding future professional development activities at our school. The OWLS project as described within this thesis will continue to evolve as do the needs of the school community.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Action Research - OWLS
Effectiveness of School Improvement Project

1. Has the OWLS project provided you with more opportunities to collaborate with your colleagues at Summerside Intermediate School?

   YES NO

   Explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Has the OWLS project provided opportunities to plan and discuss regular subject lesson plans with other teachers?

   YES NO

Explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Has the OWLS project increased your knowledge of the curriculum documents for your teaching assignment as well as the curriculum expectations in other subject areas?

   YES NO

   Explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Has the OWLS project provided opportunities to build new relationships with fellow teachers?

   YES NO

   Explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up interview?
YES NO
*If you circled yes, please sign your name and I will be in contact to set up a time that is convenient for you.

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND CANDID RESPONSES. PLEASE RETURN YOUR SURVEY IN THE ENCLOSED STAMPED ENVELOPE.

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTION LETTER

March, 2006

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting an action research on the effectiveness of the school improvement project at our school. This research has been approved by the UPEI Research Ethics Board, TTFM, the Western School Board, and Mr. Edison. The OWLS project was created by the Professional Development committee after receiving data through the form of an informal survey of all teachers at S.I.S. The two themes that emerged from that data were: 1) increase student motivation, and 2) increase teacher communication and collaboration. You have been a key participator in this project from the beginning through your suggestions on how to improve our school, through to the planning of your OWLS sessions, and the actual implementation of OWLS. Your participation in the attached questionnaire would greatly enhance the evaluation of this project. The questionnaire should take approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete. A presentation of the findings of this study will take place in the form of a staff meeting.

Your participation in this research is, of course, voluntary. Your confidentiality and anonymity are assured. All returned questionnaires will be secured in a locked cabinet accessible only by me. Return of the questionnaire to me is your consent for your responses to be compiled with others. You will not be individually identified with your questionnaire or responses. Please understand that use of this data will be limited to this research, as authorized by the University of Prince Edward Island, although results may ultimately be presented in formats other than the dissertation, such as journal articles or conference presentations. You also have the right to express concerns to me ([redacted] ext[redacted](w) or at [redacted](h)), my thesis supervisor, Vianne Timmons ([redacted]), or the UPEI Research Ethics Board [redacted]

I greatly appreciate your participation in this research. Please return the survey within one week in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope. A reminder will be placed in all mailboxes after one week.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study. I genuinely appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Michèle Bradley

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM FOR FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

Informed Consent Form for Follow-up Interview

Title: Action research on the effectiveness of the school improvement project at an intermediate school

I, _____, hereby give my consent to participate in a study about the effectiveness of the school improvement project, OWLS, at S.I.S. I understand that my participation is **completely voluntary**. The purpose of this research is to discover if the OWLS project met its goals of 1) increasing student motivation, and 2) increasing teacher communication and collaboration. Permission has been obtained from the Western School Board, the principal, Tell Them From Me, and the UPEI Research Ethics Board.

I understand that at any time during the research process, I can withdraw my contributions without question. The signing of an Informed Consent Form does not imply risk. Rather, it provides the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. I may retain a copy of the Informed Consent Form.

The interview will take place at a convenient time and location. The interview will take approximately twenty minutes. The sessions will be audio-recorded so that the transcribed notes will accurately reflect the participants' language. All audio cassettes and notes will be secure in a locked cabinet accessible only by the researcher.

I understand that I may contact the researcher's supervisor, Vianne Timmons [redacted] or the UPEI Research Ethics Board ([redacted] if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the benefits of our OWLS project to teachers?
2. What were the benefits of our OWLS project to students?
3. What were the struggles of OWLS and how do you think we could improve?
4. What was the highlight of the OWLS project this year for you? Why?

APPENDIX E

LIST OF OWLS WORKSHOPS

1. EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOW TO GET A'S BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK!
2. ART WORLD
3. EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!
4. RUBIK CUBE
5. STARRY, STARRY NIGHT
6. THE STOCK EXCHANGE
7. META COGNITION: THINKING ABOUT THINKING
8. 100% SMART
9. TURNING JAPANESE!
10. TURN UP THE VOLUME!
11. SHOW ME THE MONEY!
12. THE ROAD TO A HEALTHY BODY
13. HAMMER TIME!
14. GREAT CAREERS!
15. I WANT A JOB!
16. FITNESS 101
17. THE GREAT WHITE NORTH!
18. OPEN FOR BUSINESS!
19. SHALL WE DANCE...THROUGH THE 20TH CENTURY?

20. REV UP THE ENGINE!

21. DIGITAL FASHION SHOW!

22. THE GLOBAL ADVERTISEMENT CHALLENGE!

23. WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY?

24. FLASHBACK TO SUMMERSIDE

25. CHERISHED MEMORY

26. A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES!