ONE SCHOOL'S PROCESS FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
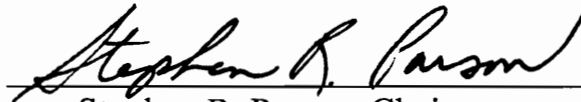
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
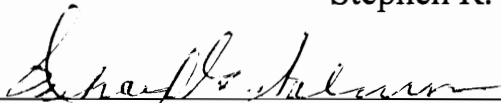
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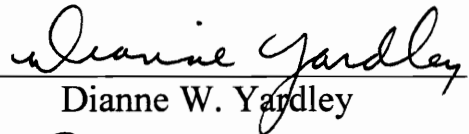in

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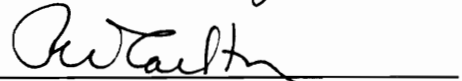
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Key Words: Action Research, Shared Decision-making, Problem-solving

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose for this study was to examine the process that one school staff used to solve a problem. This case study involved Albert Harris Elementary School in Martinsville, Virginia. This school serves all of the students in grades four through six throughout the city of Martinsville. A school improvement team was formed to implement the action research process. This problem-solving process was studied to determine the staff's perception of this procedure and whether it is an effective vehicle for bringing about change in the school.

This is a qualitative research study that examines one school's problem-solving process. Data were collected from the participants through reflective journal entries and field notes maintained by the researcher. Members of the school improvement team represented all grade levels and departments within the school. They were introduced to the process

through inservice training and received training to strengthen their group processing skills.

Identifying the problem was phase one of the action research process. Morale was the problem that the staff selected to address. Collecting data on morale and burnout was phase two of the action research process. School improvement team members shared the information that was discovered during bi-weekly meetings. Team members reached a consensus on interventions to implement. These strategies were put into place and evaluated.

There were several themes that emerged as data were analyzed. They included: empowering teachers, interacting with others, narrowing and focusing on one specific problem, involving the staff in the problem-solving process, gaining insight from a variety of sources, branching out into other areas, seeing immediate changes, taking too much time, and understanding that some things are beyond the control of the school improvement team. Data collected from all sources indicated action research is an effective process to use in solving problems and bringing about change in the school. One negative side effect identified in this study, was that using a small team

to implement the action research process can create a feeling of isolation for those who do not serve on the team if they are not fully informed of the discussions of the group.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my grandmother, Pauline Brandon Williams, who instilled within me, the belief that I could accomplish anything that I set out to do in life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A number of individuals deserve recognition for the role they played in helping with this dissertation. I would like to acknowledge and thank these people for their love and support throughout this process.

To my husband, Clarence, who stood by me through thick and thin and who took on extra family responsibilities while I completed my studies.

To our sons, Jamaal and Joseph, who became more independent and who watched Darius while I worked on weekends and at night.

To my in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Vance J. Hairston, Sr. and Brenda Gale, who pitched in to lend their helping hands so that I could attend classes, participate in the summer OTR sessions, and work longer hours on this study.

To the members of the Albert Harris Elementary School Improvement Team, who implemented the action research project and provided all of the data for this project. Without them, this doctoral study would not have been possible.

To my committee, especially my chairman, Stephen R. Parson, who directed me toward this topic and provided guidance throughout this study.

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Introduction

Schools cannot depend on external forces such as city, state, or federal governments, to solve problems that surface within their organizations. Educators must begin to take charge of developing solutions to problems for themselves without depending on external agents to bring about change. According to Kyle and Hovda (1987), the focus of educational reform is squarely on teachers and the professionalization of teaching. They suggest that teacher ownership and collegiality are essential in producing an atmosphere that is conducive to school improvement.

Some researchers indicate that action research is one strategy that can assist with creating change and improving schools. Calhoun (1994) defines action research as a fancy way of saying, let's study what is happening in the school, decide if it can be a better place by changing what is done, study the effects, and continue the process. Action research calls for teachers to become actively involved in the process of change through shared decision-making. The process includes: 1) selecting an area of focus, 2) collecting

data, 3) organizing data, 4) analyzing and interpreting data, and 5) taking

action. Calhoun's (1994) Figure 1 illustrates the steps in the action research

process.

The Action Research Cycle

Phase one:	**Selecting an area of focus** (The faculty identifies an area of interest.)
Phase two:	**Collecting Data** (Participants identify data to be collected and start to gather it immediately.)
Phase three:	**Organizing Data** (The data are shared with the faculty.)
Phase four:	**Analyzing and Interpreting Data** (The data are discussed and compared. Desired outcomes are shared.)
Phase five:	**Taking Action** (It is determined whether action is needed and what intervention takes place short and long term.)

Figure 1. A Model of the Action Research Cycle from How to use action research in the self-renewing school by Emily Calhoun, 1994, pp. 2 & 41.

Research Questions

The following questions were developed to guide the study:

1. According to participants, what effect does using action research have on them as they engage in the problem-solving process?

2. What are the advantages of using action research in the problem-solving process as perceived by participants?

3. What are the disadvantages of using action research in the problem-solving process as perceived by participants?

4. Does action research provide an effective vehicle for implementing change in a school?

5. What types of staff development are necessary to implement action research in a school?

6. What is the role of the principal in an action research model?

7. How can participants use their knowledge of action research to solve problems in the future?

Statement of the Problem

This study was designed to analyze the process one school used to

solve a problem and to examine the effects using action research had on participants.

Purposes for the Study

The purposes for this study were:

1.   to examine the process that Albert Harris Elementary School staff used to solve problems,

2.   to review the process that the staff used to gain knowledge of the action research model,

3.   to develop the skills of the participants and principal in using action research to solve school problems,

4.   to provide participants an opportunity to play a part in the problem-solving process, and

5.   to provide a problem-solving model for the school.

By working with teachers through the action research process, direction and structure for meetings was established. Calhoun (1994) indicates that school personnel develop greater skills in using tools of social inquiry and they become more willing to take on additional responsibilities when using action research. A major objective for this study is to involve

the staff in the problem-solving process. Action research, according to Kyle & Hovda (1987), involves teachers and other staff members in experiences where their input can be made primary.

Limitations

1. This study is limited to one elementary school, in one school division, that had no prior training in action research.

2. The study is limited to observing the process of the school improvement team in one school where participants were not randomly selected.

3. The study is limited due to the fact it is a case study of one school and it is difficulty to generalize or make comparisons.

Definitions

The following definitions refer to terms used in this study:

1. Action research - systematic personal inquiry employing the scientific method to solve problems; participants have critical reflective ownership of both the process and the products of such inquiry (McKernan, 1987).

2. Participant - any member of the school organized group who

took a part in the action research.

3.   Participant observer - the role that the principal played during

the problem solving process. (Participating on the same level as

all other participants while studying oneself, the participants,

and the group process).

4.   Problem solving - a means of mapping out interventions for

improving concerns identified by the participants.

5.   Intervention - the action or change agent on a school in an

attempt to introduce new procedures or curriculum changes

(Clift, et. al., 1995).

6.   Shared decision-making - a process of participating and sharing

the responsibility of determining the actions to be taken by the

school administration with teachers.

Significance of the Study

With the new wave of school renewal and reform, emphasis has been

placed on teachers and teaching. According to Liontos (1994):

"Schools have begun to assume a greater responsibility and
interest in professional staff development and assessment of
programs. The recognition and utilization of the talent and

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experience within the school are a significant shift in perspective" (p. 76).

If teachers are going to be effective in their continuously evolving roles as researchers and decision makers, they must have knowledge of the techniques and processes that are available to them. Participants in this study learned about action research and used this knowledge to solve a problem in the school.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, purposes, research questions, limitations, definitions, and significance of the study. A review of the literature relating to action research, shared decision-making, and problem solving is presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the methods of research including research procedure, collection of data and data analysis. The findings of the study are described in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusion, recommendations, and further research implications.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Shared Decision-making

One of the features of school reform and restructuring is the inclusion

of teachers in the decision-making process. Shared decision-making gives

teachers a voice in what happens within the school. Weiss (1993) defines

shared decision-making as "a formal system of teacher representation in a

decision-making body." Vann (1992) defines shared decision-making as

the concept of the principal and staff working together to share leadership

responsibilities in the decision-making process. Liontos (1994) describes

shared decision-making as a process of making educational decisions in a

collaborative manner at the school level. It involves fundamental changes

in the way that schools are managed, and changes the roles and

relationships of everyone in the school community (Allen & Glickman,

1992). According to Martin (1996), collaboration and participation in the

decision-making process fosters ownership for the decisions that are made,

produces positive morale, promotes a professional environment and a

feeling of collegiality throughout the school.

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Purposes for Shared Decision-making

"The purposes of shared decision-making are to improve school effectiveness and student learning by increasing staff commitment and ensuring that schools are more responsive to the needs of their students and community" (Liontos, 1994). Weiss (1993) identified three reasons offered in support of shared decision-making: 1) improved school performance, 2) increased teacher professionalism, and 3) the symbolism of participation.

The use of shared decision-making allows those who are most familiar with the students' needs to make decisions that will improve the situation. "Because teachers have detailed, variegated knowledge about students and curriculum, decisions in which they participate will be grounded in intimate understanding of context and will thus be wiser, yielding better policies" (Weiss, 1993). Weiss further advocates that shared decision-making will bring out the creativity in teachers. "Given a voice, teachers will supply new ideas and innovative proposals that will revolutionize teaching and learning." Teaching practices devised by teachers will encourage teaching for understanding, critical thinking and higher-order knowledge (Weiss, 1993).

When teachers are given an opportunity to participate in the process of shared decision-making, they gain a sense of ownership and commitment to the decisions that are made. Shared decision-making treats teachers as professionals signaling that they are worthy of respect because they are taking charge of their own practices (Weiss, 1993).

Shared decision-making represents democracy in action (Weiss, 1993). It provides those affected by the decision an opportunity to participate in the process reducing the power of others making decisions for them. Using the shared decision-making process also models for students the democratic process in action.

Bloom (1995) further suggests that the purposes for shared decision-making are to "reduce the incidence of making decisions by default, and making decisions that are not implemented." It is essential that staff members in schools work cooperatively to implement programs and provide services to meet the needs of the student population. Collaborating can lead to finding the best educational practices and putting them in place to benefit the total school program. Teachers know the students and the school best and they use more practical approaches when teaching than those who work

in central office positions (Martin, 1996).

Benefits of Shared Decision-making

Shared decision-making has the potential to improve the quality of decisions, increase a decision's acceptance and implementation, strengthen staff morale, commitment, and teamwork, build trust, help staff and administrators acquire new skills, and increase school effectiveness (Liontos, 1993). According to Weiss and Cambone (1994), shared decision-making provides the staff with the opportunity to shape proposed innovations to fit the practices and the culture of the school. It gives teachers a sense of ownership. Finally, with the sense of ownership comes greater commitment to implementing the innovation. Jenkins, Ronk, Schrag, Rude, and Stowitschek (1994) cite the work of several researchers that support shared decision-making:

> "Participation by teachers in planning and decision-making is seen to have advantages in the development of better plans, improving teachers' receptivity, morale, and motivation (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990); in tempering resistance to reform (Waugh & Punch, 1978); and in fostering effective schooling characteristics and improving achievement (Malen et al., 1990). Moreover, by building a team mentality, chances improve that the reform will be implemented fully and that it will last" (p. 196).

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Constraints of Shared Decision-Making

Bloom (1995) cites the disadvantages of shared decision-making as time consuming, limited financial resources to pay teachers to attend staff meetings and to provide incentives, and certain mandates from sponsoring agencies, boards, and other regulating bodies may tie the hands of those trying to make decisions. In Liontos' (1994) view, shared decision-making places new demands on teachers and administrators. All participants must contend with heavier workloads and the frustration that accompanies the slower group process. In his opinion, increased demands on participants' time may be the greatest barrier to implementing and maintaining shared decision-making.

In the shared decision-making process, teachers who normally work in isolation from other adults must collaborate with colleagues, negotiate, and make effective decisions. To do so, these teachers have to "extend themselves into new arenas of expertise" and they may be reluctant to do this (Weiss & Cambone, 1992).

Kirby (1992) identified eight barriers to changing traditional behaviors and implementing shared decision-making. The three barriers

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involving organizational limitations are lack of definition and clarity of the change effort, inadequate or inappropriate resources, and lack of hierarchical support. Five were sources of resistance from school personnel. They included fear of losing power (primarily the principal or central office staff), reluctance to changing roles, reluctance to changing responsibilities, lack of skills, and lack of trust.

According to the literature, teachers can develop negative feelings about making decisions that administrators are paid big dollars to make (Martin, 1996). This is a disadvantage that is not addressed. He further suggests that the literature does not take into consideration the varying personalities and leadership styles of building administrators or how that affects the shared decision-making process (Martin, 1996).

Strategies for Implementing Shared Decision-making

In the school setting the principal is the key factor in initiating and facilitating collaboration and shared decision-making. This person must provide the support, time, resources, and encouragement necessary to sustain positive interaction (Bloom, 1995). Several important guidelines for implementing shared decision-making have been suggested by Liontos

(1994) and others shared decision-making pioneers. They suggest that

when engaging in the process to start small and go slowly. It is also

important that participants agree on specifics of the project at the outset

with clear procedures, roles, and expectations being set. Everyone should

be given a chance to get involved and training in group dynamics should be

provided. It is essential to build trust and support for the process if it is

going to be successful.

Kirby (1992) suggests that:

"Shared decision-making teams will be more likely to focus on
issues of greater significance when minor faculty concerns are
resolved first. Kirby found that groups who risk resolving
school wide instructional concerns are more successful when
they thoroughly investigate alternatives, disseminate this
information to others, and analyze consequences before making
a decision" (p.16).

This is the exact process that takes place in action research, thus, making it

one of the best means of problem solving and continuous improvement.

The action research movement in education received new life with the

surge of school renewal, reform, and restructuring in the early 1980's

(Somekh, 1987). Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (1996) suggest that

teachers provide a strong forum for exchanging ideas, sharing information

and raising questions that generate the need for continuous growth. Using

teachers as a resource in the school improvement process is essential.

Because the involvement of teachers in the school reform and restructuring

process has increased, professionalization of teaching is evolving (Broyles,

1991). Broyles further states that teachers have become more active in

taking on additional challenges, applying new methods and strategies in

their teaching, and adding to the productivity of their schools.

Action Research

There seems to be some confusion regarding whom should receive

credit for the development of action research and when it appeared in the

literature. Wallace (1987) states the label "action research " was coined by

Collier in 1945. He used the term to describe the process used to improve

Indian farming practices. Sagor (1991) identifies Kurt Lewin as the

researcher who coined the term "action research " in 1947. McKernan

(1987) reveals:

> "Action research has evolved from a complex web of scientific and
> social problem-solving. It is my conviction that action research as an
> activity predates the work of Lewin in 1946 who is mentioned as the
> "founding father" of action research through his work in the Group
> Dynamics movement of postwar reconstructionist period" (p. 98).

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He believes that action research has been influenced by Dewey and others

as early as 1910. McKernan (1987) reports that action research has been

shaped by the following:

1.   The *Science in Education Movement* of the late
     nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
2.   *Experimentalist-Progressive Ideology* and reformist
     interventions.
3.   *Group Dynamics Movement* in Social Psychology.
4.   *Post War "Corey-era" Reconstructionist Curriculum
     Development Movement* in the United States.
5.   *Teacher-as-Researcher Movement* in the United
     Kingdom, Europe, Australia and the United States since
     1975 (p. 7).

Hannay (1987) says the term "action research" was first introduced to

the educational community by Corey in 1949. In early 1950's Corey

suggested that action research was a means for educators to solve problems

and improve classroom instruction (Kyle & Hovda, 1987).

> "A number of researchers and writers following on the building block
> of progressive and human relations-oriented social psychologists,
> promoted and championed the use of action research education. Cory,
> Taba, Brady, Robinson, Noel, Wann, and the Association for
> Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) helped to develop
> the idea of action research as a potential means for curriculum
> development" (p.46).

All of these researchers and many others have contributed to the

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formulation of a practice that continues to benefit education today.

Purposes for Action Research

The literature uncovers several definitions for action research. For some educators, action research involves using an outside researcher to investigate a problem that has been identified by teachers, administrators or other staff members. For others, action research is a means for educators to thoroughly examine their total school organization for the purpose of teacher reflection and empowerment. Still another definition, refers to action research as the study of practical problems by those who are directly affected (Hannay, 1987).

The definitions given reflect the researchers' motives and directions for conducting the investigation. There are several reasons noted for conducting action research. Throughout the literature, there are key themes surrounding the purposes for action research. Some of the purposes identified include: 1) assisting with school renewal or reform, 2) improving the curriculum by enhancing teaching strategies, 3) developing the skills of the staff giving them ownership in the problem solving process, and 4) empowering teachers by encouraging collaboration and shared

decision-making.

Calhoun (1994) suggests that the purpose for action research is to improve the school. In schoolwide action research, there are three areas of focus for school improvement. One is the improvement the staff's problem-solving skills. According to Calhoun (1994), after repeated cycles of research, the staff should become better and better at working as a group to identify needs throughout the school and better able to develop strategies to improve the situation.

The second focus for school improvement is enhancing the instructional program for all students. When the staff addresses instructional issues and conducts action research projects to improve, the intent is for all students to benefit, not just those served by teachers who are involved in the study.

Calhoun (1994) identifies the third implication of schoolwide action research as being collaborative. Through collaboration, everyone in the school is involved in the action research study. As school improvement teams strive for growth, they may involve students, parents, and the community in data collection and interpretation of the options selected for

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implementation.

In a position paper written by Takala (1994), Stenhouse is quoted as saying, "It is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it." In a paper presented at the Society for the Study of Curriculum History Meeting, McKernan (1987) clearly states that "the purpose of action research, as opposed to fundamental research is to help educators understand and solve pressing curriculum problems."

Based on the literature, there are increasing demands for teachers to get involved with school improvement. The League of Professional Schools promotes nationwide school renewal. Schools that are involved with this organization participate in planning, decision-making, and assessment cycles that assist them with implementing school-wide improvement. In League schools, teaching actions are driven by internal decisions and the belief that if teachers and principals are willing to take on the choice and responsibility of shared decision-making their schools will have a better chance of improving. (Glickman, Allen & Lunsford, 1992). Those schools that are making the effort to understand what is happening within them have a greater chance of improving and maintaining growth.

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A motive or purpose for action research identified by Takala (1994) is

that of emancipation-freedom for teachers and students. Action research

provides teachers with an opportunity to be creative and innovative while

motivating students to participate and excel. McKay (1991) advocates that

action research serve as an effective method for freeing teachers and

administrators to explore and experiment with new and different techniques

in a positive manner.

The Nature of Action Research

In *The Action Research Planner and The Action Research Reader,*

Kemmis and McTaggart (1987) outlined key points about action research.

They state:

1. that action research is an approach to improving
   education by changing it and learning from the
   consequences of change,
2. that action research is a participatory process in which
   people work toward the improvement of their own
   educational practices,
3. that action research is collaborative and aims to involve
   all those responsible for the action in the improvement
   process,
4. that action research aims to establish critical
   communities of people participating and collaborating in
   all phases of the research process and committed to
   enlightening themselves about the relationship between

circumstances, action, and the consequences in their own situation (p.27).

The process for doing action research has been described in terms of being linear and cyclic. It is a continuous process that calls for evaluation of the action taken and revising as needed. Takala (1994) lists useful points to keep in mind when doing action research. These helpful hints entail: establishing a research group and participate yourself, starting with a small group, working on a small problem without biting off more than one can chew, setting a realistic time line that allows sufficient time for collecting data, reflecting, and reporting, arranging support work in small discussion groups, monitoring each phase of the process and making time to write throughout the project reflecting on the experience.

Benefits of Action Research

Zelazek and Lamson (1992) believe that action research serves as an effective method of freeing teachers and administrators to explore and to experiment with new and different methods in a positive and constructive manner. Action research is a process that has proven successful in providing a sense of professional empowerment for participants involved in

the research. According to findings by Pine (1981), teachers involved in action research are more flexible in their thinking, more open to new ideas, and better equipped to solve new problems.

Those who have participated in action research projects indicate the process influenced their thinking skills, attitudes and efficacy as professional teachers, attitudes toward continued professional development, attitudes toward the change process, willingness to communicate with colleagues, attitudes toward their work as teachers, and teaching strategies with students (Simmons, 1985). Sumulyan (1987) in her research found that "through participation in action research projects, teachers experienced increased confidence in themselves as individuals and professionals."

Constraints on Action Research

"Fuzzy" is a word that has been linked to action research. This is because some aspects of this research are not clear-cut and measurable. In a paper presented by Kern, Nielsen, Sullivan, and Walter (1991), attention is given to the idea that action research is based on words and not numbers or control groups. Findings are difficult to generalize beyond the case at hand. It is difficult to replicate action research studies or apply findings to other

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situations. Therefore, university faculty and other researchers are less receptive of this type of research. It is sometimes thought of as "unscientific" (McKernan, 1987). McKernan (1987) identifies other drawbacks to action research being: teachers' limited knowledge of scientific language and key concepts, finding time to do research and development work while teaching a full load, and lack of technical training for teachers in research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The design of the study, context, methods of data collection, and methods used for analyzing the data are discussed in this chapter.

Design of the Study

The design of the research project was a case study of one school. The purpose for the study was to analyze the procedure that participants used to solve a problem that was identified by the school improvement team and determine if action research is an effective process to use.

Qualitative case study data were collected from recordings and transcripts of school improvement team meetings, participant interviews, documents generated by the group relating to the action research, journal records of observations and reflections on the process maintained by participants, and journal records of observations and reflections on the process maintained by the principal.

Context

Albert Harris Elementary School was the site used for this study. It is located in the city of Martinsville, Virginia. The school serves all fourth,

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fifth, and sixth grade students in Martinsville. There are approximately 700 students enrolled in the school with a staff of 54 certified and 26 non-certified staff members. These members include support staff, clerical personnel, maintenance, and cafeteria workers.

The school staff has been involved in school improvement projects for the past five years. A school improvement team was established to address problems identified by other staff members, students, and parents. There are thirteen members of this team.

The role of the school improvement team is to discuss issues that may have implications for change in the total operation of the school. Basic strategies for improving the overall school are generated by brainstorming during team meetings and identifying driving and restraining forces for the recommendations that are made. Strategies for improving the areas of concern are carried out and evaluated by the group.

By incorporating action research into the problem-solving process, an attempt was made to answer the research questions presented in this study. Using research and literature about the subject of interest, increasing teacher participation through collaboration, and observing the process were the

main purposes of this study.

The school improvement team was asked to assist with this case study. The project was explained to the entire faculty. Members of the school improvement team were allowed to withdraw if they could not commit to participating without reservations. Anyone who was interested and wanted to participate was given an opportunity to do so whether they were members of the school improvement team or not. Efforts were made to insure representation of all grade levels and departments within the school. One parent was asked to join the team. She attended two meetings. Her interaction and impact upon the team was limited.

To get participants to take ownership in the study, the importance of learning the action research process was emphasized. Demonstrating that this process can be applied to solving other problems was made evident by sharing with the team reports, papers, and articles describing action research projects that have been conducted.

Before beginning the action research project, participants were provided training to assist them with working within the group. An outside consultant was used to improve participants' skills with group processes,

data collection, and analyzing the data collected. Participants were introduced to the action research process in September and given a review of the process in November once the problem was identified. They were also given literature explaining the process and illustrating its use in other situations. This was done throughout the project.

Group sessions were held weekly for training, setting the parameters for meetings, and clarifying the problem to be addressed. Meetings were held bi-weekly or as needed after the ground work was set for completing the project. Bi-weekly meetings allowed time for gathering and reading information on the topic. The entire staff was informed of the process, group findings, and the interventions recommended by the school improvement team. The entire staff was given opportunities to give input throughout the process during periodic updates shared at faculty meetings. The school improvement team was led by the chairperson.

The chairperson was the facilitator. The role of the facilitator was to set meeting agenda, guide the discussion of the group, select a time keeper, and recorder for each meeting, and report to other staff members during faculty meetings.

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The role of the principal was that of participant observer. According to Spradley (1980), the participant observer enters a situation with two purposes in mind: 1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation, and 2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation. He further advocates that the role of the participant observer will vary from situation to situation and the investigator has to allow the way they work to evolve (Spradley, 1980). Spradley goes on to suggest that there are six features of the participant observer's role: 1) dual purpose, 2) explicit awareness, 3) a wide observational focus, 4) being both an insider and an outsider simultaneously, 5) increased introspectiveness, and 6) extensive record-keeping.

The principal's role as participant observer included participating in the process and being reflective of herself while studying others. Spradley (1980) reveals that at times, the investigator will need to focus on one role at a time. Since the principal is already an ordinary participant with the school improvement team, her degree of involvement was that of complete participation. As a participant observer, the principal kept detailed records of both objective observations and subjective feelings. The goal for the

principal was to develop a heightened sense of awareness taking in as much

information as possible and reporting on the findings whether they were

positive or negative.

Data Collection

Methods for gathering data for this study were qualitative. All school

improvement team meetings were tape recorded and minutes were

maintained. Structured interviews were conducted with three participants. A

focus group interview was conducted as part of the closing meeting for the

school improvement team. The remaining six school improvement team

members were given an opportunity to share their perceptions of the action

research study. Framing questions for conducting interviews were

developed (Appendix A and Appendix B). The questions corresponded

with the research questions set forth in this study. Individual and focus

group interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Any documents generated by the group during the action research

process became a part of the data collection. Such documents included

research articles and literature collected on the subject of morale. Any

information pertaining to the action taken or evaluation of the intervention

also became a part of the data collection.

Field notes of observations and reflections on the process from three participants and the principal produced additional data. Three participants were asked to keep journals or field notes recording their feelings about the process. Keeping the field notes and being interviewed were voluntary.

Data Analysis

Recordings, transcripts, and documents from all meetings were reviewed examining the process used by the group. Interviews were transcribed by a teacher's aide. The researcher listened to audiotapes from team meetings and interviews with participants. Transcripts of the interviews and minutes from school improvement team meetings were analyzed for commonalities. Field notes maintained by participants and the principal were studied to determine similarities and differences in content and to discover emerging themes. Triangulation by these data sources and methods was used to corroborate the findings (see Figure 2).

Themes were identified if the concept was stated in all three data sources. For example, when an idea appeared in the participants' field notes, the principal's field notes, and transcript of participants' interviews, it

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was noted as a theme. Concepts that appeared in one or two data sources were not identified as themes.

To organize the data collected, an effects matrix was used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This matrix presents the findings of the study based on outcomes as perceived by participants. This information is displayed in Tables 2 and 3.

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                    │              │
                    │  Teachers'   │
                    │  Field Notes │
                    │              │
                    └──────────────┘
                   /                \
                  /                  \
                 /                    \
                /                      \
               /                        \
              /      The Perceived       \
             /                            \
            /       Effects of Using       \
           /                                \
┌────────────────┐  Action Research   ┌────────────────┐
│  Teachers'     │                    │                │
│  Interviews    │  In the Problem-   │                │
│                │                    │  Principal's   │
│  ------------  │  Solving Process   │  Field Notes   │
│  Teachers'     │                    │                │
│  Group         │                    │                │
│  Focus Interviews                   │                │
└────────────────┘────────────────────└────────────────┘
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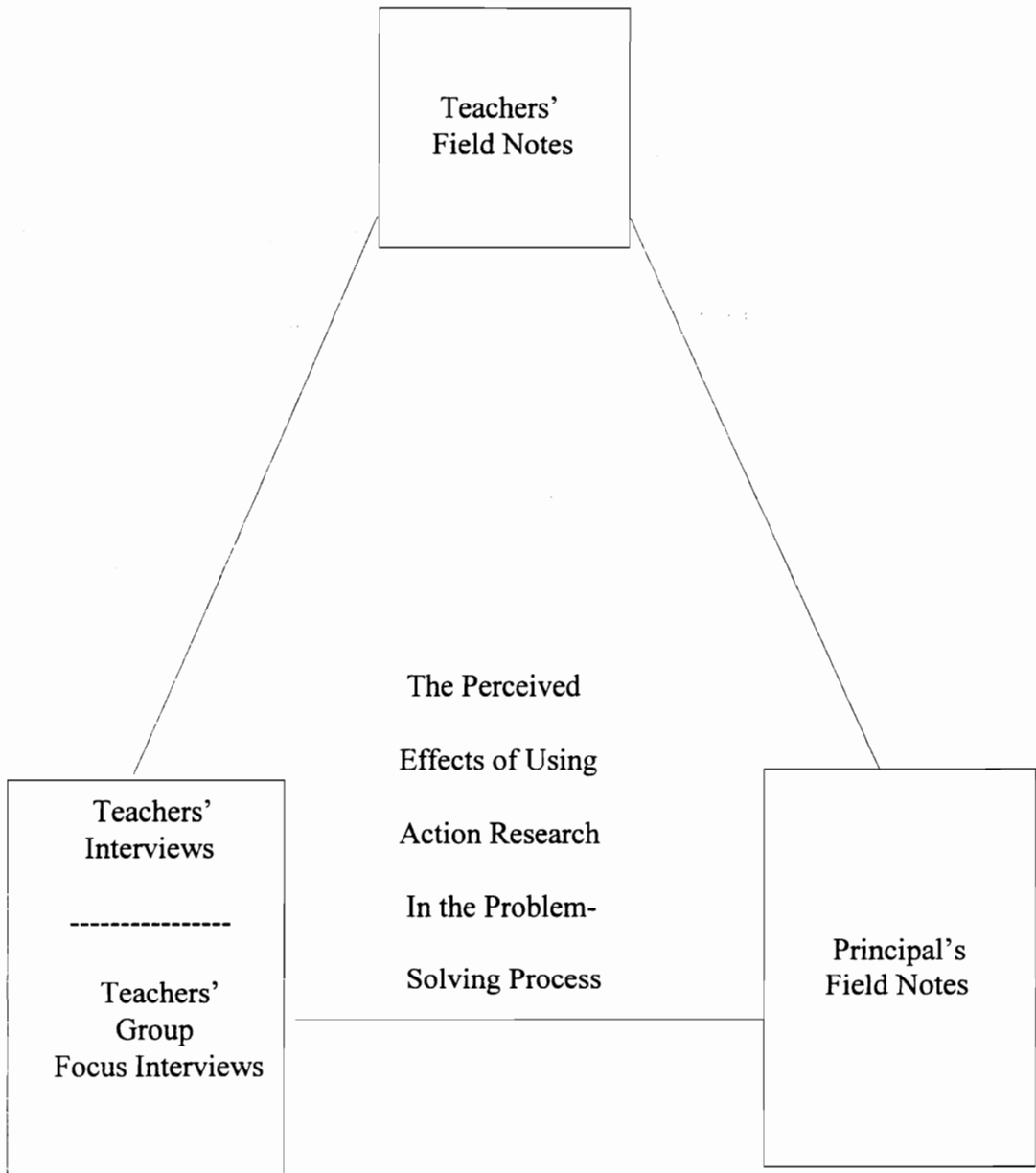
Figure 2.   Triangulation of data from multiple sources used to corroborate findings

CHAPTER 4

Findings of The Study

Introduction

This study was designed to analyze the process that the staff at Albert Harris Elementary School used to solve a problem. Investigated were the effects that using action research had on members of the school improvement team, the advantages and disadvantages of using action research, whether action research provided an effective vehicle for implementing change in the school, the types of staff development necessary to implement action research in the school, the role of the principal in the action research process, and whether participants will use their knowledge of action research to solve problems in the future.

Themes

Data in this study were collected through minutes and audiotapes from team meetings, interviews, field notes kept by three participants, and field notes maintained by the principal of general observations. These methods of collecting information were used to answer the research questions in this study. The findings of the study are presented through

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major themes that emerged from an analysis of data.

Themes emerged as participants described their perceptions regarding the effects of the action research project. These themes related to the research questions and are displayed in Table 1. The research questions dealing with the effect action research had on participants, the advantages and disadvantages of the process, and whether action research was an effective vehicle for bringing about change at Albert Harris are listed. These themes were selected because participants elaborated on these areas more in their field notes and their interviews. The themes were:

1.   Narrowing and focusing - refers to the group's ability to zoom in on one problem and to concentrate on solutions. Participants indicated that being able to focus on one problem at a time was an advantage to using the action research process. There were thirteen staff members who served on the school improvement team, but the impact of the work done by this group was felt by everyone.

2.   Involving the staff in the problem-solving process - refers to allowing staff members opportunities to provide feedback,

freedom to express their opinions and to share ideas. Until their involvement with this action research study, participants did not have an opportunity to give input into the decision made for the school. Their view of the decision-making process in the school was top-down. Some even admitted that they did not know how decisions were made. The action research process provided participants with first-hand experience with shared decision-making and school reform.

3.   Empowerment - refers to the staff members feeling that they are given a voice in deciding what course of action should take place and the power to make some decisions. Participants reported that they grew professionally from their involvement in the schoolwide action research. They felt valued and respected because their ideas and opinions were taken into consideration when mapping out strategies to improve the school.

4.   Gaining insight from a variety of sources - refers to the team's ability to gather information from research materials, other

school systems, professional literature, courses, conferences, workshops, as well as from each other school divisions. Through their participation on the school improvement team and the action research project, staff members used a variety of resources to gain information. This included professional discussions with each other. Team members revealed that they had read material that they may not have read and thought of ideas that they may not have thought of if they had not participated in the action research process.

5. Time - refers to staff's perception regarding the amount of time the action research process takes. More time was the one thing that was needed. This was a disadvantage noted by all participants. A great deal of time was spend in team meetings, gathering information to share with team members, implementing the actions recommended by the group, and evaluating their effectiveness.

6. Looking at options - refers to the opportunity to research a variety of strategies to implement and make choices that meet

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the needs of the school. One participant describe the staff

previous means of problem-solving as "taking a stab in the

dark". With action research, team members identified a variety

of options available for improving the morale of the staff.

Identifying a variety of options allowed the team an

opportunity to select the actions that were more suitable for the

people who worked in the school and not a generic remedy for

the problem.

7.   Branching out into other areas of concern - refers to

participants' desires to address additional concerns that

surfaced as a result of in-depth discussions of the problem

being studied. School improvement team members identified

other areas of concern as the issue of morale was discussed.

These concerns were directly linked to the problem of morale.

Attention was given to addressing issues that surfaced.

8.   Interacting with others - refers to communication that was

established between the members of the school improvement

team and with all members of the staff. Based on a review of

the data, participants appreciated having an opportunity to engage in professional deliberations with colleagues. This was lacking among the staff prior to the implementation of action research. Team members reported that they enjoyed having an opportunity to share ideas and get to know members of the staff.

9.   The power to change things-refers to the participates perception that some strategies for improving morale could not be implemented by the group because approval for policy or procedural changes are made by the superintendent and the school board. As a result of identifying options for improving morale, the notions to lengthen the school year and the school day were presented. The length of the school year and the school day can not change without approval from the superintendent and the school board. This also brought into question the effectiveness of action research if the group does not have the power to change things.

10.   Immediate change-refers to the participants view of action

research being an effective vehicle for change because as strategies were implemented, changes began to occur immediately. School improvement team members considered this to be an advantage for the action research process. It seemed important to them to put their ideas into action and to witness the changes taking place.

The research question involving staff development, the role of the principal, and using action research to solve problems in the future were answered by participants in short, direct terms. The themes that emerged were present in all three data sources. These themes are addressed in the research questions sections later in this chapter.

Table 1
Relations of Emerged Themes
and Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes
1. What effect does using action research have on participants as they engage in the problem- solving process?	• Empowerment • Looking at options • Interacting with others • Narrowing and focusing
2. What are the advantages of using action research in the problem-solving process as perceived by participants?	• Narrowing and focusing • Involving staff in the problem-solving process • Empowerment • Gaining insight from a variety of sources • Branching out into other areas
3. What are the disadvantages of using action research in the problem-solving process as perceived by participants?	• Time • The power to change things
4. Does action research provide an effective vehicle for implementing change in a school?	• Immediate change • The power to change things
5. What types of staff development are necessary to implement action research in a school?	• Basic introduction • Opportunity for hands-on training • Extending training to others
6. What is the role of the principal in the action research model?	• Participant • Guide
7. How can participants use their knowledge of action research to solve problems in the future?	• Classroom application • Use throughout the school with committee work

The effects matrix (Table 2) exhibits the outcomes of the action research as reported by participants from their field notes and interviews. Three participants maintained field notes, three were interviewed, and the principal recorded observations in the form of field note also.

Table 3 displays the outcomes of action research as described by the principal. The effects are presented in the form of direct quotations from the data collected. There were direct positive and negative effects to using this process as well as side effects. Direct effects were outcomes that were expected or anticipated. Side effects were outcomes that were unexpected surprises that occurred during the project. Based on the evidence, it is clear that there were more positive direct effects than negative or side effects. Both teachers, and the principal viewed action research as having more advantages than disadvantages.

The effects matrix reflects the same themes that emerged as answers to the research questions stated for this study.

Table 2
Effects Matrix: The Effects of Using Action Research on Teachers

Direct Effects (+)	Direct Effects (-)	Side Effects
Interview - Teacher F "I felt more empowered as a teacher."	**Interview -Teacher C** "It required a great deal of time to do the necessary research."	**Interview - Focus Group** "People asked me what kind of power group is this."
Interview - Teacher F "It gave me a better picture of what's going on in the school."	**Interview - Teacher F** "I was uncertain of how information was to be gathered from other faculty members . . goals were unclear."	**Interview - Focus Group** "Some staff members who are not on the team feel like we are being secretive and hiding things from them."
Interview - Teacher C "We established a definite approach for solving our problems."	**Field Notes - Teacher B** "I got confused at times about which direction we were headed . . . "	
Interview - Teacher E "I got to meet a lot of interesting people . . . I got to know them better."	**Field Notes - Teacher D** "I always felt that we didn't spend enough time reading, reflecting, and doing in-depth research."	
Interview - Teacher F "I got to see and understand the real problems of the school."	**Interview - Teacher C** "At times, I felt overwhelmed by the volume of additional work put into the project."	
Interview - Teacher C "I guess this got me thinking and reading some information that may not have read and helped me see that our problems are universal."		
Interview - Teacher C "...it provided me with some strategies to solve problems in my classroom."		
Interview - Teacher F "I gained some new ideas, some new information and some new strategies."		

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Direct Effects (+)	Direct Effects (-)	Side Effects
Field Notes - Teacher B "I think it gave us focus without just sitting and complaining."		
Interview - Teacher F "...learning about this process helped me to grow---just becoming familiar with the school itself."		
Interview - Teacher F "...it helped me to narrow things down and see the actual problems."		

Table 3
Effects Matrix: The Effects of Using Action Research on the Principal

Direct Effects (+)	Direct Effects (-)	Side Effects
"Action research helped us to organize addressing our problem with morale." (p. 16) ·	"I felt guilty asking team members to take on anything else." (p. 37)	"Two members of our School Improvement Team stated to me that they have used the group processing skills in the committees meetings that they chair." (p. 52)
"...what we are doing in our SIT meetings is spreading to other committees and functions throughout the school." (p. 54)	"Getting people to buy into new innovations is an overwhelming task." (p. 37)	"One of the school improvement team members who serve on the division wide Retention Committee asked me to help with gathering research information on retaining students. She is applying action research to activities outside of team meetings." (p. 59)
"I was happy to see our facilitator using the quality management tools that Sue suggested." (p. 46)	"There isn't enough time in the day to do everything that is required of us." (p. 38)	" I have been moved to another school. Two of the school improvement team members are moving with me. One asked if we were going to continue using action research to solve problems in our new school." (p. 53)
"Needless to say, I was pleased to see the team moving forward with the action research and sharing information." (p. 47)	"I hope team members aren't overwhelmed with loads of additional reading." (p. 38)	

Direct Effects (+)	Direct Effects (-)	Side Effects
"One thing that came to mind is the fact that as an administrator, I need to provide more opportunities for our staff to interact and exchange ideas." (p. 48)	"External forces have created concerns for our action research project. Having to deal with a new superintendent, new SOLs, a new English curriculum, and Pay-for-Performance definitely made implementing the study more difficult." (p. 36)	
"It was a very productive session. Spirits were high. There were smiles, laughter, and friendly conversations held. This project has allowed our staff to interact professionally. Relationships have formed." (p. 47)	"We are having problems trying to find a suitable time to meet. Several SIT members are actively involved with other school committees or division-wide committees. People are working feverishly to accomplish all assigned tasks." (p. 6)	
"Discussions branched out into other areas. As the topic of school calendars progressed, our conversation moved to year-round schools." (p. 26)	"We talked about the concerns that were within our control and those things that are beyond our control." (p. 23)	
"...the desire to look at research information on new topics is a direct outcome of our action research. What we are doing in team meetings is beginning to have an effect." (p. 27)	"Maybe this was a good session because I was not present. Perhaps I need to make myself scarce from time to time. Maybe not being present will allow team members to be more open, honest, and willing to participate without fear of what I might think." (p. 47)	
"I noticed that even though the meeting was over, no one left for several minutes. Informal groups formed and side conversations continued regarding what was discussed during the session. There were smiles, laughter, pats on the back, and hugs. Genuine concern was expressed between team members." (p. 48)	"A major drawback to action research is the fact that it is extremely time consuming." (p. 38)	

Direct Effects (+)	Direct Effects (-)	Side Effects
"Morale is not only improving among the group, it is improving throughout the school." (p. 48)	"Meeting bi-weekly and spending time reading has called for team members to do a great deal of work in addition to their regular work load." (p. 38)	
"Having everyone to participate in identifying the problem was the most positive aspect of our action research project." (p. 43)		
"The fact that everyone is focusing on one problem to solve is a strength." (p. 37)		
"If nothing else happens during this action research study, we have developed several good leaders who can and will benefit our total school program." (p. 42)		

Note. Quotes were taken from the field notes maintained by the principal.

Research Question 1

"What effect does using action research have on participants as they engage in the problem-solving process?" The interview data and field notes maintained by the participants and principal indicated that none of the participants had been introduced to action research prior to getting involved with this study. This was a new concept to everyone.

Prior to organizing the action research project for the school, the staff's process for solving problems was described as lacking focus and information

> Teacher C
> "Well, prior to action research, I think our problem-solving process was a little more informal. We always feel that we try to get other people's input, but there wasn't emphasis on seeing what other people were doing and reading research articles. I don't think there was as much focus."

regarding what was going on in other school both within and outside of the school division. There was no formal process for problem-solving in the school even though efforts were made to get input from everyone. Consensus building was used as part of the decision-making process before implementing action research. Staff members were made aware of what was going on. They did not feel that they were as well informed about choices as they should have been.

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According to participants, they were not always fully aware of the problems that were experienced throughout the school. They could only see

> Teacher F
> "Maybe as a faculty, we were not as aware of what was going on. Maybe we were not as aware of our choices and why decisions were made the way that they were. Action research has made me more aware of our choices and the philosophy behind making certain decisions."

what was going on from a limited point of view. What mattered to them was what affected them the most. From their perspective, decisions were made by small committees or individuals versus going through a process.

Participating in the action research process helped members of the school improvement team to see the big

> Teacher F
> "It gives me a better picture of what's going on in the school. We got to see some of the concerns that students have as well as concerns on the minds of staff members."

picture. Team members became more aware of issues relating to every aspect of the school program. They revealed that being involved in this process helped them to get to know members of the faculty that they did not know. Due to the

> Teacher E
> "I got to meet a lot of interesting people. In fact, you know, I knew a lot of teachers by name, but I got to know them better.

size of the staff, they did not feel that they had a chance to communicate

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with everyone. Interaction was limited to those people who work directly together on teams. Participants stated that being a part of the action research project provided them with an opportunity to interact with staff members from various teams throughout the school.

Participants reported that the action research process promoted professional growth. Participating in the project caused them to do more reading and thinking according to the data collected. It provided opportunities for staff members to intelligently discuss information that they had read, to exchange ideas, and to share strategies that they discovered. Prior to this project, participants did not feel that they had been given a chance to openly discuss research information and what was going on in other schools in the community and around the country.

Based on data collected, a major effect that action research had on participants as they engaged in the problem-solving process was the fact that it helped with narrowing

Teacher E
"I don't see or hear a lot of "yip-yip" between people because they seem to be coming together more and talking and sharing their ideas and doing things together rather than alone. Morale as a whole seems to be different. A more pleasurable, friendly working atmosphere of people coming together and interacting in a positive manner."

and focusing on one specific problem. Narrowing and focusing were noted

as advantages to using action research. This is addressed more in depth

later in this chapter.

Empowerment was

identified as another effect of

using action research. During

> Teacher B
> "I felt more empowered as a teacher because I was made to feel that my opinion counts. We were allowed to be a part of the decision-making process."

Phase Five (Taking Action), team members were given the opportunity to

make recommendations for the actions or identify strategies to be

implemented.

> Teacher F
> "We got everyone involved and that was really good. I liked that. We determined our greatest needs that we wanted to take care of immediately. I really appreciate having a chance to do that. As soon as we saw things that needed to change, we were given the power to make the changes right away. All along the way, as we have gone through the project, as we could change things, we did. We had a chance to say what we wanted."

Participants further noted

that they felt support from the

administration in allowing the

staff to take responsibility for

decision-making. They

identified this as a major boost to

morale and the feeling of empowerment.

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Another point that evolved from the data was the fact that participants determined that after researching and sharing ideas, they

> Teacher C
> "We have realized that the school as a whole having similar problems and the research has helped us to find new ideas that are beneficial."

discovered that the problem of low morale in the workplace is a universal problem.

> Principal's Field Notes
> "We brought closure to prioritizing the areas of concern for our staff. There were three areas that received large numbers of votes. Morale, of all things, got 235 points, communication 151, and curriculum 137. I was shocked! I was under the impression that morale was high and staff members were generally satisfied with working at Albert Harris."

Research information, interviews and field notes emphasized that it is hard to please everyone all of the time regardless of what is done.

> Teacher C
> "The greatest effect that participating in the action research process has had on me is that it has got me thinking and it got me reading some information that I may not have read or thought about otherwise. Participating in the research aspect has made me realize that our problems are universal--that our problems are shared by others."

At the beginning of the action research study, an area of focus was identified by the researcher. Things were not completely clear at the problem development stage. Based on discussions held by the school improvement team the previous school year, the focus for the next school term was to

concentrate on assessing student performance and methods of reporting to parents.

The members of the team changed as well as their area of concern. The shift in their focus is attributed to several factors. One factor was the appointment of a new superintendent for the division and a different set of goals and objectives.

Another factor that affected the direction of the school improvement team was a new Pay-for-Performance plan put in place by the new superintendent. Morale was the overwhelming choice of the staff and the area they wanted to address.

Improving the morale of the staff was rejected by the superintendent's review board. They sent the objective back for revisions because morale was not student-oriented nor did it focus on student achievement.

> Teacher A
> "Staff morale seems to be an issue that's hard to put a finger on. I guess I feel there will always be the bell curve among staff from very positive members to very negative. Professionals must be self motivated. We must be child-centered and not self-centered.

The staff revised the school objective. These objectives were directly related to student achievement. They were clear-cut and measurable. Staff

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members selected improving reading and writing scores on the Literacy

Passport Test. The school improvement team was asked to continue the

action research study and to focus on morale.

It was perceived by all participants that the effects of engaging in the action research process empowered teachers, assisted with the development of their professional skills, reinforced the fact that moral problems are universal, provided an opportunity to get a better

Teacher A
"As a committee member, I don't think there is any one solution to our school situation [low morale]. However, I do think the committee made a good suggestions to address each issue. I think as a group, we have realized that we can't please everyone."

understanding of the total operation of the school, and fostered interaction

with members of the staff. All participants reported becoming more

comfortable with the process as the project progressed.

Research Question 2

"What are the advantages of using action research in the problem-

solving process as perceived by participants?" There were several

advantages for using action research in the problem-solving process as

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identified by participants.

Teacher A
"We had an inservice session on quality training. Although the session was informative, I was not sure where it would fit in with the committee's function (since I did not know the function of the committee). I assumed it would relate to the objective we had chosen for our school. Vibes from other committee members led me to believe that they were not sure of our mission either."

Narrowing and focusing on a specific problem was given most frequently as an advantage for using action research. Participants indicated there was direction and purpose for what was being done. This was not the case at the very beginning of the project. In both the principal's field notes and the field notes maintained by

Teacher B
"As we discussed the issues of burnout and morale, I felt that there was some sympathy, but also frustration among the members about how to address these issues. I was uncertain of how information was to be gathered from other faculty members or whether certain people had been assigned to get more opinions...I got confused at times about which direction we were headed with the information we had."

participants, there was evidence that goals for the project were not completely clear. Initially, there was the feeling of disjointedness and inconsistency as the project began. Action research was something new to everyone. This was identified as being a reason for the problems experienced at the start.

Teacher B

"During this group session, there was a definite balance of positive and negative. We always have someone who can turn a negative into a positive and I like that. We really got into our discussion of what some of the articles pointed out as ways to battle low morale and burnout. There seemed to be a great deal of professional concern for creating bonds for teachers as well as for the whole faculty. I gained a lot from listening to others express their concerns and ideas. I look for the group to become more excited because I certainly am. I am seeing progress. I like the structure that the committee has: definite topics, definite assignments, definite dates...this team has direction!"

As time progressed, the perception of not having clear goals disappeared. Meetings became more interactive and ideas were generated. For most participants, things were more positive and they were able to identify the specific goals of the group.

During interviews, when asked to identify the advantages for using action research, "It gave us focus," was echoed by many of those who were involved.

Teacher F

"I think it [the action research process] really helped us to narrow down and focus. I think a lot of times, with such a large faculty, we get off onto too many topics. Everyone is concerned about different things. I think this helped us to narrow it and focus on a major problem that we needed to fix. It helps to focus on that problem versus going into all different directions trying to solve different things. We focused on this [low morale] and worked to solve it."

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Data indicates that participants did not consider school improvement team

> **Teacher F**
> "Using the quality tools of naming a facilitator, recorder, and time keeper, was excellent. It kept us focused and on task."

meetings to be gripe sessions. The action research process provided a focus from which to operate. Everyone had the same material to read and

> **Teacher C**
> "I think it [the action research process] gave us focus without just sitting and complaining. It really gave us a focus where we could look through these articles and say, "Well, this is something we could do, this might help--this is beyond our control, but this is something we can pass on elsewhere."

everyone came together to brainstorm possible solutions to the problem.

Not only did the action research process help the team to focus on a specific problem, using group processing skills and other procedures for conducting more efficient meetings, team

> **Teacher E**
> " I like the idea of discussion. I like the idea of not only discussing among the group, but taking what you have back to the general staff and allowing them to have feedback. It's not just us making decisions. Everyone has a chance to be involved. Everyone can see that we are working to solve our problems."

meetings were more effective.

From the interview data, another advantage to using the action

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research model was the fact that it involved the staff in the problem-solving

process.

Empowering teachers emerged as a theme for advantages to using action research as a process for solving

Teacher F
" I really like the fact that it keeps everybody involved. It's not just eight people around a table making the decisions for the faculty of eighty or more people. I think it is good because it involves the whole school."

problems. Data collected revealed that staff members appreciated the

opportunity to participate in decision-making. School improvement team meetings gave them a chance to engage in meaningful professional level discussions with colleagues.

Teacher A
"I especially like the idea of teachers being empowered to do and make changes. I appreciate the fact that our staff members have the opportunity to give input and feedback to each other. It makes our solutions to our problems more workable."

Being given time to collaborate with peers is one practice that participants

reported as a need. Everyone appreciated knowing that they were being

heard and that their concerns were being addressed in a timely manner.

Staff members could see the results of what was being done.

Gaining insight from a variety of sources was identified as a strength

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in the action research process.

Gathering information to share

was one responsibility given to

each member of the team. Some

> Teacher C
> "What I am seeing now, is we are really looking at what else is out there. We are looking at what other people are doing and that gives us a lot more insight. We have come up with things that we may never have come up with."

members shared articles from their professional reading. Information was

downloaded from the Internet. The Educational Research Service (ERS)

was contacted to get information and some team members attended a one

day seminar addressing negativity in the workplace. All data sources

confirmed that gathering information to assist with making decisions and

implementing effective strategies was an advantage.

> Teacher D
> "One advantage that I see is that we got a lot of different ideas. We went through a lot of literature that was brought in. We got information on what other schools were doing. It sort of gives us diversified ideas about what others are doing to meet their needs and bring about change."

While conducting an

extensive study of morale within

the school, school improvement

team members took a long hard

look at the total school program

and method of operation. From this in-depth study, ideas for improvement

branched out into other areas of interest. The issue of morale was linked to

the school calendar, time for teachers to collaborate, time for staff

development, time for teachers to do clerical tasks, school committee

assignments, preparing for the Southern Association of Colleges and

Schools' (SACS) School Renewal process, problems with getting

substitutes, managing discipline problems, implementing the revised

Standards of Learning (SOLs), and implementing the Pay-for-Performance

objectives. Minutes from school improvement team meetings reinforce the

fact that a variety of issues were addressed. These issues were both directly

and indirectly related to teacher morale. Actions were taken to improve

morale and to address each area of concern identified by the staff.

Research Question 3

The advantages of using

action research as a problem-

solving process far outweigh the

disadvantages. One major

disadvantage reported from all

> Teacher A
> "While becoming empowered is exciting and rewarding, I'm beginning to wonder if all this empowerment is going to lead to experiment. Although teachers want to be able to help make decisions within the school, there is not enough time for participating in this type of activity.

data sources was lack of time. Time to collaborate, time for staff

development, time to read the research material, and time for discussing the

information in-depth were each cited as a disadvantage to using this

process. The second disadvantage that emerged was that sometimes things

are beyond the control of the group. The power to change certain things

was in the hands of central office administration or the school board.

An unexpected side effect

of the action research process

was those who did not

> Teacher C
> "The main disadvantage I see right now in our attempt to solve our problem is that some things are beyond our control. I don't see this as a disadvantage with the model itself."

participate in the team making the decisions felt isolated and resented those

who are involved. It was reported by one participant that a few of the staff

members considered the school improvement team to be a "power group."

Even though staff members were active in selecting the problem to address

during the study, at the start of the second phase of the project, they were

not directly involved with reviewing the data and discussing alternatives.

Some faculty members viewed school improvement team meetings as

being secretive. Because they were not informed of what was going on,

they felt that the school improvement team was hiding things. This problem

was remedied by providing minutes of all meetings to every staff member

and giving updates of the deliberations during grade level or departmental

meetings and at faculty meetings.

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Participants perceived that there are more advantages to using the action research process to solve problems than there were disadvantages. Because time was brought up frequently, it is considered to be a major drawback among a significant number of participants.

Research Question 4

"Does action research provide an effective vehicle for implementing change in a school?" Interview transcripts, and field notes showed that participants agreed that the action research model does provide an effective vehicle for implementing change in a school.

Using the action research process has not only involved everyone, it has also established a procedure for identifying and solving problems in the school.

Even though action research was considered an

Teacher E
"I really do feel that this was an effective vehicle for bringing about change in our school. I think so because things started changing right away. I think some of the confusion settled down. People were really interested. You know the little chart we had in the hall? People were interested in what other people were saying or doing, and they were counting and listening and watching. Then we came right back with ideas of how to go about improving our problems. I think doing this really made a difference."

effective vehicle for implementing change, there was a general consensus among the participants that there were some things that seemed to be

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beyond the team's ability to change. The team's recommendations for handling the things that were beyond their control were to take these suggestions to the next level and make sure the concerns were addressed.

Efforts were made to address all issues that were raised during the action research project. All participants viewed this process as an effective vehicle for implementing change in the school. Whether the team had the power to make the changes or not, actions were taken to solve all problems that were identified.

Research Question 5

"What types of staff development are necessary to implement action research in a school?" In the initial proposal for this action research project, plans were made to schedule an outside consultant to provide staff development training for the school improvement team. Due to unforeseen complications, no consultant was acquired for training. During a discussion of additional training in action research with the school improvement team, team members felt comfortable with the training they had received. There were three training sessions held for participants. One was a basic introduction presented to the entire staff during a faculty meeting on

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September 24, 1996. The concept was introduced to everyone in an effort to attract participants from all teams throughout the school. The second training session was conducted by Sue Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Staff Development in Danville on October 15, 1996. During this training session, members of the school improvement committee were taught to use quality tools in the problem-solving process. The group was actively involved in applying these skills through role playing and brainstorming.

Teacher A
"I think just a brief introduction on what the major format was as far as brainstorming and focusing, selecting your areas, and starting to gather your research was appropriate training. I didn't think that we needed any more information. The meetings that we did had covered all that. I considered that to be helpful."

This training session was videotaped and recorded on audiotape. Unfortunately, there was a problem with the videotape. It could not be used to provide data for review. The audiotape was available for analysis.

The third training session was a general review of the action research process that took place during a school improvement team meeting November 12, 1996. Team members reported that the training that they received was sufficient for participating in the action research project.

Another theme that surfaced as data was analyzed revealed team members' desire to learn as they went along. They stated that they did not

> Teacher C
> "I think we have been exposed to this enough. We can either spend more time training or spend our time working on the problem. We can learn more as we go. Hands-on is the best mode for learning. I say let's move on."

want to have too many inservice sessions prolonging the process.

Participants showed concern about additional training for staff members who did not serve on the school improvement team. Team

> Teacher F
> "At one of our initial meetings, having Sue Davis to instruct us was beneficial. That with the two basic introduction and review sessions were ample....However, if it is to be used in committee meetings around the school, more training will be needed. It would need to be extended to other staff members too.

members have expressed the desire to use the action research process throughout the school with other committee work and in the classroom. When this process spreads to others in the school, more training will be needed.

Based on the analysis of data, participants identified the staff development needed to implement action research as a basic introduction of the concept and an opportunity to participate in hands-on application of the

skills. It was further noted that in order for all staff members to apply the action research model to committee work throughout the school, additional training is essential.

Research Question 6

"What is the role of the principal in an action research model?" Participants viewed the role of the principal during the action research process as initiator of the project, an educator of the process, a guide, and a "regular" member of the team. The principal perceived her role to be that of a member of the group as well.

Despite the fact that the principal was a participant in the process, she was sometimes viewed as the one who

Teacher E
"Well, you weren't the principal then. You were a committee member and I like that. I saw you just sort of sitting back and just being one of us--or helping the process to go along, but not taking over, not being in charge of, but just being a part of, and I didn't see you as the principal".

> Teacher C
> "You were there to guide in any questions that we might have in regards to the total operation of the school. You participated as a committee member, but you also played an administrative role clarifying policy and procedure."

had the answers to some of the questions. People continued to look to the principal for guidance and direction. At times, school improvement team members expected the principal to set the parameters even when she was not facilitating. When team members turned to the principal

> Teacher C
> "I saw you as a participant. Other than when we first got started, you had to help a little bit in explaining, but once you turned that role over to the facilitator, I felt that you were there just to participate, reading the same articles, and listening to the input."

to ask for clarification and policy procedure, she was viewed as the principal.

Research Question 7

"How can participants use their knowledge of action research to solve problems in the future?" All of the participants

> Teacher D
> "I have already used it in my committee meetings. We can use it as we implement the new School Renewal committee work. Action research is a good tool with students. We should teach them how to use it in their lives."

interviewed reported that they perceived the action research process as beneficial and that they hope this is how the staff will solve their problems

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in the future. They all also viewed this experience as an opportunity to gain

knowledge to use in solving classroom problems. All thirteen of the

participants saw action research as a means to improve the way problems

are solved throughout the school.

A review of the participants' field notes revealed that team members wanted to see the action research process used

> Teacher E
> "I hope we just keep it up! I think this is the way of the '90s. We have to realize that people need to express themselves and not be told what to do. It just makes a person feel more like a person when they can express their ideas and others truly listen."

with school committees outside the school improvement team. When the

question of using action research in the future was posed to the entire team

during closure of the project, several team members shared their ideas for

application.

In addition to using action research with committee work throughout the school, participants indicated it could be used in the classroom, when

> Teacher F
> I've used the group processing skills a little bit of an extent in my classroom. I have used timekeepers and facilitators and working in groups. I have encouraged note-taking during group work and that type of thing. So I have used that aspect, and also I have allowed the kids in my room to vote on certain things and stress their opinions. I plan to continue doing that."

involved in church work, and when doing research for other committees.

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The most positive aspect

of using action research in the

problem-solving process seemed

to be the fact that people were

given a chance to say what they

Teacher E
"I can see us trying to do this at church. Our pastor sort of sits back and acts just like one of the members when we are discussing matters. I can also see using this in the classroom with students, giving them an opportunity to say what they need, and allowing them to ask questions about what they want to know about the subject area."

want and ask questions about what takes place. Whether it is in a school,

church, or other organizations, most people want a chance to get involved

and to give input on matters that affect them.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Further Research Implications

This final chapter summarizes this research study designed to investigate the perceived effects of using action research in the problem-solving process. Attention is given to a summary of the results, the conclusions drawn from the study, recommendations, and implications for further research.

Summary and Results

During this research project, key concepts emerged reinforcing the idea that action research is perceived as being an effective tool to use in the problem-solving process. Reflective journal entries from both the principal's and teachers' field notes, as well as information reported during teachers' interviews provided evidence to support that using action research had positive direct effects on participants.

Professional Growth

Participants shared that being a part of the action research project helped them to grow and develop professionally. Prior to being introduced

to this process as a part of the study, none of the participants had used action research before. Learning the process was the acquisition of a new skill. The action research model provided a step by step procedure for participants to use in an effort to solve problems both in and out of the classroom.

Seeing the "Big Picture"

Prior to participating on the school improvement team, many participants admitted having a limited view of what actually went on in the school and limited knowledge of the decision-making process throughout the school. Being a part of the research project gave participants an opportunity to see the school from a different perspective. They got to see the "big picture." Seeing the "big picture" occurred mostly during Phase One of the action research process. Phase One was the problem identification stage. There was an overwhelming number of concerns identified during the initial brainstorming session. Participants admitted they had no idea some staff members felt the way they did about various aspects of the school. Selecting morale as the problem to address during the action research project was surprising to most participants.

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Empowerment

The feeling of empowerment was another positive direct effect of implementing action research as an instrument to assist with problem-solving. Prior to participating on the school improvement team, some participants revealed they had no idea regarding how and why some decisions were made in the school. Most of those who gave input stated that they felt decisions were made by one or two people and sometimes by committees. Participating in this research project not only helped them to understand how and why some decisions are made, it also gave them a voice in identifying the problem and determining the course of action to take in solving the problem. Having an opportunity to give their opinions made all of the participants feel good about themselves and what they were contributing to the school.

Interacting with Others

Participants reported that having an opportunity to interact with others was another positive direct effect of using action research. Before involving the staff in the action research process, there were limited opportunities for sitting down to discuss issues using research as a basis for

the discussions. Most participants only interacted with those who worked

directly with them on teams or those who worked in the same general

location. Action research brought people together throughout the school

and created an avenue for generating dialogue and building relationships.

Advantages to Using Action Research

There were several other direct positive effects or advantages to using

action research in the problem-solving process as perceived by members of

the school improvement team. These advantages were identified as: 1)

narrowing and focusing on one issue at a time, 2) involving the entire staff

in the problem-solving process, 3) empowering teachers and giving them

ownership in the decision-making process, 4) giving staff members an

opportunity to gain insight for a variety of sources, and 5) branching out to

address concerns in other areas.

Disadvantages to Using Action Research

Along with the advantages, there were some negative direct effects or

disadvantages and unexpected side effects. The major disadvantage cited

by all participants was time. It takes a tremendous amount of time to locate

and read relevant research materials on topics of concern. It also took a

great deal of time to conduct in-depth discussions on the information that was shared. Participants took on the challenge of being on the school improvement team in addition to performing their regularly assigned duties and responsibilities.

Realizing that some things were beyond the control of the school improvement team was noted as another disadvantage to this research project. It was brought to the attention of the participants in the early stages of the project that approval from central office personnel would have to be given for some of the solutions offered.

Finally, an unexpected negative outcome of this project was the feeling of isolation and deception that some of those who were not on the school improvement team experienced. Through comments made to a participant, it was revealed that a few of the staff members viewed the school improvement team as a "power group" trying to hide things.

Based on data collected from teachers' interviews, journals, and principal's field notes, action research is perceived to be an effective vehicle to utilize in bringing about change in a school.

Conclusions

The data gathered and analyzed as a part of this study answered the research questions and provided evidence that participants perceived action research to be an effective vehicle to use in the problem-solving process. Using action research allowed the school improvement team to focus on one problem at a time. Time and attention was given to gathering as much information as possible about morale and teacher burnout. Suggestions were made regarding ways to combat the problem. These recommendations were implemented and the morale of the staff improved.

Morale Improved

Participants and other staff members believed that the problem of low morale within the school was improved as a result of implementing action research. Evidence to support this conclusion was revealed in the results of a staff survey developed by the school improvement team as part of the School Renewal process for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). This survey was developed by members of the school improvement team. The main purpose for conducting this survey was to determine the school's needs and to establish objectives for the 1997-98

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school term. On the survey, teachers were asked to rate the morale of the staff. Of the 80 staff members surveyed, 78% indicated they felt morale had improved. Only 10% stated it did not improve and 12% saw no difference. There was 100% return on the surveys because it was completed during a staff meeting. Those who were absent were asked to complete and return surveys to a member of the school improvement team.

Further evidence to support the conclusion that morale did improve was comments made by staff members at a social to celebrate successes that had taken place during the year and statements made by several staff members at the end-of-the-year luncheon. Individuals commented that there was a sense of family felt throughout the building. Some stated that there was a feeling of love and concern present and people were interacting more both during and after school hours.

There were several major themes that emerged from this study. They include empowerment, narrowing and focusing, involving staff in the problem-solving process, gaining additional insight from a variety of sources, branching out to address other concerns, increased staff developing, and the understanding constraints of time and control.

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Empowerment

All participants reported that they grew professionally from their involvement in action research and that they felt empowered because they were given an opportunity to express their opinions. Simmons (1987) indicated that the action research process influences participants' thinking skills, attitudes and efficacy as professionals, attitudes toward continued professional development, and willingness to communicate with colleagues. To further support the concept of professional growth and empowerment, Zelazek and Lamson (1992) believed that action research is a process that has proven successful in providing a sense of professional empowerment for participants involved in the research. These theories are validated by the data collected from participants' field notes and interviews.

Other advantages or positive direct effects to the action research process noted by participants included: narrowing and focusing on one problem, involving staff in the problem-solving process, gaining additional insight from a variety of sources, and branching out to address other concerns.

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Narrowing and Focusing

As stated earlier, using action research allowed the school improvement team to focus on one problem of interest to the entire staff. By narrowing and focusing on morale, attention was given to addressing this. A focused, concentrated effort was provided to study ways to improve the morale of the faculty and staff of the school. The school improvement team spent a great amount of time gathering information about the problem, discussing strategies to improve it, implementing recommended changes, and evaluating the results.

Members of the school improvement team identified having everyone focus on one particular problem as the biggest factor in improving staff morale. Having everyone in the school concentrating on doing whatever was necessary to make the school climate more positive was instrumental in improving staff morale.

Involving Staff in the Problem-solving Process

Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz (1990) presented the theory that participation by teachers in planning and decision-making has advantages in the development of better plans, improving teachers' receptiveness, morale,

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and motivation. This theory was supported by the results of this action research project. Most of the participants in this study cited involving others in the decision-making process as an advantage of action research. They seemed to be excited about an opportunity to provide input and to have a hand in bringing about change in the school.

Gaining Additional Insight from a Variety of Sources

School improvement team members gathered information for the study from a variety of sources. They used the INTERNET, educational research journals, periodicals, and they talked to their friends and colleagues who worked in other schools throughout the state and in neighboring states. Gathering information from a variety of sources was identified as another advantage of the action research process. Participants were enlightened and their knowledge of the subject was enhanced as they browsed through professional literature to gather information to share during team meetings.

Using a variety of sources to collect information broadened the range of options available for implementation by the school improvement team. Having several strategies to implement, increased the chances of selecting options that would improve the morale of the staff.

Branching Out to Address Other Concerns

As school improvement team members discussed information that was gathered and situations that were occurring around the school, other areas of concern surfaced. Team members identified several issues that needed attention in addition to addressing the problem of morale. Also, as the causes of low morale were identified, team members offered immediate solutions to some of the problems bringing about immediate changes. Some of the immediate changes were easy to make. Until the challenge of conducting this action research study was initiated, little attention had been given to correcting or improving any of the other situations.

With the inception of the new SACS accreditation process, the school improvement team viewed what was being done during team meetings as the exact practices that were a part of the School Renewal process. The team used minutes from our meetings as documentation that the school had identified areas of concern and that efforts were being made to continuously improve the total school. The school improvement team also surveyed the staff to determine the goals and objectives that should be established for the 1997-98 school term.

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Constraints

The findings of this study also corroborate the constraints or disadvantages of implementing action research. The constraints of using action research in the problem-solving process were time, the feeling of isolation that emerged when participates were not aware of what was happening during team meetings, and question of who was in control because some strategies could not be implemented without approval from the superintendent and the school board.

Finding time to do research and planning while teaching a full load was identified by McKernan (1987) as a major drawback to the action research process. Time was sited by all participants as the major disadvantage. Some felt overwhelmed with the burden of doing additional reading, spending extra time in long school improvement team meetings, and maintaining their regular duties and assignments.

The feeling of isolation was an unexpected side effect of the research project that raises concern. There was no indication from the review of the literature that a feeling of isolation, distrust, or deception could be generated by utilizing the action research model. This was reported by one participant

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and it seemed to reflect the feelings of only a few staff members.

Staff Development

As for the types of staff development necessary to implement action research in a school, participants stated that all they needed was a basic introduction of the model and an opportunity to extend their skills by having hands-on involvement with the process. It was also noted that those who were not directly involved with the process should receive training to enhance their knowledge of the concept and to be more receptive of the options presented by the school improvement team.

Role of the Principal

The role of the principal was participant observer. This called for the individual to study the process, the other participants, and herself during the research project. Other participants viewed the principal as the same, a participant observer, the initiator of the process, and a guide when needed.

At times, it was extremely hard for the teachers to view the principal as a participant and not the principal. They frequently asked questions for clarification and approval. They were reminded throughout the study that the principal was a participant and not the principal during school

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improvement team meetings.

There was one meeting that the principal was not able to attend due to an emergency. The facilitator took charge and moved the group through the session without any problems. From listening to the audiotape and reading the minutes taken during this meeting, it was noted by the principal that perhaps the group functioned better without her presence. Perhaps team members felt less threatened and free to express themselves more openly without the principal being there to make judgements about their ideas and opinions. From that point on, the principal listened more and spoke less. When questions were directed to her, comments were limited.

Future Applications

Participants revealed that they planned to use their knowledge of action research to solve problems in the future. These could be problems that occur in the classroom and outside the classroom. There were indications that participants planned to use their newly acquired skills in other committee work throughout the school, in their church work, and when doing research for required classes in their masters programs.

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Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the data collected from this study. These recommendations include concerns that were identified by participants in their journal entries and through interviews.

Increasing Research Options

In order to do the research and data gathering that is necessary for action research, participants indicated that there is a need for additional professional journals for teachers to use in the school media center. It was also recommended that the school make an effort to gain access to the INTERNET. The ideal situation would be to enable classroom computers to connect to the system. Participants reported some difficulty in locating information to share. Providing access to the INTERNET and purchasing additional professional journals would assist greatly in conducting action research in an effective manner.

Additional Training

Another recommendation noted by participants is the need to provide additional training for staff members who are not working directly with the school improvement team. Inservice training for everyone will increase the

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level of understanding of the process and limit the feelings of isolation and deception. Providing minutes and frequent updates on what takes place during school improvement team meetings from the beginning of the process until the end will also cut down on negative perceptions about the process.

Additional inservice training for all staff members may increase the use of action research throughout the school. Participants viewed action research as a technique that should be used to solve problems both inside and outside the classroom. It was suggested that staff members use it with committee work that is done throughout the school and the school division.

There is also a need to provide staff development or inservice training for all staff members in the areas of site-based management, participatory decision-making, and team building. Other training should be provided based on needs that are identified as the staff moves more toward shared decision-making.

Reduce the Feeling of Isolation

To address the issue of isolation and deception, it could be beneficial to expand the involvement of others by extending invitations to attend

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meetings, setting up subcommittees or task groups that would call for more interaction from more staff members. A better flow of information from the school improvement team to the remainder of the staff could help with eliminating feelings of isolation and deception.

Time

To address the problem of finding adequate time to properly conduct effective action research studies, attention should be given to coordinating, reorganizing, and consolidating extra duty assignments for team members, restructuring the schedule for the school day to create additional planning time, and examining the school calendar to increase time during the year for additional staff development and teacher workdays. Teachers who participate in school improvement projects such as this action research, should be compensated for their time by being awarded recertification points. Efforts could be made to find funding for substitutes and provide some release time during the school day for participants to do additional research and team work.

Awareness

It was suggested that central office personnel be made more aware of

what the school improvement team is doing in order to gain their support to change things that are beyond the control of the participants. For example, any changes in the school calendar are approved by the superintendent and voted on by the school board. Teachers, principals, and parents do not have the power to set school calendars. The possibility of including a central office staff member on the school improvement team was mentioned.

Parental Involvement

Increasing parental involvement in the process was also recommended. Even though there was a parent representative placed on the school improvement team at the beginning of the study, that parent did not attend meetings regularly and was not instrumental in providing input during the critical phases. Having more than one parent representative or replacing them when they are not participating was suggested.

The issue of when meetings were held was raised as a concern relating to parental involvement. It was pointed out that daytime meetings can limit the participation of many parents. Efforts should be made to schedule meetings after work hours to increase the involvement of parents.

Further Research Implications

One of the limitations for this study is that it was limited to one elementary school, in one division. There is a need to conduct a case study using more than one school to examine the action research process and compare and contrast outcomes. Research should also be focused on investigating the action research process and its effects on participants at the middle and secondary levels. Cross-case analysis could yield additional information that may give insight to those interested in solving problems at all educational levels. Schools vary in size. A study could be done to see if the size of the school has any effect on the application of action research.

Replication of this study adding a pre and post-test or survey to quantitatively measure changes in the problem being addressed is needed. In this study, for example, there are no concrete quantitative data to illustrate that action research brought about a change in morale. The evidence is presented in words. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), words are much harder to manage than numbers. For qualitative data, clarifying which outcomes have occurred is not always an easy task and not always acceptable to some researchers.

In summary, several opportunities exist for further research in examining the action research process and the effect it has on those using it. More teachers need to expand their knowledge of and participation in this type of collaborative decision-making and problem-solving. The primary focus should be that of working smarter not harder.

Epilogue

Implementing this action research project has been one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had as an educator. I say this because I can truly see a difference in the morale of our staff and I have seen several members of the school improvement team grow professionally from the experience. Some of the team members have taken what they have gained out into other areas of the school and school division as they have participated on other committees. Team members are requesting to continue using the action research process as we tackle other problems that need to be solved.

Personally, I feel that this action research project helped me to grow and become more effective as a principal and a leader in the school. I was able to convince people to try something new and different and this in itself

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was a monumental task. My level of confidence has increased as well as my ability to persuade others to buy into my ideas about change. From reading the journals maintained by some of the participants, they were excited about being involved with this project and the direction we were headed.

Introducing action research to the faculty and staff at Albert Harris demonstrated my willingness to not only improve the school, but also to broaden my skills as a principal and leader. Not only was action research an effective vehicle to bring about change, it was helpful in assisting me with enhancing relationships with the faculty and staff. From the journal entries and interviews, some participants seemed fascinated by the fact that I thought enough of them to ask them to participate and that I valued their opinions. They appeared to have more respect for me as their leader and my desire to improve the school.

Two of the school improvement team members have administrative aspirations. They looked upon this experience as an opportunity to sharpen their professional skills in the area of shared decision-making. We engaged in meaningful conversations reflecting on our personal experiences, growth

and the insight that we gained during the study. Our relationships were strengthened as we worked together to enrich our leadership skills.

Studying the problem-solving process of the school staff and conducting the action research process was well worth the time, effort, and energy put into its implementation. The reactions have been mostly positive. I watched as participants engaged in constructive dialogue during team meetings. Participants seemed appreciative of the opportunity to be involved in the project and even more excited about exchanging ideas and engaging in professional deliberations with colleagues.

Conducting this action research study assisted with increasing my interaction with members of the staff and their interaction with each other. Aside from engaging in meaningful professional conversations regarding our area of focus, most of the school improvement team members began to interact informally. There was an increase in friendly exchanges. Participants were smiling and hugging during team sessions. Some even met outside of school socially. Overall, staff members began to care for each other as human beings.

The strategies put in place as a result of our action research project did

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make a difference. This was an effective vehicle to use in bringing about change in the school. I feel that in addition to improving the morale of the staff, student achievement was also enhanced. We were successful in accomplishing all four school improvement objectives that were set at the beginning of the school year. Our percentage of sixth grade students passing all three parts of the Literacy Passport Tests increased. Both reading and writing skills between fourth and fifth grade students improved as well. The factors that contributed to positive student achievement were having all faculty members focus on improving reading and writing skills and helping staff members to feel more positive about their working conditions.

Action research has the potential to change the culture of the school. I feel that it has changed the culture at Albert Harris. It is not business as usual. Teachers have become more vocal in expressing their opinions and sharing ideas. They are asking what research has to say about various topics. I have had teachers ask me to help them to gather information on retaining students, year-round schools, effective reading programs and assessing the progress of students. Teachers are more interested in taking a

look at what is working in other schools around the state and the country. They are no longer willing to limit themselves to "taking a shot in the dark" and settling for uncertain results.

Staff members want to continue being involved in the problem-solving process. This desire was revealed as announcements regarding the reassignment of principals throughout the division were made. Several of the school improvement team members expressed their fear of not being allowed to continue the action research process in the future. Some indicated that they appreciate having a say in the direction that the school moves. I am not certain that the new principal moving to Albert Harris will continue using action research in the problem-solving process. There is a good chance that she may since she has knowledge of the action research process. I will encourage her to continue this technique and teachers will ask that it is done also.

Three faculty members have been transferred to the school where I have been reassigned. Two of these teachers were members of the school improvement team who conducted the action research project. They have asked if we are going to introduce action research to the staff at Patrick

Henry. They seemed eager to lead the staff in this new endeavor. I plan to use action research as a tool to solve problems that are identified in my new assignment. I also plan to use these two teachers to lead our effort and train their colleagues.

When planning the next action research project, there are a few things that I will try to improve. One would be parental involvement. I will invite at least two parents to participate in the project. Doing so may increase the chances of having one of them to commit to staying involved until the end. I would also work to convince teachers to meet at night or at times when parents are available. Perhaps this will enhance parental involvement.

The negative side effects of isolation, distrust and deception were a total surprise to me. This study contributed to my knowledge of action research by making me aware of the need for constant communication between both school improvement team members and those who do not serve on the team. I was shocked that anyone would feel this way. Efforts had been made to draw people in who were not on the team.

To prevent those who are not directly functioning on the school improvement team from feeling isolated, I will continue to extend

invitations to attend team meetings whenever they can and produce minutes from the meetings for every staff member. I will also continue to give frequent updates on the progress of the team during faculty meetings. Attention will be also be given to increasing informal conversations with non-team members. This can assist with allowing them to provide feedback about the actions taken and the direction that they would like to see the school moving toward in the future.

In closing, words alone cannot express how rewarding this experience has been for me both personally and professionally. I have acquired additional skills for working with people and solving problems. I am looking forward to starting new projects in my new assignment.

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Appendix A

Initial Interview Questions for Participants in
The Action Research Project

1. How would you describe our current method for solving problems in our school prior to action research?

2. How can we go about improving the way we solve problems in our school?

3. What experience have you had with action research prior to our project?

4. What do you expect to learn from participating in this project?

5. Based on what you know about action research, what advantages do you see in using this method to solve a problem?

6. What disadvantages do you foresee in using the action research model?

7. How do you feel about the process and your involvement so far in the study?

Appendix B

Final Interview Questions for Participants in
The Action Research Project

1.   Describe how you participated in the action research project.

2.   Could you tell me about any effects using action research have had on you? What impact has it had on your ability to solve problems?

3.   What did you gain from participating in our action research project?

4.   What types of staff development were necessary to implement action research in our school?

5.   What were some advantages to using this method to solve our problem with morale? What were the disadvantages?

6.   What were your feelings about the process roles that we used (facilitator, timekeepers, recorders)?

7.   What did you consider my role as principal to be in the action research process?

8   Was action research an effective vehicle for implementing change in our school?

9.   Do you think using action research has improved your ability to solve problems? If so, how?

10.   Have you made an application of action research outside our project? If so, describe it?   Do you think you will make use of the action research process in the future?

11. Would you recommend using action research in the future to solve our problems? Why or why not?

12. Are there any other general impressions about action research that you would like to share with me?

Appendix C

1. INTRODUCE CONDITIONS FOR QUALITY TEAMWORK

   (GLASSER HANDOUT)

2. BRAINSTORM CURRENT OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVING
   QUALITY TEAMWORK

   (MEMORY JOGGER P. 70)

3. SHARE/IDENTIFY COMMON OBSTACLES USING AN
   AFFINITY DIAGRAM-CATEGORIZE OBSTACLES

4. PRIORITIZE OBSTACLES USING PARETO CHART

   (MEMORY JOGGER P. 17)

5. PUT OBSTACLE(S) OF GREATEST CONCERN INTO CAUSE
   AND EFFECT DIAGRAM

   (MEMORY JOGGER P. 24)

6. DECIDE ON PLAN OF ACTION USING FLOW CHART

   (MEMORY JOGGER P. 9)

CONDITIONS FOR QUALITY TEAMWORK

There are five basic conditions that have to be met if teams are to do quality work.

1. The work environment must be warm and supportive. Trust must be mutual among all members.

2. Only work that is worth doing and that contribute to the goals of the team should be assigned.

3. Everyone must try his or her best.

4. Everyone must continually evaluate his or her work and contributions to the group in order to continually improve.

5. Quality work will always feel good.

6. Team members are never destructive to each other.

QUALITY PLANNING PROCESS

I. Goals

    A. Objectives or targets (specific to school identified needs-WHAT)

    B. Rationale (explain WHY certain or specific objectives were chosen)

    C. Data (must support rationale)

        1. Charts
        2. Frequency distributions-checklists
        3. Matrices
        4. Cause and effect diagrams

II. Strategies (use complete sentences to define and describe HOW it will be used)

    A. Rationale (explain WHY strategies were chosen)

        1. Opinion-weak level
        2. Experience-medium level
        3. Pervasive evidence concerning research, testing results-strong level

III. Means of assessment (How data will be collected)

IV. Feedback   (actual data collected to support goal attainment, collected throughout year and added to SIP at end of school year)

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V. Coordination efforts (explain how time, materials and resources will be used to support attainment of goals)

    A.   Budget (site-based, school general fund $$)
    B.   Staffing formulas
    C.   Staff development
    D.   PTA, booster funds, any extra $$ coming into school
    E.   Central office personnel

VITA

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II. Educational Background

Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies	1996	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
M.A.	1982	Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
B.S.	1981	Virginia State University Petersburg, Virginia

III. Professional Educational Experiences

1997- Present	Principal, Patrick Henry Elementary School, Martinsville City Schools

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1990 - 1997	Principal, Albert Harris Elementary School, Martinsville City Schools
1988 - 1990	Assistant Principal, Albert Harris Elementary School, Martinsville City Schools
1984 - 1988	Second Grade Teacher, Druid Hills Elementary School, Martinsville City Schools
1982 - 1984	Reading and Math Resource Teacher, Druid Hills Elementary, Martinsville City Schools