USING ACTION RESEARCH TO ADDRESS THE UNDERACHIEVEMENT

OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Joan B. Montgomery

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

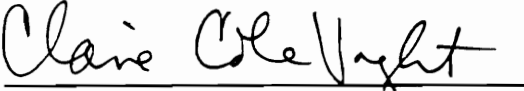Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

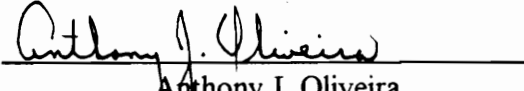in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
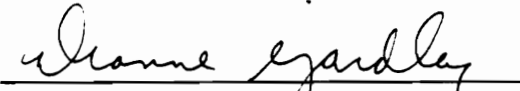
Doctor of Education

in Educational Administration

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July, 1997

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Key words: Action research, school improvement, reform, culture

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Educational Administration

(ABSTRACT)

Several decades of study have shown that school reform is a difficult process. Sharing the decision-making in a school and changing a school's culture appear to be areas that promise some hope for making school reform a reality. It was the intent of this study to examine the use of action research in one school setting in addressing a school problem and its effectiveness in bringing about school reform or renewal.

Data for the study were obtained from the investigator's field notes and from participants' journal entries, anonymous reflections, surveys, transcripts of meetings, and documents produced during the study. The investigator assumed both a participant and observer role in the study thus allowing an insider's view of the process. Multiple sources of evidence and triangulation of data assured reasonable validity to the study.

The results of this study indicated that action research is a vehicle to use to cross the disciplines in addressing a school problem. Action research is an effective route to

increased collegiality, and professional and personal growth. It is a means of sharing

leadership within a school. Although action research does not necessarily mean

immediate student outcomes will be realized, it does have the potential for long-term

change. This form of examining a school's values and beliefs has implications for

changing a school's culture and thus leading to more long lasting reform.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to several persons who were most instrumental in making the completion of this dissertation a reality. First of all, the ones who sacrificed the most in this endeavor were my family which includes my husband, Monty, and our two children, Brad and Suzanne. Without my husband's love, encouragement and moral support, I would not have had the will to complete this dissertation. To Brad and Suzanne, thank you for allowing me to spend so much time on the computer when I could have spent the time with you. This has been my greatest sacrifice and you have understood.

I am most grateful to my advisor, Dr. Stephen Parson, who guided me through this learning experience with great patience. He is an educator who encourages more than he criticizes and is a believer in the capabilities of others. His excellent editorial skills helped me clarify my thoughts and ideas through the many revisions of this document. I am also grateful to the other fine educators who gave of their time to be a part of my doctoral committee, Dr. Claire Cole Vaught, Dr. Dianne Yardley, Dr. Richard Salmon, and from the Virginia Department of Education, Dr. Tony Oliveira. Their rich and diverse perspectives were invaluable in putting together this document.

I would like to acknowledge others for their assistance throughout my research. First, to the Martinsville City School Board, thank you for funding the course work that

led to this dissertation and for allowing me the time to pursue my doctorate. To Mr. Harold Lamm, my former superintendent, who supported the pursuit of this degree and made the time from work and the funding possible, I am most grateful. Dr. Ira Trollinger, my current superintendent, supported continued funding during the dissertation part of the doctorate when funding by the school board was being questioned. His support of this degree gave me incentive to keep moving. Thank you, Dr. Trollinger.

To the staff at Martinsville Middle School who were the subjects of my research, I thank you for allowing me to work with you. The Leadership Team, composed of teachers Martha Perdue, Pete Epperly, Cheryl Fulton, Carolyn Turner, Debby Simpson, Greg Martin, Robert Hairston, Tina Early, Janice Bowles, Carolyn Matheney, and Linda Cox did the work that is the subject of this dissertation. It was a pleasure working with each of you as you gave of yourselves to make our school a better place for students and staff. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Bill Vickers, my assistant principal, who listened and encouraged me during times when I thought I might give up. Thank you, Bill.

Finally, to my husband of 25 years, Monty, you have always believed in me, even when I did not believe in myself. Through all these years you have encouraged me to grow and expand my possibilities. Thank you for what you sacrificed in order for me to write this dissertation as I could not have done it without you. You allowed me to embark on this long educational journey, asking nothing in return. You are truly the love of my life. Thank you.

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Chapter 1

Background of the Problem

<u>Introduction</u>

Educators, researchers, and critics of public education have provided an avalanche of material on the social, economic, political and educational problems that now beset public schools. Some blame problems on societal situations, others blame current practices of teaching, while others say lack of monetary resources is the main culprit. Reforming public education is not a new topic and has been hotly debated for decades. Because reform appears to be not as swift as some would like, and because the public now views test scores as a means of evaluating school effectiveness, the cry for reform is stronger than ever before. After decades of debate there is still confusion about why reform is needed and how it should be accomplished. Some believe that the only thing that has been restructured is the English language (Slotnik, 1993). What is clear is that most people believe public schools need fundamental change in order to keep pace with the increasing complexity of a global society and that students are not performing at the levels at which most citizens expect. The realization that existing educational institutions do not adequately promote the full educational development of

> Some believe that the only thing that has been restructured is the English language.
> Slotnick, 1993

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children has existed for several decades. Strategies have been developed and alternatives presented, yet outcomes have been less than successful, according to many (Heckman, 1993).

At the local level

Martinsville Middle School is no different from most schools across the nation in that it has been attempting reform for the last several years. This school, located in southern Virginia, has a diverse student population, with the student socioeconomic levels ranging from poverty to extreme wealth. The teaching staff is an experienced one, with the average teaching tenure being twenty years. As with many schools with these characteristics, change does not come easily.

Data collection for a School Improvement program through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), revealed that 25% of the student body was failing at least one subject and that 10% of the eighth grade population had been retained in that grade. Improving student achievement at the school became a major goal for the staff. How to achieve this goal became one of its greatest challenges.

Quite a few initiatives began by the administration at the school in a traditional topdown reform, as the school changed from a junior high to a middle school. At the end of a three year period, there were many structural changes in place, but very little changed in student achievement. Standardized test scores, traditionally being at the average level,

plummeted in several areas and were reported extensively in the local newspaper. Many believe that local opinion of how the middle school is performing academically is at an all time low due to this negative publicity.

Finding a solution to reform

Some authors believe that one problem with lack of significant change in schools is that teachers are unwilling to look at their teaching practices critically, not willing to evaluate their own efficacy or not willing to make changes in the face of criticism (Lester, Mayher, 1987). Others believe that if true reform is to take place, it must come from the bottom up, beginning with teachers. Many authors believe that an important way to promote the reform of schools is to involve teachers in doing research in their own classrooms. Such work provides a way for teachers to investigate issues of interest or concern and to incorporate the results into future teaching (Sardo-Brown, 1994).

There is little doubt that educational reform is here to stay. Political candidates at all levels of government are using education as political platforms. One of the more promising practices in educational reform is in teacher research. There is overwhelming support for solving problems at the lowest level and involving constituents in solutions. This study will look at such a practice, action research, to determine if this practice will lead to more sustained educational reform.

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Action research

Calhoun (1993) describes action research as "disciplined inquiry (research) in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance (action)" (p. 7). Within a school, an individual teacher, a group of teachers, or an entire staff carefully collects data to diagnose a problem within the

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This process is not only a means of solving problems but can revitalize the school community.
Sardo-Brown, 1994

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school, searches for solutions, takes action on promising possibilities, and monitors whether and how well the action works (Calhoun, 1993).

According to many who have used or observed action research in a school setting, this process is not only a means of solving problems but it can revitalize the school community. Because research is conducted by the practitioner, it is more likely to sustain long-term goals. This process also gives teachers a greater responsibility in directing their own professional development. Although many authors reporte action research as a means of empowering teachers and in increasing their roles in decision making, few researchers systematically describe the actual studies of teachers at different grade levels and the way in which teachers reflect on their completed studies (Sardo-Brown, 1994).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to look at action research as a means of school reform. Martinsville Middle School implemented a school wide action research project and its effectiveness in solving a school problem will be determined. The research questions addressed by the study are:

- Can teachers use action research to work across disciplines to address a problem?

- Can action research be used as a collective problem-solving approach to school renewal?

- Does action research lead to immediate student outcomes?

- Is action research an effective route to personal and professional development?

- Does action research lead to increased collegiality among the staff as they work together to solve a school problem?

- Is action research an effective vehicle for school change?

- Does the opportunity for leadership in action research bring about any change in teachers?

- How does action research change the culture of the school?

Significance of the problem

Seeking ways to improve schools has become a major concern across the country and within the local community. This study attempts to discover if action research is a

worthy effort in seeking solutions. If action research is determined to be of value in facilitating significant changes within a school, its lessons can be used for other reform initiatives at the local school level and with other schools. Following one school's process in seeking meaningful reform will add to the body of literature about the effectiveness, or lack of, of action research in educational reform.

Limitations

This study involved one school in one setting. Using this case study to determine effectiveness in other settings might be limiting. Another limitation could be the school's readiness for change which would influence how quickly a goal is targeted and achieved. The school in the study had undergone local negative media scrutiny and the impetus for change was present. Information in this study might be helpful to a school who has achieved a similar level of readiness.

Definition of terms

Leadership team: The Leadership Team was formed from a group of volunteers who were interested in school improvement. It consists of eleven teachers and one administrator. In some schools, this group is called Team Leaders, Steering Committee or Restructuring Team. The work of the Leadership Team will be the focus of this study.

School renewal: Cambone's (1995) definition of school renewal is "redesigning the various components of a system to produce better results " (p. 516). The meaning of school renewal, school reform and restructuring will be used synonymously with the definition given by Cambone.

Culture: Culture is defined as the organization's identity or self concept, according to Salisbury (1994). The term of culture will be used in this study to define an organization's status quo.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature related to educational reform, the educational change process and action research's development in educational reform. The study of past educational practices is necessary to understand current trends. Given the present climate for change in public schools, it appears likely that real change and improvement must be experienced school by school and teacher by teacher. Schools are now a natural setting for a resurgence of the notion that teachers individually and collectively can raise the level of education in the schools of the nation (Jenkins, 1994).

Educational reform

During the past decade, public schools were called upon to make fundamental changes. Linda Darling-

School reform is thriving in local school districts and school board members believe they are a major force behind this movement.
Gaul, Underwood & Fortune, 1994

Hammond (1994) states that educators must "rethink how schools are designed, how school systems operate, how teaching and learning are pursued, and what goals for schooling are sought." The voices are diverse and speak loudly about exactly what needs

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to be done. There is even controversy over what educational reform really means.

A universal definition of reform, whether in a school situation or not, is defined by Cambone (1995) as "redesigning the various components of a system to produce better results" (p. 515). It is used in corporations to mean making changes, acquisitions and downsizing. One nationwide study (Gaul, Underwood & Fortune, 1994) attempted to determine what the terms "restructuring" and "reforming" really mean, particularly to those who are being forced to make changes - school leadership. Six thousand surveys were sent to school board members with 1,346 responding. The survey revealed that a majority of school systems are involved in restructuring of some sort and that most school board members feel that the efforts are paying off in benefits to students. The four major areas of reform identified were site-based management, school choice, curriculum and instructional reform and the restructuring of time. The authors concluded that school reform is thriving in local school districts and that school board members believe they are a major force behind this movement (Gaul, Underwood & Fortune, 1994). Unfortunately, those not directly involved with education, and even those who are, do not feel as favorable about the direction of recent reform.

School reform has been at the forefront of national and local scrutiny for many years. The release of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for School Reform in April of 1983 caused the nation to begin a frenzy of change. The report became front page news and headlined most news stories for weeks, months, and years to come. According to

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Crosby (1993), the text of <u>A Nation at Risk</u> told the world "if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (p.600). In particular, Crosby feels schools are failing to provide the highly trained workforce needed if this country is to compete in the emerging high-tech global economy. Others feel the same. Clinchy states that "we are clearly falling behind other nations in giving students the academic skills to compete in the global marketplace and thereby promoting the country's economy," he says (Clinchy, 1995).

A Nation at Risk, led to attempts to raise the level of academic achievement of students and thus the creation of new higher national and state academic standards in all subject disciplines. Following shortly behind was the call for a system of national and state performance tests to measure and determine if these standards were being met (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Respected scholars during the early 1980's, drew similar conclusions about the need for reform, such as John Goodlad, Ernest Boyer, Mortimer Adler and others. Their findings resulted in a nationwide search for effective schools. It was hoped

> *A Nation at Risk, led to attempts to raise the level of academic achievement of students and thus the creation of new higher national and state academic standards.*
> National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983

that if effective schools could be identified and their characteristics reported, it would be

a cure-all for schools in general. Researchers such as Ron Edmonds, Lawrence Lezotte, Henry Levin, James Comer and many others began the effectiveness research. The Research for Better Schools put together the common features of 200 exemplary elementary schools and found eight common factors (Goodlad, 1984).

School district programs using effective schools research multiplied quickly. Lezotte, using the work of Edmonds, came up with a set of practices for effective schools practices which included:

- Schools will focus on teaching for learning

- Schools will be held accountable for measurable results

- Educational equity will be emphasized as diversity increases

- Decision making will be decentralized

- Collaboration and empowerment will increase

- Utilization of research and descriptions of effective practices will be emphasized

- The rate of feedback of instruction will be enhanced by technology

- Administrators will be efficient managers and effective visionary leaders

- Student outcomes will be emphasized

These characteristics were accepted and practiced in schools across the nation in reform efforts. Creating national standards was the next step in educational change since A Nation at Risk was published. With higher academic standards and tests to measure these standards, reformers began their "standards-driven" agenda in earnest. In 1992, the

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National Governors Association and the Bush Administration put together six far reaching goals (America 2000) that began major reform in the academic achievement of public schools. The Clinton administration expanded the goals to eight, calling them GOALS 2000 and legislated them into national law through the Educate America Act. GOALS 2000 went beyond academic achievement and added social reform which included that by the year 2000, all children will enter school ready to learn; that 90 percent of students will graduate from high school; that all schools are free of guns, drugs, alcohol, and violence; that all Americans are literate and thus able to work and compete in the global economy; that the teaching force in our nation's schools will be able to improve professional skills; and that every school will promote increased parental involvement (Clinchy, 1995).

GOALS 2000 included other initiatives that dealt specifically with academic achievement. One goal stated that all students will exit grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including subjects such as the arts and foreign languages. The second goal from the United States Department of Education (1994) stated that every school will ensure that all "students learn to use their minds

> *GOALS 2000 went beyond academic achievement and added social reform.*
> Clinchy, 1995

well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy" and "United States students will be first in

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the world in mathematics and science achievement" (p. 4). Thus was the creation of our nation's high national academic standards for all students in academic disciplines and the creation of performance tests to determine if these world-class standards are being met (Clinchy, 1995).

Presently, many educators, and some politicians, are working on devising standards that will spell out what students will know, what they will be able to do, what schools will do, and what teachers will teach. State educational agencies across the nation are funded by the federal government to establish their own standards with national standards being their model. Once created, state standards will need to be approved by a national panel that will certify them as acceptable or needing amendment. Much federal funding to states will then depend on the satisfactory development and subscription to a set of national standards (Darling-Hammond, 1994). To think that this newest wave of national reform is going away anytime soon is not realistic.

There are many critics of recent reform efforts. Many say reform is not significant; others say they see no change in the education of our youngsters. Some researchers point to social problems as the basis for lack of significant change. Taylor Adelman (1994) states that unless education reformers place a high priority on restructuring activities that eliminate obstacles to learning and performance, such as substance abuse and violence, it is unlikely that the eight National Education Goals will be met. Others believe the results of reform are dismal because

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efforts are not targeted toward those needing it most, the children of poverty. Page (1994) is concerned with for whom the benefits of reform are intended, who are the major reformers and what role will the government, academics and

> *Problems are systemic and are deeply embedded in family and social problems that school cannot easily change.*
> Cawalti, 1995

other advocates of reform play. His belief that educational reform of the eighties "has produced disappointing and unsatisfactory results" is shared by many (p.201). Still, others list fear as the most significant barrier to innovative change. In an article on school restructuring, Liebensperger (1994) asserts that the current bureaucratic system of rewarding adherence to the status quo in schools discourages systemic change. Controlling student behavior and preventing chaos in schools versus the need to empower students to become scholars is a major concern in many schools. In looking at what has changed in classrooms over the last decade, many believe the world has changed dramatically and rapidly but compared with other social systems, schooling has not changed over the past century (Radlick, 1994).

"Some problems are for solving, others are for living with . . . Renewal is one for living with. It is a constant challenge, never . . . quite . . . solved" (Waterman, 1987). Education reform cannot occur in a vacuum but must involve others, according to Waddock (1995). Problems are systemic and are deeply embedded in family and social problems that school cannot easily change. What schools can change, according to this

researcher, is to assume the responsibility for change and not wait on someone else to do it.

Educators, reformers and even politicians have joined forces in attempts to label restructuring efforts. Elements of restructuring are known as: performance standards, authentic assessment, interdisciplinary curriculum, school-based decision making, flexible scheduling, community outreach and instructional technology. Others add benchmarks for standards, accountability, and learner-centered principles (Cawelti, 1995). High school principals were surveyed as to their priorities in educational reform and they believe efforts need to be made to make changes in curriculum, instruction, school environment, assessment, professional development, diversity, governance, resources, ties to higher education, relationships and leadership (Breaking Ranks, 1996). A major theme throughout much of the talk on school-based restructuring is that a major component in any educational reform must include site-based decision-making if any significant reform is to take place (Louis, Kruse & Rawid, 1996, Dlugosh & Sybouts, 1994, Cambone, 1995, Cawelti, 1995).

Darling-Hammond (1994) believes that there are two opposing views competing against each other when looking at current attempts to reform public schools. On the one hand, she says, there are those who believe in the behavior and cultural transmission of information. The other belief is the constructionist view in which teaching is viewed as intellectual work and the goal is to uncover knowledge. Others advocate the philosophy

that reconciling the differences between the school's structure (rules and regulations) and the school's culture (beliefs and norms) will need to be done before significant improvement can take place (DuFour, 1995).

School restructuring calls for new expectations from those who offer leadership to schools and those expectations are not always well delineated. In an article on the leadership required for positive restructuring, the author Leithwood (1994) states that there are six main transformational leadership styles that would be effective in bringing about change within a school. A leader must be able to 1) articulate a vision for the school, 2) foster the acceptance of group goals, 3) convey high expectations of the staff, 4) provide appropriate modeling for change, 5) provide intellectual stimulation to the staff and 6) provide individual support for those involved. To be effective in bringing about needed reform, a school leader must focus on all facets, must be trustworthy, and vary practices with the needs of the school. Both management and leadership skills are needed interchangeably (Leithwood, 1994).

If reform is to succeed, say professionals such as Thompson (1994) and others (Sideris & Skau, 1994), leadership must be prevalent throughout the process of change. The superintendent must make sure the district is clear on its vision and mission, the principal must delineate roles of its staff and the school board must offer support of the vision and keep its focus in the direction of reform (Thompson, 1994). The school principal has a critical role as the intellectual leader. The principal must be willing to

> *The principal must be willing to lead from the center rather than from the top.*
> Louis, Cruse & Raywid, 1996

lead from the center rather than the top and must be able to facilitate debate and discussion. Part of the problem is in creating innovative leaders who can forge the conditions to provide the professional growth needed to change the status quo (Louis, Kruse & Raywid, 1996).

There is no single reform strategy that dominates, as they vary from state to state, depending on the driving agencies or institutions behind the reform. There are plenty of barriers that have been identified that prevent the educational reform that some desire (Medler, 1994). In 1991, the Southeastern Regional Vision for Education, a federally funded lab, began a study to identify barriers to reform in six southeastern states. The six prevailing obstacles were instability of political leadership, poor economic conditions, stop and start reforms, inability to reach a consensus on goals, the under investment in training and simply a lack of trust (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Another factor precluding reform is finding the time within a school to concentrate on restructuring activities. Many persons believe that much of the school reform will fail if it ignores constructs, boundaries, rhythms, and patterns of time for teachers (Cambone, 1995).

Continuing still is the negative publicity about public education and its continuing demise. Many strategies for its improvement have been tried. Some school districts have turned the administration of a school over to private enterprise, suggesting that

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privatizing instructional services might bring educational quality and cost effectiveness (Doyle, 1994). Others suggest that we look to technology as a means of reform while others say technology is no "silver bullet" (Means, Olson & Singh, 1995). The reform agenda calls for fundamental changes in teaching practices. Technology adds another level of complication for teachers. Other concerns lie with the increased stress educational reform is beginning to have on school personnel. Change can result in increased levels of perceived stress and planners must consider this role and value before proceeding (Means, Olson & Singh, 1995).

Some researchers (Pogrow 1996, Parker, 1994 & Mojkowskik, 1995) believe that reform will not last unless it is highly structured and easily monitored. Some even say that "change may be slow in coming if left to those on the 'inside' to facilitate" (Dlugosh, 1994, p 2). More than ten years after the release of A Nation at Risk, Crosby (1993) says "we still lack the will and commitment to reduce the risks that endanger our children."

Schools and school systems have responded with changes in many areas of public schooling. Terrell Bell, chairmen of the group commissioned to complete A Nation at Risk, states that "top-down reforms" have been ineffective (Bell, 1993). As schools attempted to meet the increasing diversity of student populations, school administrators took action by mandating program change, revamping the curriculum and instituting broad-based initiatives with often poor, or short-lived results. In Putting Common Sense Back Into School Reform, Polumbo, Joseph & Leight (1996) believe that schools are still

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in a state of disrepute. Many communities, parents and staff members, they say, feel that time spent in most reform has been a waste of time. "It hasn't changed one thing for the kids of the school" (Polumbo, Joseph & Leight, 1996, p. 44).

Still others, such as Gerald Bracey, author of Final Exam, a book that details the educational reform movement in this country, believes that schools are not in as bad a condition as many believe. In an interview for TECHNOS Press, Bracey states that a large proportion of American students are doing quite well in our public schools. He believes that "school bashing" is done for personal and political reasons. "If you look at test scores of a variety of kinds, you find that achievement test scores are at all-time highs. You find that many of the national assessment trends are at all-time highs" (p. 5). He believes that overall, public education needs most reform in the way it assesses its success (TECHNOS Press, 1997.)

Educational change

There has been a great deal of change within school districts and individual schools. With so much effort being put into educational reform, why have desired results not been

"Sometimes change isn't progress but is simply change for the sake of change."
Zakariya, 1995

achieved? Looking at the process of change, particularly within a school or school system, might offer some insight about the difficulties involved.

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Sally Banks Zakariya (1995), managing editor of The Executive Educator, says that "sometimes change isn't progress but is simply change for the sake of change" (p. 33). She reports that more than twenty years ago educational change guru Seymour Sarason, now professor emeritus at Yale, gave a pessimistic account of change imposed on schools from the outside. Zakariya cites Sarason's examples of the pressure to improve in math skills because of Sputnik. Sputnik had nothing to do with math, said Sarason. Stimulus for change had little to do with institutional culture (Zakariya, 1995).

Zakariya (1995) believes that systemic reform (fixing the system) holds the most promise for long lasting change. She believes the

"If changes do not occur in teaching and learning, all the other changes have little value."
Anderson, 1995

system includes not only the school but the district, community and the state. Why is school change so difficult? She believes change is hard because of the sheer complexity of education, the all-American quest for a quick fix, and the inevitability of opposition.

Some reforms incorrectly believe that if there is structural change within a school, then teaching strategies will change and thereby learning will improve. Structural changes, according to Harvard professor Richard Elmore (1995), that readily take place in schools are known as site-based management, scheduling, common planning for teachers, cross-grade teams, tracking and class size issues. He says change in structure is weakly related to change in teaching practices and does not lead to improving student learning.

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Executive Director of Insites, Beverly Anderson (1993) agrees. She states "if changes do not occur in teaching and learning, all the other changes have little value" (p. 15). Many teachers have embraced change, but many have not. To be successful, there must be a sense of urgency and need for change recognized from the school staff. There must be change from the bottom up. The entire staff must be involved in all phases of change according to many writers (Anderson, 1993; Evans, 1993; Neighbors, 1993; Stapleford, 1995).

Writers about change believe that only real transformation within a school can take place if the culture of the school is modified. Culture is defined by Salisbury (1994) as the organization's identity or self concept. It is a representative of

Culture in a school is the strategic body of learned behaviors that give meaning and reality to its members.
Cunningham & Gresso, 1993

the status quo and can only be altered with time and resources. Culture in a school is the strategic body of learned behaviors that give meaning and reality to its members. It is both product and process. School culture causes people to see their work similarly. It is often defined as the blueprint for a group whose members feel responsible for each other and call themselves by the same name (Salisbury, 1994). Cunningham and Gresso (1993), authors of the book Cultural Leadership, add that nothing can be accomplished if the culture works against needed reform. Educators, they say, have learned that structure

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and process are important to maintaining or reforming an organization, but it is the culture that yields the dividends.

Cunningham and Gresso (1993) use a Vertical Team approach to meet the need for developing interdependence and interaction among various levels within the school. A Vertical Team involves representatives from every level within a school, from the janitorial staff to the principal. Its purpose is the important exchange of information among individuals who share a common purpose. It is an opportunity to receive increased insight from diverse perspectives. Using vertical teams would be an effective means of influencing the culture of a school.

The authors of The New Meaning of Educational Change, Michael Fullen with Suzanne Stiegelbauer, (1991) agree that a school's culture is the key to making significant change. They agree that change is everywhere but there is very little progress. They believe that schools have failed to make change because they have not impacted the culture of the school. Fullen and Stiegelbauer believe that educational change must involve teachers, the principal, the student, the district administrator, the consultant, parents and the community. All are interrelated. The answer is not to put twenty more days at the end of the year, but to redesign the workplace so innovation and improvement are built into the daily activities of all teachers (Fullen with Stiegelbauer, 1991).

Regardless of the planning and implementation method, there will be some educators who will decide not to change. Between 15-20 percent will oppose any kind of

change according to some (Zakariya, 1995 & Mamary, 1995). The literature in the area of educational change contains many recommendations for avoiding the quick fix and to move at a slow enough pace to allow individuals to assimilate the changes. It is not the pace of change but the rate at which one can recover from disrupted expectations or the speed of absorbing change with the least dysfunction that is important according to Salisbury (1994) and Mamary (1995).

Recent reform documents have identified practitioners' lack of awareness and implementation of exemplary innovative practices as a deterrent to significant change. National organizations have noted the gap between research and practice in our schools, with suggestions made that collaborative action research and teacher researchers are the means to expand this base of educational knowledge and research (Berlin & White, 1992). Research from practice has a natural life in schools because the questions asked are appropriate, the investigations are more normal and the findings more creditable. Effort to improve the quality of schooling in America requires classroom teachers to assume new roles. By becoming researchers, teachers can take control of their lives in ways that might offer proof that education can reform itself from within (Flake, Kuhs, Donnelly, & Ebert, 1995).

Action research is an outgrowth of a change process which begins with a desire to improve a situation; it emanates from a feeling of dissatisfaction at the disparity between aspirations and achievements (Jenkins, 1994). A major goal in every school in America

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should be to search for more effective educational practices to enhance the opportunities of learning for all students. Empowering those closest to the students with the responsibility and authority to affect change might offer a powerful reformation tool (Wilkes, 1992).

Action research

Action research is deliberate, solution-oriented investigation that is group or individually owned and conducted (Johnson, 1993). It is a way of looking at a school problem, gathering enough data to make an informed decision about what to do, then taking action for improvement. Action research moves through cycles of inquiry when faculty members 1) select an area or problem of interest or concern, 2) collect data, 3) organize information obtained, 4) interpret on-site data related to this area of interest; and 5) take action based on this information (Calhoun 1994).

Table 1

The action research cycle

Conceptual framework for action research

Choose an area of study	→	Collect and analyze data	→	Review professional literature
		↓		
Monitoring	←	Action	→	Modification
		↓		
Collegiality	←	School Improvement	→	Student equity
		↓		
		Involvement of others		
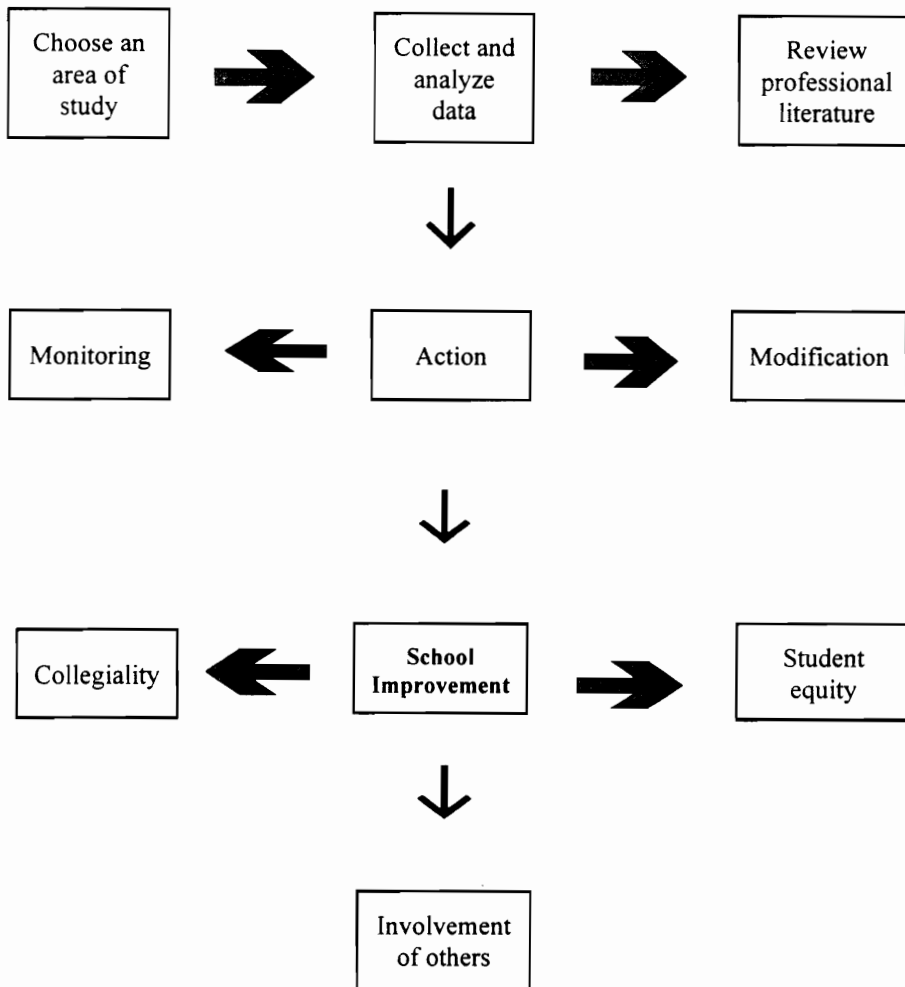
Note: The arrows indicate the direction in which the cycle flows, although the group of researchers may change directions at any time during the cycle.

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An important part of action research is the review of available professional literature which is combined with the results of on-site data to determine what actions will best achieve the group goals (Calhoun, 1994). Action research is based around a practical problem and is planned and carried out by the people most likely to be interested in and affected by the results. In a school, this is most often the teacher. It provides a way for teachers to investigate issues of interest and concern in their classrooms or school and to incorporate the results into future teaching (Sardo-Brown, 1994).

History of action research

Action research is not a new concept, although its form may have taken different shapes. Some say action research had its beginnings in 1926 with the publication of an obscure book entitled Research for Teachers by B.R. Buckingham, then the director of the Bureau of Educational Research at Ohio State University. The book was considered radical by most and of little value to the education field. It went out of print shortly thereafter (Forshay, 1994). In the 1930's, there was an attempt to revise the curriculum in education. Hollis L. Caswell was the leader in these efforts as a teacher educator. During the 30's Caswell made a number of discoveries and summarized them in a 1950's book entitled Curriculum Development in Public School Systems. One of his discoveries was that teachers had to own an innovation before they were willing to try it. Caswell founded the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation in the 1940's as a

way to carry out his findings. He created a "school network" and urged the staff of the new institute to begin classroom experimentation with teachers (Forshay, 1994).

During the 1940's and 1950's the term *cooperative action research* was coined by the work of Kurt Lewin and Stephen M. Corey. Corey became executive officer of the new institute. Corey suggested that teachers be drawn into the design of the classroom research and that they be participants in the gathering and interpretation of data upon collection. Members of the institute proceeded to do research with teachers and several publications resulted.

The cooperative action research movement was summarized in a 1953 book by Stephen M. Corey entitled <u>Action Research to Improve School Practices</u>, according to reviewer Forsay. His book points out the difference between traditional research and action research. He points out that formal research, in its attempts to focus on one variable, often rules out such classroom realities as family influence, classroom climate and rivalries, physical conditions called "contaminating variables," thus making the findings unrealistic (Forshay, 1994).

A teacher may notice a problem that needs solving and decides to research a solution.
Backman, 1994

Several articles on action research appeared in professional articles during the 1950's. In 1957, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) publication, <u>Research for Curriculum Improvement</u>, was largely devoted to

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action research. Because the research was carried out by teachers, with data being sometimes flawed, and because most felt the research to not be representative of the general population, the movement was ridiculed by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and its influence died. The impetus for much of the work of Lewin, Corey and his associates dissipated as the members of the institute staff dispersed over the years (Forshay, 1994).

During the 1980's, elements of action research began to resurface in the form of "networking," "classroom research," "site-based management and inquiry," and finally under its name coined in the 1950's as *action research*. Its premise remains similar to early efforts of researching problems from the inside out, beginning with those working directly with students (Forshay, 1994).

Types of Action Research

There are three major types of action research, although there are combinations of all of these. Each type has its advantages and values and its different objectives and results. The key to deciding which to use depends on the participants' purpose and focus (Calhoun, 1994).

Individual teacher research

The purpose of individual teacher research is to focus on a single classroom. A

teacher may notice a problem that needs solving and decides to research a solution. Examples of classroom research are: finding an effective note taking system for math students (Backman, 1994), improving writing instruction (Dowhower, 1990), or assessment and evaluation of technology in the classroom (Poirot, 1992).

The main constituency for the results of individual classroom research is the teacher conducting the research. However, if students are involved with the process, they too may become part of the research. Several teachers within the school may be conducting research on a similar problem, thus broadening the influence of the results (Calhoun, 1994).

Collaborative action research

This research involves a team of people with the purpose being to focus on problems or changes within a single classroom or a group of classrooms within a school or district or across schools and districts. This kind of research differs from the individual research in that it involves persons outside of the school setting. This research is often a collaborative effort between school people and one or more staff members from a university or other external agency. They follow the same investigative and reflective cycle as the individual researcher.

Examples of collaborative action research are: using LOGO computer language in teaching (Watt & Watt, 1991), authentic curriculum and instruction (Filby, 1991), and

teaching map reading skills in third grade (Sardo-Brown, 1994). Articles and descriptions of collaborative research often refer to work done with an educational consortium. By working with a professional group and modeling their behavior, teachers can learn valuable lessons.

The main constituency for collaborative action research is the members of a research team. This team might involve other members of the school structure such as central office staff and may extend into the home and community with parents and business leaders becoming involved (Calhoun, 1993, Calhoun, 1994).

School-wide action research

The purpose of school wide research is school improvement in three ways: the improvement of the organization as a problem-solving unit, improvement in the equity for students, and the breadth and content of the inquiries themselves (Calhoun, 1994). This type of research is like collaborative but the difference is in its involvement with the entire school.

Some examples of school-wide research are: improving student achievement in a school, enhancing the climate of a school, or implementing cooperative learning throughout the school. The audience for inquiry is the entire staff at a school and may include central office staff, community members, parents and consortium affiliated members (Calhoun, 1993).

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Benefits of action research

For teachers in particular, but also for principals and central office staff, action research promises progress in professionalism "that allows problem solving at its finest" (Calhoun, 1993). Teachers can then model this problem solving for students. Action research, according to Emily

> *Teachers felt that the experience brought them many personal and professional benefits including collegiality, a sense of empowerment, and increased self-esteem.*
> Bennett, 1993

Calhoun who has written numerous articles about the topic, can revitalize the entire learning community, as well as aiding teachers in changing or reflecting on their classroom practices (Calhoun, 1993). Christine Bennett, Assistant Professor of Education at Eastern New Mexico University, requires graduate students to complete two research courses and an action research project. She reports that action research changes students in that it empowers them to become leaders, it strengthens collegial bonds, and builds teacher networks. It also increases teachers' role in school-wide decision making (Bennett, 1993). From teacher surveys of graduate students from fourteen different school districts, findings confirmed that teachers' attitudes toward research changed during the process. Teachers felt that the experience brought them many personal and professional benefits including increased collegiality, a sense of empowerment, and increased self-esteem. The teacher-researchers saw themselves as more open to change,

more reflective, and better informed than they were prior to the research. They believed themselves to be better problem solvers and more effective teachers with fresher attitudes toward education. A strong connection was seen between theory and practice (Bennett, 1993).

Susan Abbott, a teacher-researcher in California, reported finding a much needed sense of professional community. During her research she found their time together to be a chance to meet teachers teaching across grade levels, from within her school, across town or many miles away. Teacher research, according to Abbott, is a validation of all that is right about teachers' stories. She felt that their work provided her with a place to discuss what troubled her and excited her about education (Abbott, 1994). The American Federation of Teachers and the Learning Research Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh integrated their thinking into a collaborative research model on a National Science Foundation-supported project called "Thinking Mathematics." Benefits more than a three year period included building a team providing regular opportunity for reflection and empowering teachers (Hattrup & Bickel, 1993).

Other authors cite changes that occur to teachers when they conduct classroom research. They believe that teachers' perceptions are transformed and they become more professionally active. They become more cognizant of current research while becoming authoritative in evaluating curricula, methods and materials. Still others report that teachers who conduct research become more organized and structured as teachers, their

assessment of learners becomes more human and real, there is a rekindling, a rejuvenation

of positive thoughts and feelings about teaching and they understand that what is known

about teaching comes not only from traditional research, but also from those who practice

teacher research (Page, 1994).

Fruchter and Price, in their

1993 article in Equity and Choice,

state that teacher research can be the

> *"It's the only place I can go and feel like a professional."*
> Mohr, 1994

cornerstone for teacher empowerment. They believe that research done collaboratively

also reduces a school system's reliance on standardized testing by encouraging teachers to

be energized for greater advocacy effort (Fruchter & Price, 1993). A high school teacher,

upon completing a teacher research project, describes her experiences as "the only place I

can go and feel like a professional" (Mohr, 1994). Still others believe action research

increases a teacher's role in school-wide decision making, improves relationships with

administrators and parents, and gives a sense that they are more connected to the material

found in professional journals. Interaction among faculties, when possible, might

promote a better understanding among teachers to the struggles faced at various grade

levels, say the authors (Sardo-Brown, 1994).

Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith, two university-based teacher educators,

argue that school-based teacher researchers are themselves knowers and a primary source

of generating knowledge about teaching and learning for themselves and others. They

believe action research will present a radical challenge to current assumptions about the relationships of theory and practice, and inquiry and reform. Research by teachers, they say, represents a distinctive way of knowing about teaching and learning that will alter, not just add to, what we know in the field (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992).

Obstacles in implementing action research

With this large number of positive comments about the benefits of action research, or teacher research, why are more schools and school systems not taking advantage of the benefits? Obviously, there are limitations and concerns in attempting such a program. Rosemary Hattrup, a documentation associate at the University of Pittsburgh (UP) and William Bickel, an associate

> A supportive principal makes the effort much easier and a hostile one makes the work almost impossible.
> Hattrup and Bickel (1993)

professor at UP see several issues that might hinder widespread use of action research. They are

- adequate professional development about the process,

- a credible leadership team,

- support from the administration,

- continuing support by those who understand the new practice,

- lack of regular opportunities for reflection and problem solving,

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- relief from the constraints of traditional evaluation,

- testing while new ways are learned and

- hope that structural changes that teachers begin to make will be sustained (Hattrup & Bickel, 1993).

Principals also influence the process of research within a school. A supportive principal makes the effort much easier and an overly hostile one makes the work almost impossible. Hattrup and Bickel (1993) believe that if the principal remains neutral and does nothing to sabotage the efforts of researchers, this process can survive.

Some believe that poor schools are directly related to the lack of professionalism in the teaching staff. Various commission reports on the poor state of our public schools have listed many familiar reasons as to why teaching has failed to become a major profession. Those reasons include poor preservice preparation, absence of clearly articulated standards for performance, lack of public confidence, flatness of the career ladder, and failure of teachers to remain current in theory and research on teaching. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1993), assistant professors of education at the University of Pennsylvania and coholders of the Joseph L. Calihan Chair in Education, argue that there are four very important obstacles to teacher research.

- Teacher isolation is a major obstacle that must be overcome before teacher research can become a reality.

- A typical school day rarely provides time for teachers to talk, reflect, and share

ideas with colleagues.

- Isolation can act as a deterrent by secluding teachers from each other and creating. a cycle in which teachers may view teacher research as a means of exposing themselves to public scrutiny.

- The loss of autonomy is an obstacle to be overcome (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Another area identified as an obstacle to research in schools is in the area of occupational socialization. It is believed that the occupational

Taking a stance as a researcher involves risk.
Cochran-Smith & Lytle

culture of schools is that good teachers do not ask questions that they can neither answer themselves nor are questions asked about the larger issues of schools. Taking a stance as a researcher involves risk that may change a teacher's status and have unintended consequences. Some teachers worry that school research will take time away from students and the payoff is not sufficient (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992).

Another obstacle could be in the knowledge base of teaching. Research by university-based researchers often leads teachers to believe that they are then expected to learn the skills of effective teaching and also learn how to apply them to their practice. Teachers are left out of the collaborative inquiry and the teacher has no role to play in the generation of a knowledge base.

Finally, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) suggest that the reputation of education

research itself tends to function as an obstacle to promoting teacher research. Since research, many times, has been used to blame educators for the many ills of society, it is no wonder that skepticism is high. The fact that most educational research is perceived by teachers as irrelevant to their daily lives adds to their feelings that research is distant and unpenetrable. In order to encourage wider involvement of teachers in research, it will be necessary to overcome some serious obstacles that might prevent its full implementation or its sustainment.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the procedures and methodology utilized in the study. Included in this chapter are the reasons for adopting a case study strategy and the rationale for being both a participant and an observer during the study.

Qualitative study as the research choice

The advantage of a qualitative approach in this study is that it allowed the evaluator to study the effects of action research in depth and detail, both as a participant and as an observer. The fieldwork involved in gathering data without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis "contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry" (p. 51). This study deals with people and their work. Qualitative study is more appropriate than quantitative when attempting to capture the full scope of teacher feelings about their work and in analyzing what happened during their work (Patton, 1990).

Leadership research team

This study took place in an urban middle school setting. The participants were eleven volunteer teachers and one administrator who met as a group one morning per

week from September through April of one school year. Although the group was self-selected, it was representative of the overall population of teachers at the school. Each grade level was represented as well as guidance, gifted and alternative education. The Leadership team was also representative of the staff in gender and ethnic background. With this representation of the entire faculty, the team was the "cabinet" of the school, given authority, by their peers, to make decisions on behalf of their colleagues. Each member of the Leadership Team was charged with taking information back to his area of representation and to bring back dialogue from the larger faculty to be shared with the team. The Leadership Team was a group of decision makers working on behalf of their colleagues while keeping them informed and involved in decisions made by the team. The lone administrator was the school principal who provided initial leadership and then became a team participant. The Leadership Team was the action research team. Table 2 on the following page provides a demographic description of the Leadership Team.

Table 2

Leadership team

Team member	Gender	Race	Discipline represented
1	F	A-A	Eighth grade math
2	F	A-A	Seventh grade math
3	F	C	Eighth grade math
4	M	A-A	Eighth grade science
5	F	C	Seventh grade science
6	F	C	Eighth grade civics
7	M	C	Seventh grade social studies
8	F	C	Seventh grade language arts
9	F	C	Gifted
10	M	C	Alternative education
11	F	C	Guidance
12	F	C	Administration

C = Caucasian   A-A = African-American

Background

In order to understand the context in which this study took place, background information on the school, staff, and the status of teacher readiness for change in this school has been provided.

Martinsville Middle School underwent tremendous upheaval and change in the last

six years. It had three principals and four assistant principals in the last ten years. It was a junior high school for 25 years, with a veteran staff that was

The SACS process of School Improvement is a modified version of action research.

somewhat skeptical of changing from a junior high to a middle school, a decision made by the school board. It was the new principal's task, in the fall of 1993, to

provide leadership to this change process.

The school had not completed a self study during this 25-year period. Because of curricular changes, administrative changes and unknown reasons, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) gave waivers to the school. A School Improvement Plan was completed during 1995-96, with a site visit from SACS representatives. The next stage for the staff was to implement the improvement plans for the four areas of weakness identified by the staff and detailed in the SACS report. The areas of improvement were student achievement, discipline, technology, and oral and written communication skills of students.

The SACS process of School Improvement assists a school staff and community in the comprehensive evaluation of the programs in the school. It is a means of gathering both process and product oriented data necessary for valid assessments of the school program. The information generated is obtained from multiple sources and is expressed in the "form of descriptions and judgements which are then used in developing a specific School Improvement Plan" (p. 38) which is a similar process to action research (Neighbors, 1993).

On site statistics obtained during the SACS review provided baseline data to demonstrate improvement in areas of improvement identified by the staff. These statistics became particularly important in areas of academic achievement as these were areas chosen by the staff on which the School Improvement Plan was built. Table 3 on the following page provides a summary of statistics gathered for the SACS review.

Table 3

On-site statistics from 1995-96

- 65% of students are receiving free-reduced lunch

- The student body is 57% African-American, 42% Caucasian and 1% Other

- Most students (68%) do not live in two parent homes

- 76% of the professional staff is Caucasian

- At mid-semester, 1995-96, 35% of eighth graders were failing at least two subjects

- At mid-semester, 1995-96, 20% of seventh graders were failing at least two subjects

- Twenty-five students (10%) were retained in eighth grade for 1995-96

- Twenty percent of the student population is overage

- Ninety percent of class failures were represented by African-American males

Rather than use the conventional approach of administrative mandates or bringing in consultants as used in the past, the staff was introduced to action research and used this method to address one of the problems, the underachievement of a large number of students. A Leadership Team was established by recruiting faculty volunteers. Letters were mailed to all staff members during the summer, explaining action research, and asking staff members if they would like to be a part of the newly formed action research team in the school (Appendix A). Recruiting 10-12 volunteers that represented a cross section of the staff was the goal. Eleven teachers ultimately volunteered and became members of the Leadership Team.

Members of the Leadership Team received training on action research prior to the 1996-97 school year. The incentives for the faculty to participate included a chance to be a part of a group to bring about positive change within the school, to learn about the research process and to receive recertification points. The team was provided current on-site data, as well as research reports relevant to the work of the team. Additional on-site student achievement data was shared after the first six-weeks grading period and periodically as the year progressed.

Participants were asked to keep journals of reflections about their involvement in the action research process, from beginning to end. They were asked to include not only what was done in meetings, but feelings and concerns they had about how the work of the team progressed. Meetings were recorded on charts and then typed by a nonmember of

the Leadership Team. The team was provided group process skills after the first meeting as a means of resolving conflict and sharing leadership (Appendix B).

Participant and observer

The researcher assumed both a participant and observer role, allowing the description and understanding of externally observable behaviors and internal activities. The roles allowed the researcher to understand the realities of the workings within the group. Thus, the researcher shared as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study in order to develop an insider's view of events. Getting to know the team on a personal level and participating fully in all activities allowed the researcher to experience activities with empathy and sympathetic introspection (Patton, 1990).

After each team meeting, the researcher recorded field notes as an observer of the process. These notes gave further analysis to important and significant events that were documented by being both a participant and observer. The researcher provided leadership at the beginning of the research project but the role quickly changed to being a participant only.

Data collection

The investigator participated in 28 Leadership Team meetings, spanning from September through April in the 1996-97 school year. The meetings were held in the

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school's conference room at 7:45 a.m. each Thursday and lasted for forty-five minutes.

Breakfast refreshments were provided at each meeting to encourage attendance and to

allow persons to arrive to school earlier than other staff members. Leadership roles were

shared with rotating the role of manager, facilitator, and recorder at each weekly session.

The minutes from meetings were recorded and transcribed into print immediately

following the activities by a secretary. Team members kept journals of weekly meetings,

their accomplishments, and feelings about how the session had progressed. During the

seven-month period, the Leadership Team was given three surveys with open-ended

questions. The surveys were returned to a typist, not associated with the Leadership

Team or the investigator, to allow the authors of the journals to remain anonymous and to

make the answers as honest and candid as possible. Using triangulation, this study was

able to examine multiple sources of data to arrive at conclusions and findings.

To assist teachers in organizing their data, data collection forms were created on

which to summarize research literature reviewed (Appendix C). A similar form was used

in collecting data on teachers as journal entries, recordings and notes from meetings

(Appendix D). Table 4 on the following page provides a summary of data sources used in

this study.

Table 4

Data Sources

- Journal entries

- Anonymous reflections

- Surveys

- Transcripts of team meetings

- Documents produced by the Leadership Team

- Researcher's field notes

Journal entries

Team members were provided with an indexed, three-ring notebook to keep information received at the meetings and to keep their journals. Journals, kept by each member, were used to record meeting agendas and accomplishments of the meeting. Members were encouraged to spend the last few minutes of each meeting to record feelings and reflections about the session. Periodically, journal entries were collected and transcribed by a non-team member for anonymity. The investigator kept a journal along with other team members, as a source of comparison with other members of the action research team and a place for recording field notes.

Minutes of weekly meetings

A recorder was selected for each meeting, and a large chart was used to record the salient points of each meeting. The chart was reviewed at the end of the meeting, for accuracy and to add further points. After each meeting, the investigator added to the chart any items left out, according to notes taken during the session. An independent typist used the minutes of meetings to make transcripts of the meetings. It was important to team members that the minutes are a reflection of not only their accomplishments but often their personal feelings. Personal feelings were recorded in the form of quotations.

Field notes of researcher

Soon after each meeting, the investigator recorded field notes of the meeting. These field notes dealt with the agenda and accomplishments of the meeting and also included personal reflection on how the meeting progressed, impressions of events and any other notes that might be pertinent for future use. Recording these observations, from the researcher's point of view, permits the researcher to return to the observation later during analysis and also permits the reader of the study findings to experience the activity observed through the research report (Patton, 1990).

Periodic Surveys

Periodic written surveys were used with the Leadership Team at three points during the school year, at the beginning, midyear and near the end of the school year. The surveys consisted of open-ended questions and results were given to the independent typist to further maintain the anonymity of the team members (Appendix E).

Documentation

To augment and corroborate data provided by the principal/researcher, the Leadership Team requested data from many sources. The data they collected for review was reviewed from the beginning of the study to the end, thereby giving clues to further investigation. In reviewing requested data, the team was able to establish baseline

comparisons to show future progress. Table 5 on the following page summarizes the data requested by the Leadership Team.

Table 5

Data Requested and Received by Leadership Team

Data requested	Provided by
Grades from 1st six-weeks	Office staff
Attendance records from 1995-96	Attendance office
Grades from 1st semester, Compared with previous year	Principal
Attendance records at mid-year	Attendance office
Grades at end of 5th six-weeks	Office staff
Attendance records at end of 5th six-weeks	Attendance office
Standardized test scores for 1995-96	Principal
Discipline records for 1995-96	Office staff
Literacy Passport Test data from 1995-96	Guidance
Academic failure rates for 1995-96	Office staff

<center>**Data Analysis**</center>

Content analysis

Content analysis is "the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, 1990). This involves analyzing the content of the sources of data. Simplifying the complexity of the data into more manageable parts is the first step toward analysis. To assist the researchers in organizing their data, Summary Forms were created. The Summary Forms allowed team members to record important details of research articles and then allowed the researcher to use codes to assign meaning or categorize information.

Summary forms

A Meeting/Contact Summary Form (Appendix F) was used to summarize the important parts of the meeting or contact. The form "puts the document in context, explains its significance, and gives a brief summary" (p. 50-51). The field worker's notes were set off in double parentheses. The summary form also included a coding of emerging themes to be used for rapid retrieval when needed (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Coding

Codes are aspects or labels for assigning meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study. For the purpose of this study, initial codes were

taken from the research questions, but other themes emerged as data analysis progressed.

Codes were used in this study to identify themes that emerged from field notes, surveys,

journals, minutes of meetings, and reflective writings.

Table 6

Codes

Original codes used	Meanings of codes
CROS-DISC	Cross disciplines; teachers working across teaching disciplines
PROB-SOLV	Problem solving; teachers solving problems collectively
I-S-O	Immediate student outcomes; showing immediate results or improvement in student achievement
PER-DEV	Personal development; developing the personal side of participants
PROF-DEV	Professional development; improvement in professional development of participants
COLL	Collegiality; teachers getting along with each other, learning to work together
SCH-CH	School change; indications of changing practices within school
LEADSP	Leadership; issues dealing with leadership of teachers
CUL	School culture; the identity or self-concept of the school
Emerged Codes	
T-L	Time limitations; concerns with not enough time for meetings
VOL	Volunteering; reasons teachers volunteered to be a part of action research

Mid-year survey

To help determine if the group felt their work during the first half of the school year was of value and to determine the direction of the group for future meetings, the group was asked to respond to a survey that included open-ended questions. The questions were:

- Do you feel the Leadership Team has made any accomplishments so far this year, and if so, what are they?

- Do you feel you have grown personally or professionally from being a part of the Leadership Team?

- How would you change the way the meetings are being conducted?

- Do you feel there have been any limitations on difficulties in accomplishing the goals of this group? If so, what are they?

Chapter IV

Findings of the Study

Introduction

Data in this study were collected through minutes of meetings, journal notes and reflections, surveys, documents produced by the Leadership Team, the researcher's field notes and document analysis. Two kinds of data are included: the results of the Leadership Team and the data collected by the researcher. These data were used to answer the research questions in this study. The investigator puts this chapter into perspective by describing the current status of the school and its readiness for change. The findings of the study are presented in three sections:

1.   Work of the Leadership Team

2.   Categories and themes

3.   Changing role of investigator

The study site: Martinsville Middle School, Martinsville, Virginia

Martinsville Middle School is located in the southern, central part of Virginia, close to the North Carolina border. Its student population is 425 students in grades seven and eight. At the beginning of this study, the school was called Martinsville Junior High School and has now been renamed to Martinsville Middle School, reflecting the physical,

structural and philosophical changes within the school. Preparations are in place for moving sixth grade to the school in the fall of 1997 and increasing the student population to more than seven hundred. With the addition of these students will be many new teaching and staff positions. The physical structure of the school has changed since the study began with the school recently completing a $6 million building renovation project. Teachers and students, during this research project, have moved into more modern facilities, have additional technology support, and have been involved with the student and teachers' transition to the school.

At the beginning of this study there was a great deal of criticism of the school's current master schedule, perhaps impacting the staff's readiness for school change. The criticism was published in the local newspaper and concerns were voiced at a School Board meeting early in the school year. The new schedule had been a teacher-driven decision. With teachers having to defend their judgement and then promising to produce results, the Leadership Team was a vehicle for bringing about change within the school.

Work of the leadership team

Summary description of leadership team meetings

To fully understand how and why decisions were made during the school's action research project, meetings of the Leadership Team will be summarized. These descriptions were obtained from the researchers' field notes, from team members'

journals, and from recorded transcripts of the meetings. Each meeting provided insight into the progress of the group.

The first meeting of the leadership team

The first official meeting of the Leadership Team was held on September 5, 1996, the first week of the 1996-97 school year. The group leader was the principal who was also the researcher. Given to the group were notebooks to hold information used throughout the year, books to be used for journal entries and reflections, and information on action research. The group made several decisions at the initial meeting: 1) to use student achievement as a school-wide action research project, 2) to hold the meetings earlier in the morning due to lack of time at the first meeting, and 3) to request data for study.

At the September 5 meeting, there was some difficulty in organization, with the principal needing to mediate several disagreements on what area the group chose for its research. Some members felt that choosing test scores as a means of showing academic improvement was validating their importance. Others thought test scores were valid measures of achievement. As each argued his point, it was evident that some team members could be easily influenced and manipulated by more vocal and aggressive members. It was apparent that the group would need assistance in group processes in order for the meetings to be productive for all members. The group requested

information on standardized achievement scores for the previous school year, discipline and attendance data from the previous year, Literacy Passport test failure rates from sixth grade, failure rates of students from 1995-96, ethnicity of students and staff, statistics on socioeconomic levels of students, and any other relevant information that would impact student achievement. At this meeting, members of the research team were asked to complete their first open-ended survey with one question about why they chose to be a part of the Leadership Team.

September meetings

The next two meetings of the Leadership Team involved reviewing of the data received and implementing Group Process Skills, using an unpublished work by Stephen Parson (1997), a professor in Educational Leadership at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. It was decided by the members of the team that henceforth the leadership would be shared and volunteers would assume the roles of meeting manager, recorder and facilitator for each meeting. The group decided that the school would adopt two school-wide goals: 1) to improve the academic achievement of students and 2) to improve discipline and disciplinary practices of the staff, as each impacts the other. These two goals were defined, analyzed and strategies developed at two subsequent meetings in preparation for presenting information to the remainder of the staff.

October meetings

The fifth meeting of the research team dealt with how to present information to the faculty and how to receive further information from them as well as obtain a consensus on proceeding with school goals. It was decided that the staff would receive a written copy of the school's goals (Appendix G), as determined by the leadership group, and a form would be provided for additional input. At the faculty meeting, leadership team members would present portions of the plan, seek additional verbal input and determine if a consensus was achieved.

In subsequent meetings the team became more focused as they continued their site-based research to determine strategies for improvement. After looking at attendance data, one of the first goals the group began work on was student attendance. Within days, the group presented to the staff new Attendance-Taking Policies that were immediately implemented by the entire school (Appendix H). Communicating with and receiving feedback from other staff members was a concern to the group and was resolved by deciding to communicate their work through a weekly memo that is published by the principal and given to all staff members.

November meetings

As the staff began to implement strategies to obtain school goals, the Leadership Team looked at research on topics that would impact reaching these goals. The

Leadership Team asked for a review of the action research process and the book How to Use Action Research in the Self-Renewing School by Emily Calhoun was distributed. The group decided to research strategies to motivate reluctant learners. Research data was obtained from Educational Research Service and a form was used to summarize and record information to be shared with each other and the rest of the staff. The official topic for research review was "Strategies for Motivating Reluctant Learners." Team members were each given three articles to review, summarize, and present findings at subsequent meetings. Topics ranged from computer use in schools, counseling reluctant learners, improving test scores to writing skills. Articles on improving standardized test scores and motivating writing techniques were shared with the rest of the faculty. Another article dealing with exceptional children was sent from the team to the director of special services.

December meetings

Meetings in December concentrated on research about motivating reluctant learners and deciding if any strategies were appropriate to approve in this school. It was decided that the school was already executing some of the strategies being researched and current work was validated. New strategies emerged that included careful monitoring of student progress by teams, meeting with parents and students to discuss progress and strategies for improvement, personalizing instruction, rewarding academic progress and

achievement and targeting student attendance.

Comments and answers to the Mid-year Survey were typed by a person not involved with the process to protect the identity of writers and to give the team more freedom in their comments.

January meetings

The Leadership Team began to meet again on a weekly basis immediately after Christmas break. The first two meetings were not attended by all members and it was feared that the work load had become too burdensome, but most members were back within a two week period. January meetings were used to look at the goals set for the school and in evaluating their effectiveness. Researchers decided to look at student achievement midyear and to compare it to the previous school year, even though a different group of students was being compared. Important data emerged. Table 7 on the following page presents data on academic failures that was to become an important part of the focus of the Leadership Team.

Table 7

Academic Failures

First Semester Failures
Two or More Subjects

Team	1995-96	1996-97
7th grade team I	8	18
7th grade team II	11	20
8th grade team I	37	21
8th grade team II	25	6

The teacher researchers determined that the information received did not demonstrate that school goals were improving student achievement but did show that overall, the eighth grade class was performing better academically than the previous years' class. The information was used to identify the failing students and to begin strategies for improvement. The group discussed initiating a study skills course and decided that this needs to be done during the next school year and brain-stormed other ideas on implementing the class without employing an additional teacher.

In continuing to look at programs put in place and evaluating their effectiveness, team members asked for additional data on attendance. It was determined that the attendance policies initiated early in the school year were not working well enough based on the following data presented on Table 8 on the following page.

Table 8

First Semester Attendance Data

Martinsville Middle School Attendance Data (1/97)

Daily Attendance Sept., 1997	Daily Attendance Jan., 1997
7th grade: 95.4%	7th grade: 95.4%
8th grade: 93.2%	8th grade: 88.1%

After evaluating this data, the Leadership Team decided to change directions with the attendance policies and issued an Addendum to Attendance Policy (Appendix I). It was apparent that attendance was not improving at either grade level, as was intended, and that attendance was worse at the eighth grade level. Subsequent meetings were used to discuss the status of current strategies and brainstorming new ones, as this group felt that student attendance was having an immediate impact on student achievement.

February meetings

As weekly meetings continued in February, the Leadership Team began to involve others within the school to provide data or to share information. The school initiated a project in which students who had failed a test or not completed an assignment would remain in the academic class during physical education class until the work was accomplished to the teacher's satisfaction. Students could also choose to go to physical education in order to obtain assistance in classes in which they were having difficulty. Students stayed in class with academic teachers. This activity was causing students to complete more work on time, to study more for tests, to receive tutoring before the subject matter became too overwhelming and thereby grades were improved. At one meeting, a representative from the physical education department was asked to attend the meeting after hearing that keeping students from physical education to do academic work was a concern in accomplishing physical fitness and health education goals. The group

was able to hear another viewpoint on the consequences of their decisions. This input led to further alteration of the action being implemented in the school to improve academic achievement.   Students would only be allowed to miss physical education three days per week instead of five which was a compromise reached with the physical education department.

At another meeting in February, the team asked each interdisciplinary team to send a representative to the meeting to share the strategies currently being used by teams to improve attendance and academic achievement. Each team made a verbal presentation as well as presenting forms and contracts they are using (Appendix J.) One member of the Leadership Team commented "We got some good stuff today that we usually don't know about. The sharing is great."

The Leadership Team used the research generated from Phi Delta Kappa's Hot Topic Series booklet compiled by Scott Williams and Robert Murphy, Developing Successful Middle Schools (1996). The Leadership Team Research Report form was used to record data for review. Each member was asked to review two research articles on the topic of "Adolescent Needs" which was a compilation of articles dealing with the unique needs of this age group. A second topic, "Middle Level Strategies," was introduced in late February and reviewed by the Leadership Team for use in the school. No particular program was initiated as a result of the research review.

March meetings

Team meetings in March concentrated on improving attendance and on strategies for improving standardized test scores, as this was one of the school goals for the year. Teachers shared with each other the strategies that were working in getting students to school each day, such as calling the absent student immediately, using the classroom telephone, and rewarding perfect attendance by homerooms and by teams.

The group brainstormed ways to improve standardized test scores and the consensus was to concentrate on improving the motivation of students. The following strategies were decided upon and shared with the rest of the faculty:

- Share with students test scores from the previous year,

- Share with students the newspaper article that criticized test scores at the school,

- Tell students what the school goal is and ask for their help in accomplishing the goal,

- Ask students for input on a school-wide celebration should the goal be met,

- Place banners of encouragement throughout the school during testing week,

- Solicit support from parents by sending them information on testing and having them provide incentives to students during testing, and

- Offer the Presidential Academic award to students scoring in the 85th percentile and above on standardized testing

April meetings

In April, the Leadership Team used its meeting times to look at the programs they had initiated within the school and to evaluate their effectiveness. They felt their accomplishments were:

- Establishing obtainable school goals for the year,

- Establishing new attendance policies that included ways to reward good, attendance and strategies for students with attendance problems,

- Disseminating information on exemplary middle school practices that work,

- Improving disciplinary practices within the school,

- Eliminating Internal Suspension classes and adding Saturday School as a way to keep students in school,

- Improving communication across discipline areas, and

- Sharing leadership within the school.

The last step for this group was to determine if their accomplishments directly affected the year long goal of improving academic achievement. The group used as its baseline data for academic achievement statistics from the first six-weeks' report cards, specifically, the number of students failing two or more subjects. These grades were compared with those after the fifth six-weeks with the following results shown on Table 9 on the following page.

Table 9

Student Achievement
1996-97

Percent failing 2 or more subjects after first 6-weeks		Percent failing 2 or more subjects after fifth 6-weeks	
Seventh Grade	Eighth Grade	Seventh Grade	Eighth Grade
6%	19%	5%	14%

After data was obtained showing some improvement in student achievement for the school year, the group was surprised that the results were not higher as most felt that achievement had improved more than the data indicated. The information was shared with the remainder of the staff with the determination to make more improvement in grades before the year ended.

In addition to student achievement, the Leadership Team evaluated its efforts in disciplinary action since attendance in school was determined to be a cause of poor academic achievement. Each team within the school had begun practices of meeting with individual students and their parents for minor disciplinary concerns, rather than sending them to the office with a possible consequence of suspension. Table 10 compares external and internal suspensions from the past school year to the current one.

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Table 10

Discipline action data

Percent of students with external suspensions		Percent of students with internal suspensions	
1995-96	1996-97	1995-96	1996-97
16%	11%	20%	5%

The Leadership Team was able to see from the discipline action data that their efforts had made a significant difference in the number of students being suspended from school. There was a great deal of discussion as to why the improved disciplinary practices did not show more significant results in student achievement. The group decided that this topic should be one of the first for discussion in the 1997-98 school year.

Another accomplishment the group felt was significant was the establishment of new attendance policies that included rewarding good attendance. The Leadership Team had spent several meetings in finding ways to improve in this area and then looked at data comparing last year's attendance percentages, by grade level, to percentages for the current year. See Table 11 on the following page for comparisons.

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Table 11

Attendance comparisons

Summary attendance 1995-96		Summary attendance 1996-97	
Seventh Grade	Eighth Grade	Seventh Grade	Eighth Grade
93.5%	92.8%	95.1%	94.9%

The comparison data indicated that attendance had improved in both grades although the group felt that the improvement should have been more significant. It was decided that the team would challenge the staff to continue its efforts for better attendance in the last weeks of school in order to show more significant improvement in the area of attendance. The group decided that targeting attendance in the 1997-98 school year should be a top priority.

Categories and themes

Ten categories and themes emerged after reviewing the data and coding each for

significance. Eight of the ten were related to the research questions that were asked in

this study. Reasons for volunteering and limitations of the group were categories that

emerged incidentally from the analysis. Although not initially planning to study these

additional issues, analysis indicated relevance and therefore investigation seemed

necessary. Table 12 shows the categories and their relationship to the research questions.

Table 12

Relations of emerged categories and research questions

Research questions	Categories
1. Can teachers use action research to work across disciplines to address a problem?	• Working across disciplines to solve problems
2. Can action research be used as a collective problem-solving approach to school renewal?	• Problem-solving for school renewal
3. Does action research lead to immediate student outcomes?	• Student outcomes
4. Is action research an effective route to personal and professional development?	• Personal and professional development
5. Does action research lead to increased collegiality among the staff as they work together to solve a school problem?	• Collegiality
6. Is action research an effective vehicle to school change?	• Vehicle for school change
7. Does the opportunity for leadership in action research bring about any change in teachers?	• Leadership
8. How does action research change the culture of the school?	• School culture

Themes that emerged from each category are presented below. The words of the participants will be used in textboxes to illustrate themes in analyzing each category and to allow the reader to share the personal responses of the Leadership Team. Quotations are from Leadership Team members and were gathered through anonymous journaling that does not allow for the individual identification of the writer.

1.   Reasons for involvement

Eleven staff members volunteered to be a part of the Leadership Team, along with the school principal. The researcher was interested in reasons for volunteering and found them to be for professional reasons. Most seemed interested in doing their part for school improvement.

> *"I thought the idea behind the team's formation was a good one. I liked the idea that it was open to anyone. I also see it as a way of doing something to make us better."*

> *"I am interested in improving our school. I hope I will have some valuable ideas or suggestions that will assist the committee in dealing with complaints.*

Textboxes contain actual quotation from notes written in individual journals. The main reasons for participation included the chance to be a part of positive change within the school and to share leadership within the school.   Having input into changes that are

> *"I wanted to know what was going on in the school and to be a part of a positive force for improvement."*

> *"I am interested in our school's progress. Guidance often hears concerns from parents, students and teachers. Hopefully, I could give input from these viewpoints."*

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being initiated within the school was considered to be a motivating factor. Others saw

their participation as a way to help the administration of the school while some saw their

involvement as a way to study the leadership of the principal.

2.   Working across disciplines to solve problems

For many staff members working in

a middle school with teams being on

different schedules and many having been

formerly departmentalized as a junior high

school, this was their first opportunity to

work with colleagues from other

disciplines. All journals reflected their

interest in working across disciplines to

solve problems as a positive experience.

Team members commented in their

journals that they had never worked with

such a diverse group and that it would be a

challenge to hear and understand the

differences of opinion. They seemed to

feel that their diversity derived from their

> *"This is an interesting group! I have never directly worked with science and math people. I look forward to this new experience."*

> *"It's good to get input from all people in the school, not just by assignment area. This has been a real plus for me."*

> *"Today we invited the PE department to join us and to hear their concerns about some of our initiatives. It was good to hear their perspectives and to try to understand where they are coming from. I think we take them for granted sometimes."*

> *"I was shocked at the amount of information kept at the school about attendance and the amount of work that goes into keeping records. I personally plan to do a better job in providing information to the secretary."*

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work in varying disciplines. As more information was needed, the Leadership Team invited other staff members to attend their meetings. On one occasion the physical education teacher attended the meeting and on another occasion office personnel were asked to share information. At another meeting, the band director attended. Journal entries revealed the respect team members were beginning to have for the jobs of others within the school. One teacher commented on her attempts to do a better job for the office personnel who keeps attendance records. It was obvious from the reflective entries that working across disciplines within the school was a new experience for most members of the Leadership Team.

3. **Problem solving for school renewal**

Having completed the SACS review for accreditation and the creation of a School Improvement Plan, the staff was ready for implementation. The Leadership Team decided to use action research as a vehicle for school renewal.

> *"I want to help in identifying our strengths and weaknesses and help to make changes that will make us better."*

> *"We need to change the way we are doing some things. Students aren't doing as well in our school as they could. We've got to change!"*

As the group began working together, they decided to begin immediately to set goals for the school. School goals were established and a consensus

obtained from the rest of the staff. School renewal, or change within a school to better

meet the needs of its students, became the

focus of the group.

> *"Letting teachers come up with their own solutions is new for us. For so long we've been told what to do. Learning to solve our own problems makes us really evaluate what I do with my students."*

It was obvious to the investigator

of this study that staff members were not

accustomed to making their own decisions and solving their own problems. In the past,

this had been an administrative task.

Learning to identify their own strengths

and weaknesses and then making changes

within themselves, and within the school,

became a novel idea. Using this group as a

vehicle for change, rather than leading

> *"We are finally recognizing that we need to change some of our practices. Sometimes I think we encourage students to do poorly in school because of the way we set up our assignments. This has been a good problem solving session."*

from the top down, was recognized by the group as one solution to school renewal.

4.   Student Outcomes

When the Leadership Team was

asked to respond to its accomplishments,

many of their comments did not reflect

direct student outcomes. The team believed

> *'Deciding on school goals and strategies for achieving them was an important accomplishment. Student achievement should improve but I'm not sure how this will happen."*

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they had set goals and accomplished many goals but had difficulty reflecting these goals to actual student performances. At the end of the fifth six-weeks, when the researcher left the field, evaluation was made of actual student outcomes as a result of the Leadership Team initiatives. Many were surprised that their efforts were not more dramatic. Because of their intense involvement, they seemed to feel that student outcomes would show greater improvement in academic achievement.

"I expect major improvement in some areas and maybe not as much in others. We've done a lot in discipline this year and I think that will show in less referrals to the office. Student achievement has so many variables beyond our control."

"I think we'll show great improvement in all areas. The things we've done should make a difference in student achievement. At least I hope so!"

"When I looked at grades after this 6 weeks, I was disappointed that we still have all these failures. We need to keep trying harder. 'Hard data' is not something we are used to analyzing."

Their disappointment in not showing "hard data" or figures that prove their accomplishments was evident.

5. <u>Professional and personal growth</u>

In the letter sent to the staff asking for volunteers for the Leadership Team, professional growth was promised. Having been a part of the group throughout the year, it was interesting that participants felt they had not only grown professionally, but personally. Being a part of a positive force within the school seemed to be personally gratifying.

All members of the Leadership Team felt that they had grown both professionally and personally during this investigation. In a survey teachers were asked *What have you gained personally or professionally by being a part of the Leadership Team?* Responses varied. Some members felt that becoming a better listener during the meetings would help in other phases of their career development. One teacher saw these meetings as a place to become professionally

> *"I have grown personally and professionally by being a better listener to students and teacher and I have tried to find ways to work better with both."*

> *"This is a place where I have been professionally inspired. Each time we meet I learn something new. The research that has been shared and discussed should make me a better teacher - if I find time to use it!"*

> *"Additional information from articles and school data that I might not otherwise know about have given me more insight into the middle school program, problems and possibilities. This helps me in teaching middle schoolers."*

> *"Yes, reading the articles and doing research on our goals and how to solve problems help me in my daily work with students. Talking with other teachers helps too."*

inspired and recharged for the day. Learning to work together was a learning experience

for another teacher who felt that this growth would make her a better professional.

6.   Vehicle for school change

Zakariya (1995) says educational change is not always progress but is just "change for the sake of change." She believes that usual change in schools is hard because of the complexity of education and the quest for quick action. Wilkes (1992) believes that a solution to school change is empowering those closest to students with the responsibility to affect change. Action research, conducted by the teachers in the school, provided an avenue for making decisions at the lowest level.

Journal entries reflected an appreciation for how action research was

"It's really hard to change some people and the way they think - including me. I take the ideas we generate back to my team and sometimes they look at me like I'm crazy. Many of us are working hard to make our school better for kids."

"I see things changing but not fast enough."

"Action research has given me ideas to improve my own practices. I'm concerned that more people are not involved. We need the staff to buy into what we are doing."

"We have tried to focus the staff in the same direction this year, working to improve the students' behavior, grades, and attendance. We are trying to change things."

being used to bring about change in the school. As strategies were developed, refined and

evaluated for success or failure, team members commented on making changes within the

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school. Some teachers thought change was happening, while others expressed disappointment that all staff members were not participating. Others were frustrated

> *"I really thought we had made more change than what I saw in the numbers. I'm disappointed that we were not able to show a dramatic difference in student achievement."*

with the slowness of change and were concerned with their inability to affect the attitudes and educational practices of professionals in the school.

7. Leadership

School restructuring calls for new expectations of leadership to schools according to Leithwood (1994). He believes leadership from the principal is vital to the success of school change. Others (Thompson, 1994 and Sideris & Skau, 1994) believe leadership must be present from many areas other than the principal of the school.

> *"I really like the Team Process Skills with everybody getting a chance to assume a job title."*

> *"I like that everyone has had an opportunity to lead. I have not been in this role before and I like it."*

A sense of empowerment from those participating in action research was documented as a benefit. The group at this school confirmed that their leadership in this process was important to them. A category that emerged in analyzing data

> *"I like the rotation of roles. I like the way everyone gets a chance to do each job."*

> *"When I joined this group, I planned to just listen and learn. I'm usually quiet in a group. This has forced me to be a leader and it's within a supportive environment. I'm surprised that I can do this."*

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from the Leadership Team revealed that the many teachers enjoyed assuming roles of leadership within the school. Some commented on different roles that were assumed during the meetings. Introducing Team Process Skills as a means to rotate leadership caused other teachers to comment on its effectiveness. Many teachers had not previously assumed a leadership role in the school before and the meeting format was conducive to letting this happen. One teacher commented that this process had "forced" her to be a leader and she was surprised at her ability to assume this role.

8.   <u>School Culture</u>

Fullen and Stiegelbaum (1991) believe that schools have failed to make significant change because they have not impacted the culture of the school. Changing the culture in a school means changing the way teachers feel about their work and their purpose in the school. The culture at Martinsville Middle School seems to be directed toward giving the major responsibility for student achievement and success to the student. With the faculty

> *"Has the whole school changed in how it deals with students? Some have and some haven't. This kind of thing takes time."*

> *"We have a long way to go in changing the way the entire teaching staff thinks. Are we more student oriented? Overall, I'd say yes, but there are still a lot of people who feel like the students own all their problems."*

> *"Real change takes a long time. We haven't done this long enough to change those things yet. Will some on this faculty ever change? I doubt it."*

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taking responsibility for student

achievement would be a major change in

the culture of this school and has been one

of the goals of the Leadership Team. When

> *"You finally hit on what our problem is. We've got to change the way we think about students."*

the team was asked if they had impacted the culture of the school, some members thought

there had been change in the way the staff thinks about its work with each other and

students. Some thought significant change was happening while others expressed

frustration at not everyone in the school participating in change. Most recognized that

real change in school culture takes time and one year is not enough.

9.   Collegiality

Many proponents of action research

believe increased collegiality is a benefit for

initiating this process. Bennett (1993) lists

the strengthening of collegial bonds as a

strong value for beginning a research project.

When teachers get along with each other and

support each other, a better learning

environment for students and staff should be

created.

> *"Having refreshments is a nice touch. Here is where I look forward to coming on Thursdays to see colleagues I never see otherwise."*

> *"It's nice to be with people who have the same problems I do and truly understand my concerns."*

> *"I have enjoyed working together with other colleagues to solve problems. I rarely see some of these people much less work with them. I've enjoyed the opportunity to get to know them."*

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Teachers who initially thought these meetings would only be an added responsibility soon came to realize that meeting with other teachers on a regular basis could be enjoyable, according to notes written in their journals. Teachers reflected on their need to be with other

> *"Getting to work with different people has been professionally gratifying."*

> *"It allows for some give and take among my colleagues that we don't have time for during the day. The group dynamics are different."*

teachers on a regular basis to share concerns and to enjoy each other's company. There were no negative comments about working together after the initial conflict of roles and defining those roles for shared leadership. Other than social benefits, the group found their work together professionally gratifying as well. Working with teachers that they normally do not have the opportunity with whom to associate became an important issue to several. The ability to get input from different disciplines was a professional stimulus that many enjoyed.

10. Limitations

Hattrup and Bickel (1993) believe an obstacle to meaningful research taking place in a school is the limitation of time. Having a supportive principal is important, they say, or at

> *"Our time usually runs out before we really finish each meeting. We probably need to meet when we have more time for discussion and sharing but I'm not sure when that would be. It's probably the best we can do but it's sometimes frustrating."*

least one who does not get in the way of progress. Others believe that the isolations of teachers and their lack of time for reflection are major deterrents to school research being productive.

The Leadership Team reflected throughout their journals their frustration in lack of time to accomplish goals. After the first meeting, the team decided to allow more time in the mornings but comments still reflect their concerns.

> *"Scheduling times to meet is a concern to me. Early morning works for most but is not the best time for me with two children to drop off at different schools, but I do the best that I can. Finding time that is good for everyone is a limitation, I think."*

Other limitations emerged that were equally frustrating to team members. Finding ways to include others in this process was a concern as well as not allowing the most vocal members of the staff to dominate meetings. One person commented that change that is slow is frustrating to her while another mentioned personal issues being a limiting

> *"The lack of personal time I can give these meetings is frustrating to me especially meeting the morning after a night class. That my principal supports this is very important to me."*

> *"Just the realization that change is often slow to implement is a limitation to what we often want - quick action."*

factor in how much time she was able to give the meetings. No one seemed to have an answer to the problems faced by the group in having limited meeting time, or at least it was not mentioned in journal entries or survey answers.

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Changing role of the investigator

Throughout the research project, the investigator was a fully participating member of the Leadership Team. As roles were rotated, the investigator assumed the same roles as other participants, providing an insider's view of the process. At the end of the fifth six-weeks of the school year, the role changed from participant to researcher. Stepping out of the field as the group continued its work allowed the researcher to look at what had taken place from a more objective point of view and to examine the data with a different perspective. Members of the Leadership Team completed surveys and submitted their journals for typing to provide data to be used in the study.

The first meeting after leaving the field

The Leadership Team continued to meet after the investigator left the field. The first meeting was without the investigator and minutes of the meeting were placed on the principal's desk. At that meeting, the group discussed the superintendent's decision not to add an administrator or guidance counselor for the 1997-98 school year, even though the school's population would be significantly higher. The team decided to call the superintendent and ask for his attendance at the next Leadership Team meeting.

The second meeting after leaving the field

The investigator attended the next meeting of the Leadership Team, expecting the superintendent to be in attendance. At the meeting, it was discovered that a small group within the team had decided that it was not appropriate to contact the superintendent and the person to make the contact did not follow up with his assignment from the team. Other members within the team were upset and some even angry about this decision as it was not supported by the rest of the team. The meeting ended with the principal, now out of the field of investigation, bringing resolution to the dispute. The principal reminded the group of its purpose and of the roles of each member of the Leadership Team. The group agreed not to contact the superintendent as this was not their role as a team.

Bringing closure to the leadership team meetings

It was important to find out what happened in the meeting in which the principal was not present and to determine how to bring closure to the meetings for the year. After talking with several team members after the meeting, it was determined that after the principal decided to not attend further meetings but only to receive notes, one very vocal team member decided to seize control of the group and pressure others into deciding to involve the superintendent in its next meeting, even though most did not agree with this decision. An important issue that evolved was the role of principal, or of another significant person within the school, who could keep the team focused. The group had

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made many important decisions that affected the school and with one meeting, the group almost disintegrated. The principal called one additional meeting to bring resolution to the conflict and to plan for future meetings.

The last meeting of the leadership team

The principal called a last meeting in May of the Leadership Team to bring resolution to conflict from the previous meeting and to bring closure to the group's work for the 1996-97 school year. Team members were allowed to give their points of view about calling the superintendent. Group Process Skills (Parson, 1995), particularly leadership jobs from earlier meetings were reviewed as it seemed to some that a few had assumed unrecognized leadership roles during the last meeting. The group decided to take no further action at this time.

The group reviewed its accomplishments for the year and made plans for the 1997-98 school year. It was decided that goals for the next school year should include:

- Continuation of attendance policies,

- Continuation of disciplinary practices that promote academic achievement, and

- Continuation and revision of policies in test-taking skills.

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The group decided to add several issues that should be included in plans for 1997-98. They are:

- The achievement, or lack of, of African-American students,

- The equity of educational opportunities for different races of students, and

- The diversity of our student population and how to celebrate the diversity rather than dwelling on its problems.

Chapter V

Discussion, Conclusion,
Implications for Practice,
and Recommendations for Future Research

Introduction

The investigator carried out an in-depth study of the use of action research at

Martinsville Middle School to address the underachievement of its students. Through

analysis of journal entries, anonymous reflections, surveys, transcripts of meetings, the

researcher's field notes, and data produced by the Leadership Team it is seen that the use

of action research might be an effective vehicle for addressing this issue.

The sections in this chapter are discussion, conclusions, implications for practice,

and recommendations for future use. The investigator used the components of the

research questions to guide the discussion on how action research was used to make

changes within the school, particularly in student achievement.

Discussion

How teachers used action research to work across disciplines to address a school problem

This study shows that action research can be used with a staff to involve members

from many disciplines to solve problems that are common to the entire school. Teachers

volunteered to be a part of a Leadership Team and the group included teachers from nine

disciplines within the school. Being one of the first times the various subject areas had worked together there was some compromise used in decision-making as well as sharing leadership roles. The group met on a regular basis thereby allowing time for faculty from different disciplines to get to know each other.

As the group met and determined issues to be studied, information and additional data were needed from other sources. Bringing more diverse presentations to meetings, such as office personnel and physical education teachers, the group expanded its work into more areas of the school. The approach of including persons from various subject and discipline areas was a means of breaking down barriers of misunderstanding that had been created many years earlier. Teachers were saying "I didn't know she felt like that," or "this gives me a new feeling for how that person thinks about this issue."

By opening the membership to any interested person and by nurturing the diversity of the group, action research became an avenue to pull the faculty together in ways not earlier possible. Working together from many areas of the school gave unity to the purpose and to the staff.

How the school used action research for collective problem-solving

Meeting dates were scheduled for each Thursday of the week and agendas were set in advance of the meetings. The agenda was determined by the results of the last meeting or set between the principal and the meeting manager. The meetings were a

place to put issues on the table for solution-finding, whether through brainstorming with members or through researching the issue. The action research model was used to move the process from discussion to action. Professional literature was reviewed as well as seeking and receiving ideas from the collective group.

Several issues were tackled. As student achievement was the main thrust of study, it became clear to the group that other issues were affecting the academic achievement of students. An issue that the group spent much time on was attendance, as the group felt that students could not learn or achieve without attending school on a regular basis. The group initiated a new attendance policy that made sure all students were counted present, if indeed in school, as well as rewarding perfect attendance in homerooms. This was a new policy in that many students were previously being counted absent because of attending breakfast during attendance-taking in homerooms. As competition mounted among teachers and students, there was a marked improvement in attendance statistics. The Leadership Team felt that if students began to care about being at school, their achievement would improve as well.

Another issue the Leadership Team tackled was in the area of discipline, as it was felt that this area directly impacted student achievement. Research on effective disciplinary practices were reviewed by the team. The group began changing disciplinary practices such as team contracts or lunch detention, and created a reward system that showed promise for keeping students in class thereby improving learning. Action

research became a way to get input from many to solve the problems of all.

Determining immediate student outcomes

Although there were positive outcomes in several areas, only a few showed immediate results. The one area in which there were immediate results was in the area of attendance. A school-wide contest was held in which homerooms competed for perfect attendance for the week and best attendance for the six-weeks. Announcements were made daily for homerooms with perfect attendance and large "blue ribbons" were placed on the doors of homerooms. At the end of the six-weeks, the class with the best attendance received a pizza party. When one team had perfect attendance for an entire week, an ice cream party was held by teachers as a means of celebration. There were immediate student outcomes in improved attendance.

As disciplinary practices changed there was a decrease in office referrals but student achievement did not change immediately. Team teachers began meeting with individual students, groups of students and with the parents of students to discuss disciplinary problems. Students were encouraged to choose appropriate consequences that would change the behavior that was keeping them from being in class to learn. Teachers were encouraged that these practices would have long-term effects if carried out over an entire school year, but immediate outcomes were not as apparent in grades.

As teachers were attempting to impact achievement directly, many changed their

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practices in testing by allowing students to retake tests and turn in assignments late but with a penalty. The school initiated a policy that failing students would be held back from physical education or exploratory classes in order to complete work or receive tutoring from teachers. Students also were allowed to attend Saturday School, formerly held for behavior problems, to make up academic work. For students who were serious about changing and for students who had teams of teachers who took partial responsibility for their learning, there were immediate student outcomes. Grades improved and academic achievement was impacted. When teachers agreed to tutor students but did not encourage their attendance, student outcomes were not immediate nor were they sustained. Student outcomes that focused on changing how teachers teach and how they deal with students individually appeared to have the greatest immediate influence on student achievement.

How personal and professional development of teachers was influenced

Action research provided the team of teachers with the opportunity to share leadership and decision-making that had not previously been afforded them. Teachers grew professionally by reviewing literature of practices that work and then trying them out in their own classrooms. Many reported that their professional skills were enhanced by learning to listen to others and to other points of view. Getting to know each other on a personal level or in a different capacity was also a means of growing both professionally

and personally. Most teachers participating in action research commented that they enjoyed the new friendships found and the professional alliances that were strengthened.

One of the important professional developments involved new paradigm shifts. As teachers implemented new practices, evaluated their value and then modified their actions, they began to see how their professional actions empowered them to make significant change in the lives of their students. One teacher commented in her journal "I can see now that I have the power to change the course of my students' lives. I don't have to leave it up to them. I'm the one who can make changes for them."

The effects of increased collegiality on the staff

"Breaking down barriers that divide us" was a way one Leadership Team member described his association with other staff members while being a part of the action research team. The group enjoyed time to socialize and have food and drink together. Finding time to socialize and get to know others on an informal basis has the potential for improving staff morale within a school. As teachers get to know others and as they learn to accept different points of view without anger, bridges are built and a better learning environment is created for both students and staff. In every survey and in every journal, team members commented on how much they enjoyed the collegiality of other staff members and how important this was to their mental health. New networks were formed and new alliances made. Finding ways to expand this experience to the rest of the staff is

a next task to be tackled.

How action research was used for school renewal

Martinsville Middle School had tried many efforts in school reform but few had sustained results. Action research provided a vehicle to making significant and lasting change by allowing those closest to students to have input into these efforts. The principal allowed her leadership to be shared therefore providing more opportunities for leadership among the staff. The school was beginning to see the results of school renewal in improved test scores, improved academic achievement, better attendance and less disciplinary action being taken with students. By setting staff goals and targeting areas of improvement, the staff began to move toward a more student oriented school.

Changing the culture of the school

The action research team did not set out to change the culture of the school as it changed its practices for students. Changing the school culture to being one where power is shared, where staff input is valued and where staff members feel they can impact their environment was a by-product of this process. The Leadership Team felt that they had changed the culture of the school within their group, but were unsure as to whether the culture in the entire school had been changed. Moving a staff in the same positive direction was not a specific goal of the Leadership Team but quickly became a goal that

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was desired and attempted. Changing a school's culture is not a goal that can be met in a partial school year but must be ongoing, with the same determined commitment year after year. Expanding leadership beyond the Leadership Team to other staff members should also be explored. Only then can a school's culture be truly impacted. Action research and its process for school improvement shows great potential for moving a school in such a direction.

Conclusions

The case study at Martinsville Middle School in Martinsville, Virginia has provided several conclusions. First, it was found that action research is a vehicle that can be used to cross the disciplines in addressing a school problem. Meeting weekly, setting school goals and finding solutions to problems provides problem-solving at its finest in an approach to school renewal. Action research can provide some immediate student outcomes although most actions need time to implement and evaluate for long term use.

Based on the findings in this study, action research was an effective route to increased collegiality, professional and personal development. Teachers who participated in the study unanimously agreed that they had grown in all these areas. Their need to be around others of similar concerns and who have empathy for their situations appear to be of paramount importance to teachers. Finding ways to expand the role of the Leadership Team into other areas of the school needs to be explored.

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Most schools want to make lasting change in its continual reform and renewal efforts. The use of action research to bring about this change appears to be an effective means. Using the expertise and leadership of teachers was a way to make change from the bottom up, which appears to be more sustaining and more effective, according to the results of this study. Giving teachers the opportunity to share in the leadership of the school appears to be important to them.

Unless a school's culture is impacted, there will probably be little actual change in student achievement. Action research provided the opportunity to examine one's values and beliefs and to begin efforts toward changing individual beliefs as well as those of the organization. Changing the culture of a school takes time and effort and is a goal that should be ongoing and long-term

Implications for practice

This study has produced several findings. It is based on these findings that the following suggestions will be recommended to public schools for implementation.

Elements necessary for use of a school-wide action research project

1. There should be some understanding of what action research is and how it is used in a school. This could be done by providing staff members with literature on the subject or staff development from someone knowledgeable about its use. *Action*

research should become a phrase that can be used by the staff with some understanding of its components and use.

2. The principal of the school must be willing to support the use of action research or at least not be hostile to using it. Attending the meetings and providing requested materials and expertise would add value to verbal support. Being a participant with the staff would give further opportunity for shared leadership opportunities.

3. Membership of the team leading action research should be voluntary, not appointed. Voluntary membership gives further leadership to the team and takes away the appointed member bias. With members volunteering, they may be more prone to remain involved in the process from beginning to end.

4. There should be a desire, within the staff, to make change within the school. Having identified areas of concern or areas for improvement are necessary to give direction to the research study.

Structuring time to implement action research

1. Implementing action research requires time on a regular basis for committee members to meet, discuss, and implement strategies. Time should be set aside at least once a week to meet without distractions or interruptions.

2. Team members, ideally, should be given release time on a regular basis to carry out duties of action research. For example, teachers may have homerooms

covered by an aide or other staff member once a week in order to appropriate more time for the participation.

Resources needed to support action research

1. A meeting place that is set aside for this purpose, which is quiet and free of distractions, would be conducive to discussions and decision-making.

2. Supplies such as an easel, chart paper, markers and tape are essential to keeping the group focused and in clarifying discussion. Having these items available every meeting would provide valuable time often used to secure these materials.

3. A typist should be made available to the group to record minutes of the meetings so they can be given to team members for review, clarification and study. This person could provide support for the researchers and relieve them of additional responsibilities.

4. A means to keep all information together and available for easy access should be made available, such as a notebook or accordion folder. Bringing this information to each meeting would save time and energy in retrieving needed information.

5. The staff must have access to research data. Having someone responsible for obtaining requested data would provide assistance to the team and encourage the use of these resources. This data needs to be accessed quickly and provided promptly for more effective use.

How to begin action research within a school

1. Beginning with a small project might be wise prior to initiating a school-wide project. Those with some success would be resources for further action or use.

2. Providing staff development in a school on action research prior to asking for volunteers would allow better decision-making as to the commitment required from staff members.

3. Leadership must be provided to the team, at least during initial stages. After leadership is shared among the group, the initial support can lessen.

4. Group process skills should be provided in the beginning stages of the research. These skills will allow the group to rotate jobs and share leadership. It also will reduce conflict among the research members and clarify roles.

Effects of action research on a faculty

1. Action research increases collegiality among the participants. The principal of a school should consider using action research not only to solve problems but to provide opportunities for staff members to get together socially and professionally.

2. Action research shares the leadership within a school. The literature review reveals that when decisions are made at the lowest level, at the teacher level within a school, there is a better chance for more significant change. Schools

should recognize this and set up an environment that would promote this shared leadership.

3.   Action research is a means to change the culture in a school. If a school wishes to make significant change, this might be a vehicle to use.

4.   Action research gives the responsibility for change to the staff. A school could use this method to cause those most responsible for instruction to change the status quo.

Recommendations for future research

Because this study took place over an eight month period, long term goals of the group were not realized. School-wide action research needs to be at least a two-year process in order to realize maximum results. Following such studies for longer periods of time might be valuable.

Studying action research as an observer and not a participant might provide data that would be objective and revealing. By looking at a group's work in action research without having a stake in the outcome of initiatives might give further insight into the value of such an endeavor.

Literature reviews on school reform reveal the need for results that last longer than one school year. Impacting a school's culture appears to be an avenue for sustaining goals that are desired or achieved. More research into ways to change a school's culture

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and how this change affects school reform appears worthy of further research.

In this study, it was found that action research was an effective means of attacking a school-wide problem. It is hoped that more research will be done on how other schools are using action research to solve problems. Only through multiple approaches to school renewal can schools find methods that might be appropriate for long-term and sustained gains in target areas.

Researcher's reflections

In reviewing the results of this research project, it seems appropriate to further reflect on several unique and interesting aspects of this endeavor. First, conducting research in one's own school provides easier access to data but presents challenges. As principal of the school, a major concern was that the staff not see this action research as "her dissertation topic" but as a school improvement project. Being concerned that the staff might see this work as self serving to the principal and not in the best interest of the school put stress on the researcher that might not have existed if research had been done in another setting.

As principal of the school, and the supervisor of all members of the Leadership Team, there was concern that answers to questions and decisions made were to please the principal or to say what one thought should. For this reason several steps were taken to assure anonymity in the recording of data for review. Maintaining a relationship of being

a team member and not the leader was often a balancing exercise because there were several instances in which leadership and direction had to be provided in order to keep the group focused and moving forward. There was always present the worry that the the principal, as a member of the team, carried more weight than other members. Using this status fairly and not in the pursuit of a personal agenda for the school was always a challenge and concern for the researcher.

Near the end of the school year, the researcher left the field to begin analyzing the data. The Leadership Team had some additional work to do and held a team meeting without the principal's presence. After all the good work accomplished previously, the group almost disintegrated because of conflict among the members at this one meeting. At first it was thought that this conflict was created due to the principal not being present, causing speculation about what this meant to the research project and the significance of the principal's role in this project. A more realistic answer might be found in the unique circumstances that transpired during this period. Rumors were rampant that a new administrative team would be assigned to the school and tensions were high as it appeared the rumors would be true. Putting significance to the principal not being present might bring a wrong conclusion as any meeting at this point would have been different than previous ones.

Being a principal, participant and observer in one's school while researching carries unique opportunities and challenges. Remaining objective yet projecting one's

own views is often difficult. Careful consideration must be given to each role played and how these roles will used in the research project. A major advantage to this type of research, in one's own school, is getting to know some staff members more closely and also developing more personal and professional relationships. Having now left that school setting, the relationships established during these meetings together will last beyond the classroom walls. The researcher experienced many of the postive feelings and experiences as did other members of the Leadership Team, as well as the frustrations. Perhaps, the objectivity required in assuming roles of participant, observer, and sometimes leader, the researcher did not project as many of her own feelings as might have been possible. Weighing objectivity and personal subjectivity were always a challenge.

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APPENDIX A

Letter to Staff

Martinsville Middle School
201 Brown Street
Martinsville, VA 24112
August, 1996

Dear Staff Members,

I wanted to write you about a unique opportunity for the coming school year that is open to anyone willing to put in a little extra time to make a difference in the life of our school.

Our school will be undertaking an action research project this school year which involves choosing a school problem, gathering on-site data about it, reviewing professional literature about the topic, deciding on action, modifying the action and then evaluating our progress. This process will be led by a group of volunteers.

I am looking for 10-12 persons who represent the entire school population to be a member of the Leadership Team for 1996-97. You will be given an action research project and will have the opportunity to make decisions on behalf of the school. It is time to implement our SACS School Improvement Plan and this group will lead the staff in these efforts. You will be given recertification points as well as professional growth in an area in which most of you are unfamiliar.

If you would be interested in being a part of the Leadership Team, please call Jinky and leave your name before school starts. This is a chance to get in on the ground floor of making significant changes in our school. I urge you to take part.

Hope you summer is going well. I'll see you soon!

Kindest regards,

Joan Montgomery
Principal

Appendix B

Group Skills Process

Group Process Skills
By Stephen Parson, Ed.D.

FACILITATOR

1. Neutral servant of group
2. Focused group on common task
3. Doesn't evaluate or contribute ideas
4. Suggests alternative procedures and methods
5. Encourages participation
6. Protects individuals from personal attack
7. Helps group find win/win solutions

RECORDER

1. Maintains group memory, public record of group ideas and accomplishments
2. Accurately records essence of ideas from the group
3. Checks with group on accuracy; asks for feedback
4. Supports the facilitator
4. Uses variety of techniques to highlight and separate ideas and information

MANAGER

1. Responsible for chairing and planning the meeting
2. Determine issue and agenda with input from members
3. Call meeting to order and handle logistics
4. Let facilitator run the meeting
5. Participate as a group member
6. Push for clarity and closure on action items
7. Assist if facilitation breaks down
8. Handle post-meeting follow-up

ROLE OF THE GROUP MEMBER

1. Keep the facilitator neutral
2. Keep and eye on the group memory for accuracy
3. Concentrate on the content; facilitator will monitor process
4. Contribute
5. Listen, listen, listen
6. Be positive and be positive

APPENDIX C

Leadership Team Research Report

Leadership Team
RESEARCH REPORT
Martinsville Middle School

Researcher _____ **Date** _____

____**Name of Article/Report/Source:**

List highlights of research:

Could this research be useful in our school? Why or why not?

Quotes from article that could be useful:

Other information to share:

APPENDIX D

Data Collection Form

<center>**Data Collection Form**</center>

Name of data _____

Author and Source _____

Date of article _____ **Date of review** _____

****

Salient Points:

What could we use in our school and how:

Reviewer _____

APPENDIX E

Leadership Team Survey

Leadership Team Survey

Jan., 1997

Why did you decide to become a member of the Leadership Team?

Do you feel the Leadership Team has made any accomplishments thus far for the school?

If so, what?

What have you gained professionally and/or personally from this experience, if any?

What have been the limitations or disappointments?

What would you change in the way meetings are conducted?

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APPENDIX F

Meeting/Contact Summary Form

Meeting/Contact Summary Form

Meeting_____ **Date** _____

Persons in attendance_____
_____
Site _____ **Coder** _____ **Date Coded** _____

Listed below are salient points in the meeting/contact. Points are numbered and can be found on the corresponding page of the write-up or field notes. Themes are listed in CAPITALS and comments are included in double parentheses.

PAGE   SALIENT POINTS   THEMES/ASPECTS

APPENDIX G

**School Goals
Martinsville Middle School
1996-97**

Martinsville Middle School
SCHOOL GOALS
1996-97

Goal #1:
To improve Academic Achievement of students by:
- Increasing number of students receiving special recognition each six-weeks by 10% with the first six-weeks grades as the base for improvement
- Improving standardized test scores by: a) scoring at or above the national average percentile in every area, b)having no negative change in scores from last year to current year, and c) targeting math score improvement
- Improving attendance of students by 5%, recognizing that attendance and achievement are directly related

Strategies for Special Recognition:
1. Target students with D's and F's for remediation, using time built into current schedule
2. Target parents of D and F students for Parent-Teacher conferences, seeking a conference with 100%
3. Add an Achievement List to special recognition list, which would indicate one letter grade improvement from one six weeks to next (only eligible to student on no other recognition list)
4. Post academic honors on team halls and in conspicuous place in school
5. Send letters to parents of students receiving special recognition
6. Put special recognition of students in school Newsletter
7. Send to local newspaper the Academic Achievement list each six-weeks

Strategies for Improving Standardized Test Scores:
1. Place motivational posters throughout school about doing well on tests
2. Have an "outside of school" speaker (possibly superintendent) talk with students about the purpose and importance of standardized testing
3. Provide guidance lessons on test-taking skills prior to testing
4. Provide special remediation for students on SOL achievement, beginning in January, 1997
5. Familiarize 7th grade teachers with the 8th grade test content if possible
6. Provide staff development on testing, for teachers
7. Reduce distractions in scheduling testing time to maximize student performance
8. Have subject area teachers administer their subject part of the test

Strategies for Improving Attendance:
1. Reward students for being on time and present, with tickets, for example
2. Give special recognition to a homeroom with 100% attendance on any given day
3. Hold school-wide monthly competition for homeroom attendance (banners, team rewards, ice cream, etc.)
4. Solicit local industry for rewards
5. Target students with excessive tardies and absences based on first six-weeks, for conferences with students and/or parents
6. Refer students to attendance officer immediately when absences become excessive
7. Purchase Parent Hotline technology to assist in notifying parents of absences

Goal #2:

To improve discipline and disciplinary practices by:

- Reducing the number of students referred to the office
- Reducing the number of students placed in internal suspension, out of school suspension, or expelled from school by 10%
- Providing staff development for improvement of disciplinary practices

Strategies:
1. Meeting with students for minor discipline problems rather than office referral
2. Providing alternatives by teacher/team for office referral
3. Holding staff development sessions on Middle School Disciplinary Practices That Work
4. Keep team records of disciplinary conferences
5. Make comparison of team referrals and office referrals
6. Compare last year's referral, suspension, expulsion levels to this year's numbers
7. Change the image of ISS by making it more productive for students and a more serious consequence
8. Hold Saturday School each Saturday as an alternative to internal suspension

APPENDIX H

Attendance-Taking Policy

Attendance-Taking Policy
1996-97

In an effort to increase attendance and decrease tardies, the Leadership Team has formulated the following plan, to begin immediately:

- Do not count students late to your homeroom until 8:35, due to some late buses that we have been told can get no better. **Do not announce to students.** When students come to your room after 8:35 and they do not have a breakfast pass, send that student to the office for check-in.

- Do NOT allow students to record attendance/tardies, as it is easy enough for teachers to make mistakes.

- If you see a student in school who is on the absentee list, please let the office know immediately. **Attendance bulletins will be ready by first period. If you have not received it, please send a student for it.**

- Put this code on your attendance form: TE- tardy/excused, TU-tardy/unexcused, and TB-Tardy/bus late. For absences, record A, not a slash. This will make it clear for attendance and standardized for all.

- Cafeteria duty people will check off a list of students each day who are attending breakfast and turn in to the office daily. The attendance officer will check this list against those from homerooms to determine who is present. HR teachers should turn in the form of those they think eat breakfast each day so there can be an easy check-off for duty people.

- TURN IN YOUR ATTENDANCE REPORTS BEFORE BEGINNING FIRST PERIOD - most important.

- Continue reporting to the office any student not in class and not on the office attendance list.

- See the Breakfast Attendance Form that you should complete and return to office **this a.m.** so we can get double check attendance of homerooms.

Breakfast Attendance Form

_____

Date

Students should sign in each morning before eating breakfast. The name should be legible and homeroom teacher checked. Accuracy is most important!

Piranhas

Student	Brown	Farrar	Tobler	Simps

APPENDIX I

Attendance Policy Addendum

ATTENDANCE POLICY ADDENDUM
(Add to the 10/14 draft from the Leadership Team)
1/22//97

- Announce to students that they MUST bring in a written excuse from home after each absence or the absence will be considered UNEXCUSED. Parents are notified after 3 unexcused absences. When notes are brought to you, they should be attached to the Attendance Report that you send to the office each day. If you answer the phone and a parent calls with an excuse, please let Carolyn Brown know in writing so the absence can be excused.

- We are beginning a weekly and six-weeks contest for attendance, beginning Wednesday, January 22, 1997. Each time a homeroom has perfect attendance, there will be an announcement on the intercom. On Friday, the homeroom with the best attendance will have a large ribbon placed on their door and an announcement made. The homeroom with the best attendance at the end of the six-weeks will have a Grand Prize.

- Homeroom teachers, in particular, but anyone else, should monitor student absences and when there is a concern (over two days without hearing from the child or parent, for ex.), the teacher should complete the ATTENDANCE ALERT FORM. This form is lime green and can be spotted easily for its color that will not be used for any other purpose. The form should go directly to the guidance counselor who should find out about the child and let you know something as soon as possible. Please keep all returned ALERT FORMS as I will ask to see them periodically to see how we are doing.

- Guidance counselors will call the home or contact the parent at work. If no response from either of these, a home visit will be made to determine why the child is not in school.

- Do not allow students to be out of school for days or on a regular basis without having someone check!

- Tell students about the policy and that action will be taken against them and their parents if the policy is not followed or if it is ignored.

STUDENTS CAN'T BE TAUGHT IF THEY AREN'T AT SCHOOL!

ATTENDANCE ALERT!!!

Date _____ Child's Name _____ Referred by_____
To Guidance:

_____   **Been absent more than 2 days with no excuse**

_____   **Comes in late often**

_____   **Is not showing up in my class**

_____   **Is absent often; check attendance record**

_____   **Other (please explain)**

Action taken and results:

                                  Guidance signature_____

APPENDIX J

Example of Team Contract

Unteam Behavior Contract

Name_____   Return_____

Teacher_____   No Return____

Date_____

Describe what happened:

Why did you behave in this manner? Have you done this in the past?

Why do you think there is a rule dealing with this offense?

State two alternatives you COULD HAVE chosen:

What will you do next time?

Parent signature_____   Student signature_____

VITA

Name: Joan Barnes Montgomery

Address: 807 Corn Tassel Trail
Martinsville, Virginia 24112

DOB: December 9, 1948

Education: Pfeiffer College
Misenheimer, North Carolina
Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education (1971)

Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina
Master of Arts in Special Education (1975)

University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia
Certification in Elementary Principalship (1983)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (1996)

Work Experience: Elementary Teacher
Stanleytown Elementary School
Henry County Public Schools
1972 - 1973

Learning Disabilities Specialist
Martinsville City Schools
1975 - 1983

Administrative Intern
Patrick Henry Elementary School
1983 - 1986

Principal
Druid Hills Elementary School
Martinsville City Schools
1986 - 1993

Principal
Martinsville Junior High School
Martinsville City Schools
1993 - 1997

Principal
Albert Harris Elementary School
Martinsville City Schools
1997 to present

Joan B. Montgomery