

**A VISION REVISITED:  
A Study of  
Collaborative Decision Making  
at One School**

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## PREFACE

School reform and the restructuring of the governance, funding and delivery of education to meet the changing needs of students have been the focus of attention by the public and departments of education since the first formal educational system was established. Current global trends find significant changes in education taking place in New Zealand, England, Australia, many states in the USA and several provinces in Canada. 1994 saw the province of Alberta undergo significant changes in education imposed by the Minister of Education with the aim of improving Alberta's education system. Foremost among the many changes as outlined in the Three Year Business Plan For Education was a recognition that (1) authority for the decisions affecting the education of children should be given to the school, (2) the key to restructuring education is effective school-based decision making and (3) the principal is the key educational leader in fostering successful school-based decision making. As a result of Alberta Education's directive, all school boards who have not as yet embraced school-based management will begin to move in this direction this school year.

The staff at the Children of St. Martha School have been practicing some of the elements of School-Based Decision Making for the past four years. As principal of the school, I recognize and accept the role I play in the development of the process and in fostering an atmosphere which will ensure success. The purpose of this study is to examine the decision making

process in The Children of St. Martha School to determine if it meets the expectations of the staff and if not, where to make appropriate suggestions and recommendations for changes to our procedures.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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The Staff of The Children of St. Martha School who took time to respond to the questionnaire and those who graciously agreed to the interview format. Their open and honest sharing helped me to arrive at a better understanding of where we are in our attempt at developing a school-based decision making process.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **A School Project: *Creating A Vision***

In the spring of 1991, prompted by a School Review scheduled for the spring of 1992 and the staff's perceived futility of school evaluations in the traditional format, the staff and administration of the school set out to develop a process for our school evaluation that would make it meaningful to the staff and result in constructive and purposeful information. The school's adopted project, titled *Creating A Vision*, had two objectives: first, to improve upon the traditional review format, making the process more useful and meaningful to the school community, and second, to develop a practical model and some specific strategies for managing the planning, goal setting and action process for our school. The school staff set out to take ownership of the school review rather than have an outside group impose their evaluative agenda upon us, and through this action, began a process we now refer to as school-based decision making. It is this second objective that is the focus of study for this project.

We have concluded the fourth year of our school project and by my perception, there are many indicators that positive and meaningful changes have been initiated in several areas and are flourishing in many others. A Steering Committee of six staff members met every two or three weeks,

gathering data, discussing, studying, planning and preparing proposals and presentations to staff. On the basis of the work of this committee, the staff identified three or four areas of focus for each year. For each area of study, goals and actions were discussed and proposed for staff deliberation and acceptance. Professional development days and inservice days were planned and scheduled based on the specific needs of the school staff. The staff was involved in developing a school timetable that allowed for common planning time between teachers and for staff team meetings, enabling staff to meet for curriculum planning during the school day. They were instrumental in making decisions affecting the school budget, the selection of classroom textbooks and the selection of classroom and library resources. Some staff members began participating in visits to other classrooms, observing and planning together. Individual teachers were attempting activities and projects they had avoided in the past. The conversations shared in the staffroom during recess periods were now often on topics of curriculum and instruction. Teachers shared ideas more openly, reflecting on events taking place in their classrooms. Conversations between staff were less confrontational, with fewer judgments made on opinions expressed. Staff members individually or in small groups initiated investigations or actions on curricular topics. There were more activities in the school involving students, staff, parents and visitors from outside our immediate community.

As principal of the school I was encouraged and delighted by the

direction I thought the school staff was taking. Would the staff's thoughts and perceptions agree with mine? Now would be an appropriate time to examine the course of action taken these past four years to determine if we are moving in a direction acceptable to the current staff.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The study proposes to examine and review the school project begun four years ago with the specific focus of determining if shared or collaborative decision making is working in our school. In order to answer this question, several issues must be examined:

- How does the staff feel about the journey we have taken? ... about their participation? ... their contribution? ... their ownership? How active and involved are the staff in the decision making process of our school? Do they have a real input into: Goal Setting, Curriculum and Instruction Development, In-Service and Staff Development, Use of Facilities, Budgeting, Assignment of Personnel, and the Shared Decision Making Process at the school-site?
- What, if anything, has changed since 1991 which requires us to change our present focus? What additions, deletions and/or changes need to be made to the practices and procedures adopted to date to better facilitate the aims and objectives of the original school project?

- What suggestions, considerations and recommendations would the staff identify which would enable us to improve the shared decision making process at our school?

### **Design of the Project**

The study was conducted with focus on two areas:

- I gathered and analyzed data collected through the use of the T.I.P.S. 2 Instrument to determine to what extent the staff felt they have been involved in the decision making process at the school (A sample copy of this instrument is included in the appendix). Recognizing that the T.I.P.S 2 Instrument is open to a variety of interpretations and thus a variety of opinions, I followed up on some of the survey responses with six personal interviews in order to clarify, enhance and better understand the data received.
- I reviewed the literature on decision making by re-examining the documents, articles and notes I had collected which made reference to the principles or concepts of shared or collaborative decision making, collaborative, authentic or transformational leadership, participatory school-based decision making and school-based management. The aim of this task was to define some of the critical characteristics that make for effective decision making and to assist me in the analysis of the collected data. The literature was examined for strategies and skills that help

school-based decision making work, a description of events or actions that act as barriers to effective school-based decision making and a description of what role school culture plays in shaping and influencing group decisions. An examination of recent documents issued by Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association which relate to school based decision making assisted in determining future directions the school staff must consider.

The end product of this study would hopefully give me a better perspective of the how well shared decision making was working in our school. How the staff perceived our attempt at collaborative decision making would determine what changes should take place in the process we were using for goal setting and decision making at the school site. It would assist in defining a future plan of action, integrating the school model, the district model and the model of decision making encouraged by the provincial government. The project allowed the current stakeholders an opportunity for input into the assessment of what we have been attempting these past four years and through their involvement to improve on the current model.

The information and data gathered lent itself to a descriptive write-up as opposed to numerical indices and quantitative analysis. I therefore chose to conduct and record this study as a *descriptive inquiry*.

Involving the School Steering Committee in the planning and action stages of this examination provided for a check on the validity and reliability of my findings, analysis, judgments, conclusions and recommendations.

### **Limitations**

As I listened to the taped interviews and recorded on paper my interpretations of what I heard, I recognized my biases and perceptions would result in a personal "slant" to the study. This limitation would also hold true for my interpretation of the T.I.P.S. 2 Instrument, even though I asked the five teachers on the school Steering Committee to review my interpretation, and to share their comments on differences of interpretations they might perceive. Given my position of school principal, would these members of the Steering Committee be completely candid in their review of my interpretations?

Although the six teachers interviewed appeared to be candid and open with their comments, it is likely that not all of their thoughts were shared. I recognize that my position as principal and my personality may have prevented the teachers from being totally honest with me.

While listening to the taped interviews, I was aware of how much I talked and shared my opinion on some of the questions, rather than listening and recording data during the interviews.

Shared decision making is a process based on an exchange of ideas and is effected by the relationship of the participants. It is a living and changing process, growing and maturing if provided with the appropriate

climate and structures. Comments shared about the process vary from day to day, or week to week, depending on individual perceptions and the relationships between the stakeholders. The opinions shared on the questionnaire and during the interviews reflect a consensus of the staffs' general attitudes and beliefs on how shared decision making is working in our school during the month of June, 1995.

Comments shared by the Steering Committee members, as we reviewed results of the T.I.P.S. 2 questionnaire, implied that several staff members may have responded to the some of questionnaire items from the perspective of their involvement and participation in decision making at the school division level as well as decision making at our school. Responses to such an interpretation would skew such item scores to the left of the instrument scale.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

#### An Introduction

What is shared or collaborative decision making? Nearly everyone on staff had some idea of what the process entails, but the ideas were different for different people, including myself. Before I began interviewing staff members about their perceived involvement and participation in shared decision making in our school, I began a review the documents, articles and notes I have accumulated during my years of study on this topic through University courses in administration, workshops, conferences and inservice activities sponsored by the Council on School Administration and the A.T.A., as well as my own independent professional reading. From this past collection and more recent articles on the process of shared decision making, I chose those which would assist me in analyzing and interpreting the data I would be gathering. This chapter is a collection of some of these articles and summaries. The following criteria were used in selecting these for inclusion:

- Articles which had a significant influence on my insights, perceptions and thoughts on this broad topic.
- Articles which would help provide information to the school staff, clarifying the misconceptions about shared decision making and offering insights into a better understanding of the process.
- Articles which would assist in the evaluation of our present school project and in defining recommendations for improvements in how shared decision making works in our school.

Bauer (1992) proposes that one of the keys to success in shared decision making is building a consensus about what the process is. He says that once a school staff has reached a consensus on a definition they are on

their way; without it they are doomed to “fingerpointing, distrust, and general malaise” (p. 26). If Bauer’s assumption is correct, it offers one explanation for why our staff’s attempt at shared or collaborative decision making has progressed so slowly. As a staff we have not taken the time to come to a consensus on our understanding of shared decision making nor have we defined what the process means to us.

Not many years ago, the public assumed that the principal, as the instructional leader, had the main, if not the sole authority and responsibility for bringing change to a school. In this top-down view of change, the principal was expected to mold the staff, who were seen as passive participants in the process of change. Shared decision making represents a fundamental change in the way the school is managed and changes the roles and relationships of everyone in the school community. This change often results in uncertainty, confusion and apprehension about the future. Our staff should examine some of the literature which would provide us with the information and knowledge about the strategies and skills needed to meet the changes and challenges inherent in our move towards collaborative decision making. For my purposes, I chose to review studies on collaborative, authentic and transformational leadership, examining the roles and characteristics defined for principals using these styles of leadership. The topics staff, including administrators, should study include topics on shared decision making, collaborative decision making, school-based management, strategies and skills for shared decision making, and barriers to collaborative decision making.

## **Characteristics of Current Leadership Roles**

### **Collaborative Leadership**

The use of consensus in the decision making process among the staff of a school is a more powerful tool than the use of overt control. Through communication, a school community can establish mutual norms or goals, which each member understands and supports because of staff involvement in their formation. This was the conclusion reached by Lendill and Coplin (1989) in their review of studies conducted by Rutter, Goodlad, Edmonds and Brookover, discussing the importance of a positive school culture.

In his study of *Role Effectiveness: Theory Into Practice*, Robert Krajewski (1979) concluded that "how the school's administrator works with people in the everyday situations is the basic determinant of overall leadership effectiveness and success" (p. 53). He advocated that the principal should allow the teachers to be participants in the decision making process. Through such involvement teachers would willingly make decisions and implement them.

Johnson (1989) summarized a study he conducted on the outcomes of a 1988 preliminary investigation on the "Perception of Effectiveness and Principal's Job Satisfaction in Elementary Schools in Alberta." He identified four major categories for judging the effectiveness of an elementary school: goals and other beneficial outcomes; attitudes and behavior of staff; appropriate organizations and structures, and environmental factors. In explaining these four categories it was evident that the principal's role was a major factor. Participative goal-setting seemed to be a key to accomplishing goals on a school-wide basis. Principals and teachers in effective schools collaboratively developed, discussed and publicly declared their educational ideals. These schools had an atmosphere of cohesiveness, cooperation and

high morale. There was evidence of extensive professional and social interaction among teachers and administrators and in open lines of communication throughout the school. Among staffs of effective schools, Johnson saw a shared expectation and a desire for collaborative work with colleagues. Teachers were keen to learn from one another and were open to advice and suggestions from other teachers. In the interviews conducted, Johnson noted that, "All respondents in this preliminary investigation commended the elementary school principal's leadership as critical for school effectiveness overall" (p. 17).

Carl Glickman (1991) stated that the principal of successful schools was not the instructional leader but the educational leader who mobilized the expertise and talent of others in a caring way. These educational leaders were the persons who symbolized, supported, distributed and coordinated the work of teachers as instructional leaders. In restructuring schools of today, Glickman advocated decentralization, deregulation and site-based empowerment. On the basis of what we know about teaching and learning, if schools are to improve, central office people, school administrators and teachers must learn to trust each other and to share in decisions about teaching and learning. "In democratic environments power is achieved by giving it away rather than struggling for more" (Glickman, 1991, p. 5). We need to create schools where the faculty wants to share in the choice and responsibilities of school-wide decisions and where school administrators want them to participate.

Smith (1987) also saw the key to school improvement as collaboration. He recognized that although there was no one model of the collaborative school, there were some common characteristics:

- a belief that the quality of education is largely determined by what happens at the school site.
- a conviction that improvement in instruction was most effective when it is examined continuously and on a collegial basis.
- teachers accepted responsibility for the instructional process and were accountable for its outcome.
- there existed a wide range of practices and structures enabling administrators and teachers to work together on school improvement.
- teachers were involved in the decisions about school goals and the means for implementing them.

Shantz's (1993) version of the collaborative school emphasized a school culture which:

- constantly attempted to improve
- utilized a power base shared by administrators and teachers
- engaged in group vision building
- utilized problem solving to provide an array of solutions and then implement the best solution
- provided ongoing teacher inservice and development
- was characterized by collegiality
- was led by sensitive administrators who constantly provide a positive role model
- established a safe, supportive environment which encourages risk taking

Our school project was based upon concepts, principles and characteristics such as those above. The more current literature refers to

leadership roles by different titles and descriptions, which after close inspection, are similar in meaning and characteristics.

### **Authentic Leadership**

Evans (1993) tells us that leaders must aim not at manipulating subordinates who do as they are bidden, but at motivating followers who become actively involved themselves. This requires leaders who are skillful and, above all, credible. To be credible, they must be authentic. Authentic leaders link what they think, what they seek and what they do. They join, in Sergiovanni's terms, the head, heart, and hand, of leadership.

Principals whose personal values and aspirations for their schools are consistent, coherent, and reflected in their daily behavior, are credible and inspire trust. They are leaders worth following into the uncertainties of change. (Evans, 1993, p.21)

According to Evans, authentic leaders were biased toward clarity and were focused on their goals. Their vision for change was broad and focused effort, attention, and resources on each initiative. Evans identified authentic leaders as being biased toward participation, but ready to assert themselves as needed to foster innovation. Participation, not paralysis, was the operative function. The value of collaborative decision making in schools was widely acknowledged. Participation was the path to commitment and implementation improved when teachers helped shape the changes. Collaboration was the ideal in school governance, so much so, that many advocates of reform expected teachers to embrace enthusiastically any opportunity for participation. When teachers had little history of meaningful involvement and

when they struggled with the process, they engaged less readily than leaders anticipate, particularly when the contemplated changes were complex.

Authentic leaders believed in clear and consistent communication. They were eager and respectful listeners. Their belief in communication was reflected in the steps they took to facilitate information sharing and constructive feedback at all levels.

Authentic leaders knew that, especially in the early stages of change when uncertainty was highest, a staff needed confirmation and affirmation of its efforts and its initial successes, even if these seemed modest. They recognized and affirmed teachers' results and effort. A key goal of innovation is to enhance experimentation, therefore leaders rewarded any willingness to explore new directions and new approaches. Authentic leaders knew that morale and innovations were both improved by recognition among colleagues, so they attempted to engage teachers in direct discussions of ways to improve the flow of appreciation.

Despite these constructive steps, Evans (1993) says some staffs still resist change. Some try to fulfill the new goals and fail, thinking they have succeeded, while others refuse to try. Together, they test a leader's authenticity and commitment to innovation. Evans suggests that the task for an administrator faced with such a circumstance is to arouse appropriate anxiety or guilt in the staff. This is done by demonstrating to teachers how their performance fails to meet the goals and by assisting teachers in meeting these goals in a non-threatening manner. This task has been described as "one of the most complex and artful of human endeavors." (Evans, 1993, p. 23)

## **Transformational Leadership**

The idea of transformational leadership was first developed by James McGregor Burns (1978) and later extended by Bernard Bass (1981). Although the studies were based on work with political leaders, army officers and business executives, their work was adapted to the school setting and suggested that there were similarities in transformational leadership whether it be in a school setting or a business environment.

Leithwood's (1992) study of transformational school leaders, identified practices that help staff members work smarter, not harder. These leaders employed collaborative problem solving that ensured a broad range of perspectives from which to interpret the problem by actively seeking different interpretations and by being explicit about their own interpretations. These school leaders assisted group discussions of alternate solutions, ensured open discussion and avoided commitment to preconceived solutions. As participants in discussions, they actively listened to different views and clarified information at key points during discussions. They avoided narrowly biased perspectives on the problem by keeping the group on task, not imposing their own perspectives, checking on their own and others' assumptions and remaining calm and confident. These leaders shared a genuine belief that, together as a staff, they could develop better solutions to school problems than the principal could alone.

Leithwood (1992) used the term of transformational leadership based on the role of the principal having a form of power that is consensual and

facilitative in nature. This form of leadership, where power is manifested through other people, was a contrast to the traditional role of leadership that demonstrated power over people. A transformational leadership style emphasized participative decision making as much as possible.

When a process makes people feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them, they will have a greater commitment to the overall enterprise and will take greater responsibility for what happens to the enterprise. ( Leithwood, 1992, p.9)

According to Leithwood, researchers are just beginning to make systematic attempts to explore the meaning and utility of such leadership in schools. Very little empirical evidence is available about its nature and about its consequences. In his own studies of schools initiating reforms and adopting transformational school leadership, three fundamental goals appeared to be the focus:

- helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture
- fostering teacher development
- helping them solve problems.

Richard D. Sagor (1992) reported some interesting trends he had noticed as he worked with staffs at more than 50 schools involved in collaborative action research. In schools where teachers and students reported a culture conducive to school success, a transformational leader was the principal. This leader used principles of shared decision making and teacher empowerment. He/she found ways to be successful in collaboratively defining the essential purpose of teaching and learning, empowering the entire school community to become energized and focused. In such schools teaching and learning became transformational for everyone involved.

Jean Brown (1993) said, "transformational leadership was about vision and working with people. It was about respecting people, and allowing and encouraging the growth of others" (p.19). Brown emphasized that this leadership style was concerned with influencing people to work willingly toward group goals. The focus was not on the power of the leader but rather on the empowerment of others. It was about growth rather than control. Using a variety of strategies the culture of the school was changed, allowing and enabling leadership to be shared.

### **Shared Decision Making**

Even though the process of shared decision making varied from school to school, Bauer (1992) found that those who use it agreed on three basics:

- The focus of shared decision making was on improving school effectiveness by getting teachers and parents involved in decisions.
- This aim was accomplished through the formation of school councils charged with a degree of decision making responsibility for certain issues.
- The process adopted was designed to improve the overall quality of decisions and tailor them to meet the needs of the school community.

According to Bauer (1992), the following were found to be common characteristics of schools involved in shared decision making:

- Those who were closest to the children made the best decisions about the children's education.
- Members of the school staff and school community had more say about the policies and programs affecting their school and the children.
- Decision making was as close to the action as possible.
- The people responsible for carrying out the decisions had a voice in determining those decisions.
- Change was most likely to be effective and lasting if those who carried it out had a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.

Bauer (1992) defined shared decision making as:

A process designed to push education decisions to the school level, where those closest to children may apply their expertise in making decisions that will promote school effectiveness and ensure the appropriate services are provided to students and the school community. ( p. 27)

### **Participatory Decision Making**

In its simplest terms, shared or collaborative decision making means the participation and involvement of all stakeholders. Roy (1995) contended that education has followed the lead set by American business in recognizing that the worker must be a valuable partner in the problem solving process. Providing for site-based management promotes the involvement of stakeholders. One of the lessons learned about the process of change and

reform is that teachers need to be involved in that process. Glickman (1992) stated that the reason for involving staff was “not simply as an exercise, but to establish a covenant to guide future decisions about goals, staffing, scheduling, materials, assessment, curriculum, staff development and resource allocation” (p. 14).

Scott & Smith (1987) contended that if a school site was to take collective action to solve school based problems and create new programs, five norms needed to exist:

- A belief that the quality of education was determined by what happened at the school site.
- A conviction that instruction was most effective in a school environment characterized by norms of collegiality and continuous improvement.
- A belief that teachers were professionals given responsibility for the instructional process and held accountable for its outcomes.
- The presence of a wide range of practices and structures that enabled administrators and teachers to work together on school improvement.
- The involvement of teachers in decisions about school goals and the means for implementing them.

According to Roy (1995), when a decision needed to be made, there was a continuum of decision options ranging from:

- Individually determined at the school site

- Subgroups at the school site with or without consultation
- Staff consensus
- Staff vote
- Staff and administration through consultation or by consensus
- Unilaterally by administration beyond the school site

Which option should be considered, would be determined by the following ingredients:

- Importance: The critical nature of the decision
- Acceptance: How strong the feeling of individuals would be about the decision or process
- Time: was there a need for an immediate decision
- Trust: The degree to which individuals had confidence in each other
- Teamwork: The desire of the administration to improve the functioning of the team

Although there was no hard and fast rule regarding which decision making strategy was best in all situations, Roy (1995) suggested one rule of thumb to consider was that the people closest to the problem or the solution should be involved in making the decision. Fact finding was the first step of any decision making group. Roy discussed three possible strategies. The first was referred to as the nominal group and was used when groups tried to identify priorities from a large number of actions or goals. Each person

selected five options from a list of brainstormed ideas, assigning them a number from one to five. After everyone made their selections and the numbers were totaled, the goals having the highest totals became the goals for the entire staff.

If the number of options was small, Roy suggested a strategy called "Spend a Buck" (p. 21). This strategy asked the members of the group to distribute a total of \$1.00 among the options. The totals assigned to each option determined its importance to the group.

A third useful strategy described in Roy's article was a force-field analysis. In this strategy the group identified factors which were helping or hindering the group in attaining a specific goal or outcome. Once factors were listed, the group determined how to strengthen 'helping' factors and reduce barriers. Plans for accomplishing both sets of factors were determined and an action plan defined.

Roy (1995) identified five obstacles which must be overcome in order to be successful at site-based decision making.

- Fear: People feared change even if it was positive.
- Control: Initially administrators expressed a loss of control.
- Lack of information: Access to information was vital.
- Group vs. Individual Recognition: Participatory decision making required group recognition.
- Staying Focused: A clear definition of roles and responsibilities was necessary.

The assistance of a facilitator should be considered by staffs who need help with group process and decision-making strategies. Facilitators help staffs develop skills in team building, trust, collective decision-making strategies, consensus-seeking strategies and conflict management. Administrators and staffs must recognize that participatory or collaborative decision making requires time and effort.

### **School-Based Management**

In a study of school-based management, Delaney (1994) stressed that the process should not be perceived as a goal but rather as a means of effecting school improvement through the use of shared decision making in the day-to-day and long-term operation of the school. School-based management required the principal, teachers, parents and students, all stakeholders, to work together in the management of the school. This process was designed to involve the entire school community in establishing school objectives, developing programs to meet those objectives, implementing the programs and monitoring their success. While outlining a list of the benefits of site-based management, Delaney emphasized that not all the literature was positive. One of the major concerns expressed by teachers and administrators was the amount of time and energy the process needed to ensure its success. Although the research literature on site-based management to date was inconclusive in its acceptance or rejection on the concept, one recurring conclusion of successful practices was that successful

site-based management had less to do with management details and more to do with the leadership style of the principal, the culture of the district and the moral and material support it offered school staffs. School staffs needed knowledge and practice in dealing with active and reflective listening, team building, problem solving, the change process and the process of shared decision making.

David (1989) argued that although there was little empirical research on the topic of school-based management, there was an abundance of relevant research one could use to examine the issues involving school-based management and thereby using this information to make choices appropriate for varying circumstances. From her study of the research, David offered these conclusions:

- School staffs made different decisions when they were given unrestricted control of their school sites.
- Teachers enjoyed an increase in job satisfaction and feelings of professionalism when given opportunities and authority to be engaged in authentic dialogue about planning and decision making.
- School district staff, teachers and administrators, needed time and professional development opportunities to acquire the new knowledge and skills needed for successful implementation of site-based management.

- Leadership, school culture and a demonstration of support of shared decision making within the district had a greater impact on the success of site-based management than the operational details.
- Implementation involved many factors and took five to ten years.

From the research David concluded that site-based management was not a set of fixed rules and would operate differently from one district to the next, from one school to the next and from one year to the next. This conclusion was based on the definition that the goal of site-based management was to empower each school staff with authentic authority, flexibility and the resources to solve the educational problems specific to their school. Its success hinged on the support and leadership of superintendents, school boards and teachers' associations. Site-based management required time for implementation and the participants needed to be open and flexible to change, learn and adapt from their mistakes and successes.

Although the impact of site-based management has given more authority to those at the school site to plan and carry out decisions that would maximize the school's potential and effectiveness, the real impact on the classroom remains unclear. This premise by John O'Neil (1994), suggests that although site-based management has initiated substantial changes in teaching and learning, the new autonomy, has not yet altered school programs in significant ways. O'Neil (1994) reached this conclusion from his study of research reports on the Chicago School Reform, Miami's approach

to S.B.M. and Kentucky's initiative to have all schools use a site-based management approach by September of 1996. Although site-based management's impact remains unclear, O'Neil believes changes will be slower in reaching the classroom than first anticipated. Despite the shortcomings, experts continue to see great potential in the site-based management approach and encourage movement in its direction.

### **Advantages of School Based Management**

While preparing a detailed guide for the successful implementation of school-based management, Neal (1991) defined a number of advantages which made decentralization superior to centralization. A summary of these advantages included:

- Greater commitment by the stakeholders
- Greater support for how funds are spent
- Increased growth of participants
- Improved morale at the school site
- More open view of expenditures
- More effective spending of limited funds
- More equability and flexibility
- Allowed for a more democratic process
- Allowed for more leadership opportunities
- School was more responsive to the community

- School staff felt more empowered
- Education took highest priority and school became more effective

### **Considerations**

Neal (1991) warned that before adopting a school-based management approach, participants must examine a number of considerations that characterize process:

- S.B.M. required considerably more planning time and effort
- Extra financial assistance was needed at the beginning
- The transition to School Based Management involved controversy
- Labour relations were a problem
- Organization inefficiency could result
- There was no guarantee things would get better

### **Potential Hazards**

Neal (1991) identified several potential hazards which pose as threats in our attempts to convert to school-based management.

- Inefficient support and commitment from the “top”
- Board and Superintendent not willing to “let go”
- Poor organizational structure
- Unworkable or unfair allocation of funds
- Poor labour relations

- Insufficient development opportunities
- Poor customer satisfaction
- Lack of preparation and preconditions

### **Desirable Elements**

Although knowing what to avoid assists one to plan for success, Neal (1991) listed several identifiable elements that must be in place to increase the probability of success:

- Committed stakeholders
- A structured, decentralized approach
- Clear and understood parameters
- Clearly defined roles
- Effective maximization of resources
- Major share of budget transferred to schools
- Decision Making power accompanied funds
- Funds allocated equitably
- Funds spent in the best interests of students, according to a school plan and school budget approved by the Superintendent and Board
- School plan and budget developed through a collaborative process with stakeholders
- School plans designed to improve education of students
- Evaluation of school goals and plans based on results not methodology

## **Strategies and Skills**

### **Tactics That Work**

What were some of the tactics that principals employed to positively affect, directly or indirectly, the initiative, creativity and personal growth of teachers? Poelzer (1989) suggested that principals, with the help of their school community, should develop a philosophy, goals and objectives for the school within the guidelines set forth by the district. The administration, staff, parents and students needed to work as a team in the development of these statements ensuring that all activities had a focus, were consistent with the school philosophy, met the needs of the community and had the community's support. Furthermore, principals were required to create an environment in which staff members felt free to express their ideas as professionals, initiating open discussion and encouraging dissension in a constructive way.

According to Poelzer (1989), principals who implemented the kinds of strategies mentioned above functioned as facilitators and coordinators. Excellence in education flourished under their leadership. The signs of excellence in the school were recognizable: sounds of laughter were frequently heard in the staff room, there was much discussion at staff meetings, brainstorming sessions occurred often, opposing views were analyzed, decisions were made as a staff, teachers readily approached administrators and almost everyone attended socials. In these schools cooperative teaching took place. Teachers' conversations centered on new approaches to learning with a great deal of sharing of ideas and materials, and teachers supported each others' projects. Teachers appeared happy, energetic and buoyant. Absenteeism was rare, new things were being planned for next year and excitement was in the air.

**Time**

Raywid (1993) insists that the most essential ingredient in school reform is "time" and, according to him, research concurs. He emphasizes that collaborative time for teachers to undertake and then sustain school improvement may be more important than equipment, facilities or even staff development.

Raywid insists that, if schools are to improve, teachers must have time for sustained collaborative reflection on school practice, conditions and events. According to Fullan and Miles (1992) time has emerged as the key issue in every analysis of school change appearing in the last decade.

If collaborative endeavor is necessary to school adequacy, then schools must provide time for it. The responsibility rests with schools not individual teachers. Further, administrators, policy makers, and the public alike must accept a new concept of school time. If we are to redefine teachers' responsibilities to include collaborative sessions with colleagues, then it is necessary to redefine teacher time. The time necessary to examine, reflect on, amend, and redesign programs is not an add-on to teaching responsibilities, nor is it "release time" from them. It is absolutely central to such responsibilities and in Raywid's view essential to making schools succeed.

Recognizing that collaborative endeavors are necessary to school reform and improvement, stronger efforts must be made to provide for it. This responsibility rests with administrators, policymakers and parents not with

individual teachers. Raywid identified four general approaches to finding essential collaborative time: free up existing time, restructure or reschedule it, use it better or purchase it. As a follow-up to these approaches, he conducted a survey of how schools across the USA were finding the necessary collaborative time and summarized examples with potential:

- Schedule teachers for the same daily lunch period and a common preparation period immediately before or after, giving these teachers a total of 90 possible minutes of shared time.
- Adoption of a year-round calendar, with three-week intervals. During the intercessions two or three day meetings for teacher collaboration and planning were scheduled for which participants received compensatory time.
- Set aside three to five days per year within the school district allowing teachers to attend to staff professional development.
- Legislate bills which convert five or more of the required instructional days into staff development days.
- Lengthen the school day by 20 or more minutes for four days in order to dismiss students at noon on the fifth.
- Find collaborative time during the school day through creative interpretation of state requirements for instruction.
- Explore the possibilities of having older students tutor and coach younger ones, freeing teachers for collaborative time.

- Make every Friday a “Hobby Day” or some other “special program” allowing all adults, not just teaching staff, to instruct students. Through careful scheduling groups of teachers could be free to work together for a few hours.
- Increase class sizes so that teachers teach fewer classes and have more time to confer with colleagues.

Leithwood's (1992) case study of twelve improving schools, identified strategies used by their principals to assist teachers in building and maintaining collaborative professional cultures. He made reference to the creation of time for joint teacher planning as a priority. Other strategies mentioned by Leithwood include:

- involving staff members in collaborative goal setting.
- principals actively communicating the school's cultural norms, values and beliefs in their day-to-day interpersonal contacts.
- sharing power and responsibility with others through delegation of school improvement teams within the school.

Leithwood's observation of one study suggested that teachers' motivation for professional development is facilitated through involvement in establishing a school mission they felt strongly committed to. The school principal could enhance teacher development by giving teachers a role in solving routine problems concerning school improvement and developing a school culture that values continuous professional growth.

## **Five Necessary Skills**

Mitchell (1990) described several activities meant to assist schools in developing what he defined as five necessary skills for team members using the process of collaborative school based decision making.

### **1. Team Building**

The first of these skills, team building, was identified as the heart of site-based decision making. The school staff or team is made up of a group of individuals who depend on each other and interact with each other. The team exists if and when the people in the group talk freely, are concerned about the achievement of their identified group goals, feel that their colleagues are helpful, and refer to themselves collectively as “we.” The school leader must have or acquire the skills and knowledge to organize the diversity of personalities of a staff and develop a smoothly operating, productive team. For this reason team building is considered by Mitchell to be a necessary prerequisite and the development of trust is a key element in successful school-based decision making. The ability of the team or staff to function effectively can make or break an effective school program, therefore each member must give up a certain amount of independence and become a team player, a person who cooperates, shares and works for team rather than individual success. Each member must work hard at complementing other members and working in unison to accomplish the goals of the group. Team building provides members with an opportunity to express their anxiety, concerns, questions and opinions since team builders allow every individual

an opportunity to speak. Team builders enhance the bonding and acceptance of each member and allow for practice in listening to each other with respect. This means giving each person speaking your full attention and not thinking about what you're going to say or about an unrelated activity.

**Teamwork:** is the ability to work together toward a common vision, directing the individual accomplishments towards the organization's objectives. O'Haire (1995) shares several essential factors which must be in place if teamwork is to be effective:

- *Clear Objectives and Agreed to Goals* - The team has a specific purpose or goal upon which they are clear and focused.
- *Openness and Confrontation* - Team members are open and honest with each other respecting each others rights and accepting of differing viewpoints.
- *Support and Trust* - Team members encourage and affirm each other, acknowledging contributions made and trusting that all members will do their best to complete the assigned task.
- *Cooperation and Conflict* - The team works in a collaborative way accepting that conflict is a natural part of the process of working together and using conflict as a basis for development.
- *Sound Procedures* - Team meetings are held on a regular basis with good records being kept so that all members are informed of proceedings and developments.

- *Appropriate Leadership* - Leaderships emerge from the needs of the group, not impositions by status or position.
- *Regular Review* - The team examines itself on a regular basis to determine where it may improve.
- *Individual Development* - Individuals of the team are encouraged to develop their own skills which can be brought back into the group to enhance its work.
- *Sound Intergroup Relations* - Effective teams link themselves to other teams, sharing information and ideas, and exchanging ways of working where these are mutually beneficial.
- *Fun* - Effective teams have fun and are enjoyable groups to belong to.
- *Celebration of Success* - Effective teams recognize success and celebrate it.

**Stages of Team Development:** Based on the above list of characteristics, one could conclude that an effective team would be essential to a collaborative system of decision making and the promotion and nurturing of these building blocks is a critical first step towards a collaborative model. O'Haire (1995) shares that an effective team evolves and passes through four basic stages before it becomes mature and productive.

•Stage One: Beginnings

Some teams never get beyond this stage because there has been no negotiations within the team about ways of working together. The focus of

the team is on the task at hand with no consideration to what it is like to work as a team or how the process can be improved. Listening skills are poorly developed, resulting in misunderstandings and arguments. The trust element is weak resulting in few risk taking solutions.

- Stage Two: Experimenting

Members of the group are beginning to learn from their own experimenting and are able to initiate and debate some issues that are classified as risky or controversial. Better listening skills are practiced demonstrating a concern for the feelings and thoughts of team members.

- Stage Three: Consolidating Experience

Based on the experimentation of stage two some teams recognize that development of a more deliberate and methodical process must take precedence over task orientation and begin their move into stage three. Team members begin agreement on development of basic ground rules for resolution of conflict, confrontation, negotiation and the rights of individuals to challenge each other.

- Stage Four: The Mature Team

The truly mature team becomes creative and imaginative, able to adopt flexibility into the work habits of the team. Leadership does not depend on the person but rather on the issue or situation. Individual commitment to the team and pride in the team is high. Group members recognize the value of outside help, seeking it from time to time and giving assistance to other

teams. Team development and its stages are not as clear-cut as the four defined above. In reality the stages overlap and run into each other.

**Vision Building:** Vision is a powerful statement about the future of a team which may be used by the team members as the basis for understanding their work. Noreen O’Haire (1995) suggests that a school staff develop a vision or “big picture” for collaborative school-based decision making before it decides upon a strategy and a plan for its use. Vision statements are generally simple statements which are easily recalled at a moment of difficulty or crisis. The sentence is picturable. Individuals are able to see the meaning of the vision in terms of images. The vision statement shapes the behavior and action of the group, challenging them and taking individuals beyond where they are now. The vision is supported and owned by all staff members and used as a sign post and test for their decision making. Vision building is not something that every staff member wants to be involved in developing, although all members contribute to the vision building process.

It was noted that:

- Vision without action is called dreaming.
- Action without vision is called passing the time.
- Vision with action can change the world.

## **2. Facilitation:**

The role of the administrator as facilitator is critical to the success of the school-based decision making process. Facilitation is the ability to make

something happen in a group situation. The facilitator is the individual who takes the group and blends them together so that they begin to work together as a team to achieve their stated goals. Mitchell (1990) proposed that to be an effective facilitator one must be adept at modeling, empathizing, listening, organizing, sharing, encouraging and confronting. The facilitator must also be able to assure a pleasant atmosphere for meetings, establish the parameters or ground rules for the meeting, clarify the roles of group members, set the time limits, maintain discussions, involve everyone in discussions, clarify and summarize agreements and differences, ensure that the events of the meeting are accurately recorded, provide an evaluation of the meeting, establish the agenda for the next meeting and ensure that group members understand any action needed prior to the next meeting.

### **3. Brainstorming:**

This skill, when used appropriately, gives participants experience with a positive, constructive approach to problem solving. It serves as a good opportunity to practice listening with respect. Successful brainstorming requires active sharing of many creative ideas by all participants, while suggesting ways of combining and improving on these ideas with no expression of judgments or criticism.

### **4. Consensus Building:**

Consensus building is critical to the success of school-based decision making. This strategy depends on the willingness of participants to negotiate personal agendas while working toward mutually agreeable positions on a

particular issue or problem. Mitchell defined consensus as “two or more people cooperatively arriving at a decision they can support” (p. 48). It is important that each staff establish and agree to their definition of consensus. An example of such a definition comes from the Bellevue School in Washington School District: “Sufficient Consensus means that after real dialogue about a particular issue had taken place and everyone had been given a legitimate opportunity to state their case and be listened to, if a small number of people were not in agreement, such disagreement could not hold up the vast majority taking action” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 48). According to Mitchell consensus is based on cooperation and reflects a win-win philosophy. This process allows the concerns of the participants to be accommodated resulting in greater group unity, more creative ideas and solutions, and a greater commitment to implementation.

**Consensus Decision Making:** The increased study and understanding of group process has resulted in the awareness of the importance and relevance of the concept of consensus decision making. Alexander (1987) recognized the ability of a group to make consensus decisions as a sign of its maturity and effectiveness. He saw the use of consensus as an important technique for reducing conflict, because the process enabled the group to reach a decision with which every member of the group could agree. Alexander listed several prerequisites for consensus decision making to work. The participants must believe that a win-win outcome is preferable to a win-lose or lose-lose outcome. They must believe

a solution can be found and that collaboration and cooperation are important to reaching decisions. The element of trust is present. Participants believe in the process of consensus decision making, accepting that it can produce results that are superior to other kinds of decision making. To assist members in the process of consensus decision making, Alexander (1987) offered this set of guidelines:

- The group must remain focused on the problem after agreement has been reached on the definition of the problem.
- The group must avoid suboptimal methods such as voting, negotiating and exercising power if the process is to work and produce win-win situations. In nonconsensus decision making, there is a loser, there is less or no involvement, and often something must be given up.
- The availability of information and data upon which a common understanding of the problem can be built assists the group in arriving at agreement.
- Adoption of an acceptable problem solving process and following it assists the group towards making consensus decision making work more effectively and helps participants avoid defending their own positions.
- Acceptance of other viewpoints is critical to the probability of reaching a consensus decision and improves the chances of reaching a quality decision.

- Participants must avoid behaviors and arguments that suit only their own needs and personal agendas.
- The periodic review and examination of the group's decision making process to determine if it meets the needs and satisfaction of the group is important.

The practice of consensus decision making is not easy and requires time and commitment. As a concept it has tremendous appeal for groups involved in decision making, and if practiced using the above guidelines, consensus decision making results in long-term effectiveness, commitment and fewer unresolved conflicts.

#### **5. Pyramiding:**

Mitchell described pyramiding as a process for members of school-based decision making groups to communicate with the stakeholders they represent. Pyramiding allowed for further member involvement since it required members to share their views on a particular topic with other members. Pyramiding established the climate for doing things by informing the community, discovering new data sources, identifying assistance, reducing rumors, promoting proactive thinking and enhancing creativity.

In addition to Mitchell's five necessary skills one might add the skills of conflict resolution and problem solving, both of which are inherent in a decision making process that acknowledges the equal importance of all participants' ideas.

## **Barriers To Positive and Effective Collaborative Decision Making**

Principals have an enormous effect upon the quality of education provided by the staff and hence the quality of education that students receive. It was Poelzer's (1989) belief that principals promote educational mediocrity in their schools by inadvertently discouraging the initiative, creativity and personal growth of teachers. When this occurs, teachers experience feelings of frustration, indifference, powerlessness and apathy; hardly the kinds of feelings that elicit high-quality teaching, teamwork and an atmosphere conducive to collaborative decision making. The products of such feelings are job dissatisfaction, resentment, poor morale and stagnation, non-involvement and a lack of participation.

Poelzer categorized the tactics principals employ which negatively affect the initiative, creativity and personal growth of teachers, into four groups.

**Expediency:** (a) transferring students into and out of classes without consulting either the receiving or the sending teachers, (b) bringing a list of activities to a staff and telling teachers that they are expected to participate in these activities although no staff input has been sought, (c) making announcements over the public address system at any time of the day, so that activities such as tests, films and dramatizations are disrupted, (d) frequently holding a meeting with a teacher during his/her preparation time.

**Coercion:** Informing teachers they must supervise at least two extracurricular activities while reminding them they will be evaluated within the next two years.

**Intimidation:** (a) mandating that a teacher who, at a staff meeting expresses a view opposing the principal, meet with him/her after the meeting, (b) calling a teacher into the office to account for an absence from an evening event such as an awards evening, (c) calling new teachers, especially those in their first year, into the office at the beginning of the year to tell them who the boss is, what performance is expected of them, what activities are to be undertaken by them and that evaluation of performance will take place near the end of the year, (d) informing secretaries that, if they value their jobs, they will eavesdrop on teachers' conversations and inform the principal about the content of the conversations, and (e) documenting and keeping on file conversations carried on at every meeting between the principal and a teacher.

**Other:** (a) assigning teachers a minimum rather than a maximum number of subjects they are qualified to teach, along with several options and subjects they are not qualified to teach, (b) keeping the budget a secret, making teachers feel they are too extravagant if they propose to purchase new materials for an activity they wish to implement.

Principals employing these types of tactics have defined their role as one which is domineering and controlling and establish a serfdom of mediocrity in their schools. The resulting symptoms appear as: no sound of laughter from the staff room, silence at staff meetings, a high rate of absenteeism among staff members, staff members doing 'their own thing', teachers avoiding administrators, doing only what they are assigned to do, avoiding staff socials, appearing tired and worn out and counting the days to the next holiday.

### **Moments of Truth**

As plans are made to involve school staff in the school-based decision making process, one should reflect the critical moments that will occur as the elements of the process are introduced and practiced. The recognition of these critical moments of truth, identifying occasions which encourage or discourage staff members from accepting and participating in the decision making process, is crucial to the survival of staff involvement, participation and trust. Participants at a Collaborative Decision Making Inservice Project sponsored by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Council on School Administration shared examples of just such moments:

- The first meeting with staff at which the process is introduced and the manner in which this is done has an effect on the staffs buy-in perception. The explanation or answer given to "Why? ... are we doing this?" will determine the outcome of this critical moment.
- The first few decisions made through the use of the school-based decision making process must be successful, functional and significant to the staff.
- The manner in which acceptance or rejection of the school based decision is communicated by administrators to the staff is a critical factor.
- Conflicts resulting from deliberations during the process ,in particular the first conflict, and the manner in which these are resolved will effect future discussions.

- The manner in which attempts at sabotage, mutiny and resistance are dealt with are crucial moments that will determine the outcomes of future staff meetings focusing on school-based decision making.
- What administrators do when a staff makes a decision that fails to resolve the situation or meet expectations is critical.
- The manner in which the administrative staff deals with decisions made by staff that are then questioned by parents, superintendent or the board of trustees, become moments of truth.

Suggestions were not offered on how to deal with these critical periods, trusting that if one is aware of how detrimental these occasions can be to the future involvement of staff in decision making, each administrator would attend to these moments of truth with sensitivity and responses that would build trust and ownership in the process.

### **Four Relevant Documents**

What are the positions of The Alberta Teachers' Association and Alberta Education in respect to the decision making process? An examination of four relevant documents reveals the desired and legislated expectations. The first of these documents, "*Trying to Teach: Necessary Conditions*", is a report of the Committee on Public Education and Professional Practice sponsored by the Alberta Teachers' Association (1994). The report outlines teachers' concerns about a number of factors that make it

difficult to teach effectively and contains recommended principles for the development of a comprehensive position and plan of action. A key concern expressed by teachers was the need to turn away from the 'top down' administrative model that is prevalent in today's school and mandates a 'legislated learning.' We require a more democratic and consultative approach to decision-making, one that involves teachers and parents in structured, informed, professional and collective discussions resulting in decisions focused on the specific needs and situations of the classroom and school communities involved.

*"The School Act for the Province of Alberta"* contains the Statutes of Alberta for 1988 with amendments in force as of July 1, 1994. These regulations are specific, and as of 1994 recognize the role that parents have been legislated. Section 15 states that, "A principal of a school must: (i) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board." Section 17(1) requires that, "A school council shall be established in accordance with the regulations for each school operated by a board." Section 17(4) adds that, "A school council shall: (a) advise the principal and the board respecting any matter relating to the board," and (e) "do anything it is required to do under the regulations."

The legislated function of parents through School Councils is more clearly defined in Alberta Education's Position Paper, December 1994, *"Roles*

*and Responsibilities In Education.*” The government’s restructuring plan calls for equitable funding for education, reduced administrative expenditures and a greater emphasis on decision making at the school level. The government’s emphasis on deregulation is an effort to ensure a minimum of external controls by the province and by school boards on schools, thus enhancing opportunities for the implementation of site-based management. In describing the primary function of each group which participates in education, key premises are defined, reflecting the decision making process. Premise #2 states that, “Parents, community members and school staff make the key decisions about the education of individual students,” recognizing that the individuals on the site are likely to make better decisions. Premise #9, requires superintendents to be involved in extensive consultation and interaction with the province, the school board, school principals and parents before making decisions. The role of the principal, Premise #10, is to provide the educational leadership and administer the school in consultation with central office staff, teachers, parents, the school council and the community. Rounding off the decision making process is a recognition in Premise #12 that other school and school jurisdiction staff, such as clerical, accounting and custodial staff, are partners in education and have a role in the decision making process.

The fourth document, “Meeting the Challenge II: Three-Year Business Plan for Education”, prepared by Alberta Education for the years’ 1995/96 to 1997/98, attempts to clarify the Alberta Government’s early initiatives at

restructuring education in Alberta. After a brief summary of the progress made in meeting the nine goals and 42 strategies outlined in the first *Meeting the Challenge* business plan for education, the document defines Alberta Education's Mission and Mandate, the proposed spending targets for education, the goals and strategies for improving education and the results and measures for goal achievement. Goal #2 proposes to "provide parents with greater opportunities to select schools and programs of their choice and allow for greater parent/community involvement in education." To meet this goal, provisions must be made to "enable parents and teachers to have a meaningful role in decisions about policies, programs, budgets, and activities in their schools." Goal #5 requires that we "achieve increased efficiencies and effectiveness in the education system through restructuring the governance and delivery of education." This goal will be met through implementation of school-based management by 1996/97 and implementation of new roles and responsibilities for stakeholders throughout the education system that same year. Individually and collectively, the four documents clearly direct stakeholders towards a collaborative decision making process.

### **School Culture**

A school community's culture plays an important role in shaping and affecting the decision making process of the community. O'Haire (1995)

describes eight culture-shaping tools which could assist the school principal in influencing, reinforcing, building or improving the culture of the school.

1. *The use of stories, sagas, lore and myth* is an effective method to influence the culture of a group. School leaders often gather their material from their real interactions with and observations of parents, students and teachers. The recall of many of these incidents may be retold in ways that will reinforce desired values and beliefs.

2. Effective leaders *teach, coach and/or model* the behaviors and values they want to incorporate in their school's culture. They play out their visions and offer members of the community concrete examples of how desired cultural norms look and sound. They seek out opportunities to demonstrate the values and beliefs they want to build into the community culture.

3. A site administrator's influence over the *allocation of resources, time, rewards and recognition* of staff offers a multitude of opportunities to reinforce desired values and beliefs.

4. Effective principals *manage the communication network*, taking time to test out new ideas with staff members through the gossip and casual conversation of the staffroom as well as formal information channels. Using the political network of the staff by speaking with the informal staff leaders and negotiating with the staff resisters to gain support for innovations, is a part of the principal's effective communication process.

5. *Hiring and promoting* staff members who already have the desired values and beliefs, while *transferring or dismissing* those who resist, offers leaders the most immediate and forceful means to shape a school's culture.

6. Principals may improve the school's culture by *establishing appropriate school goals*. Instead of accepting the status quo, these leaders communicate clearly and frequently that the school can perform better each year. The cultural norm underlying these goals is that everyone has responsibility to improve his/her own performance and to assist the improvement of others.

7. School leaders can *strengthen current staff heroes, create new heroes from existing staff or import new heroes*. All three sources provide individuals who can demonstrate the desired cultural values and beliefs.

8. A principal's choices about his or her own time allocations powerfully symbolize the values and beliefs that are desired. This *focus of attention* by the school principal illustrates to the staff the priorities that are valued by the leader. Good management is the art of selective neglect.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The concepts of school reform such as increased teacher involvement in shared or collaborative decision making, school based management, participatory decision making, and teacher empowerment, are reforms aimed at improving student learning and achievement. Recent assessments on the

effect these concepts have in bringing about substantial positive changes in teaching and learning in the classroom remain unclear. It appears that the actual changes as a result of restructuring will be slower in making a positive impact on the classroom than first anticipated.

There is, however, an important benefit to our present efforts at reform which must not be overlooked or underestimated. School decisions involving stakeholders in a collaborative process will always be a better way to arrive at decisions than the traditional top down structures. School staffs, parents, students and administrators will be more satisfied, accepting and committed to decisions which have been discussed in a collaborative manner and agreed to consentaneously.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **COLLECTING DATA: THE INTERVIEWS**

#### **Introduction**

“Do you think shared decision making is working in our school?” This was the focus question of my study and could only be answered by the staff of the school. To gather information that would help me determine an answer to the question, I chose to use two data gathering techniques: interviews with staff members (Chapter Three), and data collection through the use of a questionnaire (Chapter Four). The interviews precede the T.I.P.S. 2 data because they contain information and opinions which will assist the reader in understanding the diversity of responses expressed in the T.I.P.S. 2 survey questionnaire found in Chapter Four. Reflections on my personal observations regarding my attempts at facilitating staff participation in shared decision making were used in the interpretation of the data and in arriving at conclusions or questions where appropriate.

#### **Methodology**

I invited staff members to participate in an interview focusing on a more in-depth clarification and interpretation of the decision making process in a letter addressed to staff on May 31, 1995 (Appendix A). This letter was accompanied by a description of the project as well as the T.I.P.S. 2 Instrument. On June 22, 1995, I distributed a second note (Appendix B) to all

staff regarding the follow-up interview, outlining some general questions about school-based decision making and specific questions on areas which would assist me in defining recommendations for improving our decision making process.

I did not intend to speak to each staff member and at the time of my second note had not yet established a criteria for selecting those staff members I wished to interview. I had hoped several staff members might volunteer. Since there were no volunteers, I chose to speak to staff members, who through their discussions in the staffroom and during staff meetings had demonstrated their involvement and participation in issues and concerns of the school. These individuals were not reluctant in expressing their views and I therefore expected to receive a candid and open expression of opinions during our interviews.

I originally identified twelve members of staff to interview, eight teachers and four support staff. Due to the low return of questionnaires from the support staff, I chose to forego my follow-up at this time and will pursue this section of my study at a later date. Of the eight teachers remaining, I selected the six individuals whose schedules and timetables best suited my own. All six of the teachers I approached agreed to my request and did not appear threatened or uneasy about the pending interview. Only one of the interviews needed to be rescheduled.

The interviews were from forty-five to sixty minutes in duration and focused on the sets of questions outlined in section six of the June 22nd note

to staff as well as on the questions concerning time and consensus as presented in section five, questions eight and nine of the same note to staff. I taped all the interviews and took notes on what I thought were key points at the time.

In summarizing and interpreting the interviews, I used pseudonyms to provide anonymity to staff participating in the interviews. A list of the questions asked is found in the Appendix C.

### **Summary of the Interviews**

**Question I: How does the staff feel about the journey we've taken to date? ...about their participation, contribution and ownership in decisions pertaining to the functioning of our school? How active and involved are staff in the decision making process at our school?**

Susan guessed that we were in the developmental stage of our attempt at shared decision making. From my interpretation of O'Haire's (1995) Stages of Team Development, I would have rated us somewhere between Stage Two: Experimenting, and Stage Three: Consolidating Experience. Susan acknowledged that,

"Some of the staff find it hard to get involved or participate. This isn't because they're uncomfortable or unwilling. They're just not sure of themselves. Not sure how much they're allowed to get involved. They're still testing the ground. You've got a mixed bag. It's going to take awhile."

Helen and Cathy thought we were "getting there" but some of the staff were becoming frustrated with the process since there were no clear

guidelines or policies indicating that decisions made at the staff level were meaningful or binding. Helen occasionally felt that the items brought to staff were not really for staff to decide because of limiting factors. "We are frustrated with the larger district process and the effect it has on our decision making opportunities." Alice questioned the opportunities school staff had to be involved in meaningful school-based decision making because of existing School Board Policy. She referred to how little control staffs in our school region presently had in areas such as the school budget. "So much of it is delegated to us by the Board."

Michael, a relatively new staff member, thought the administrators of the school "have a very open approach to anything regarding the school." In his opinion there were,

"very few areas that as a staff we are not able to be involved in. There are times when I am surprised that you'd ask for our opinion on a certain issue or topic that needed a decision, areas I would not have thought were in the staff's realm of responsibility or concern."

Michael perceived that there were some staff members who desired more involvement in the decision making process. "I'm not one of them." He appreciated being consulted, involved and allowed to participate in decisions that affected his role in the classroom but trusted that the administrators would make decisions in ways that were "appropriate and best for the students, staff and school."

Alice and Charles, two senior staff members who have taught in other schools, acknowledged that the staff had been invited and encouraged to

participate in the decision making process of the school and that structures had been created to facilitate the process. However, Charles thinks,

“In order for things to work, there have to be some decisions from upstairs and some by the staff. Fine to get everyone involved in decision making but we won’t get anywhere. There are too many people with differing opinions. We have to trust that you will make decisions that are best for the school. If we don’t like those decisions we should be able to say so without feeling threatened or put down. You can’t go around trying to satisfy everyone.”

Alice referred to herself as ‘old school’. “I accept the principal’s decision. The staff does not need to participate in all decisions.”

One participant was able to comment on the importance of making all staff feel comfortable during staff discussions. She has observed the effects on staff when “you lost your cool once or twice.” These critical moments, were occasions which staff members remember and result in a lack of involvement and participation in future discussions for fear of confrontation or ridicule.

Each interviewee spoke of a recognition by staff members that we had a variety of staff backgrounds. This diversity of opinions made it difficult to obtain everyone’s acceptance and agreement to the process. There were always staff members who were unhappy with the choices made. Susan asked the question, “ How can you have twenty-five people from twenty-five different walks of life all thinking that you’re doing everything perfectly?” As a counter to this notion, Helen offered her observation that staff members “are

feeling better about things. We're starting to be a staff, a group of team players."

**Question II: What decisions if any, should be made by staff alone? ... by administrators alone? ... through a combined collaborative process? How do we arrive at an appropriate categorization of decisions to be made?**

Although no specific answers were shared on these questions, several participants offered suggestions. Cathy believed we needed to define which decisions were made by parents, which by teachers, which by administration and which through a collaborative process involving the various stakeholders. In her opinion, we should establish a criteria for group involvement defining who, how, when and for what types of decisions each group was responsible. The Steering Committee's role in the process should be described, defining the topics they may come to decision on and those which need to be brought to staff as a recommendation.

All interviewees suggested the parents and support staff should be invited to play a role in the school decision making process. Helen qualified her acceptance of this invitation by adding, "if they are prepared to put in the time." Charles agreed parents should have an opportunity for input on topics concerning their children and posed the question, "How do we ensure a reliable sampling of parent opinion?"

According to Alice, parents already had an opportunity to offer their advice and opinion through the Parent Council. She thought the role and responsibilities of parents defined by Alberta Education provided for adequate involvement and opportunities for input. This parent role will develop and expand with time as we establish clearer guidelines and trusting relationships.

**Question III: How do we know when we've reached a "collaborative" decision or one that meets the "consensus" of the staff?**

As we spoke about consensus, Susan shared,

"At present not all staff participate in the decision making process. Often only three, four or five show their agreement with others abstaining. Maybe we need to require that everyone must either vote for, against or show their abstention. If there is not at least sixty per cent participation, then the administration makes the decision."

Helen supported this statement. Her definition of consensus stated that, "if the majority of participants are happy with the decision and will support it, it is not necessary to take a show of hands." None the less, Helen "liked" to vote on issues because it sped up the process. This preference was repeated by five of the six staff members interviewed. They were skeptical that we could arrive at true consensus and saw nothing wrong with voting and the concept of majority rules. Cathy summarized that view stating, "I'm willing to live with that process. I've lost many a vote and for me that's fair." As we explored the concept of consensus and the advantages and disadvantages, all

interviewees agreed they would try working towards the concept of consensus building if we could arrive at a definition all could accept.

As we discussed the concept of consensus building, three interviewees expressed the need for more information on topics and issues being discussed. Michael suggested the Steering Committee and staff's involvement in decision making would be more effective if, along with the agenda, individuals were provided with information relating to the issues several days in advance. This would promote thought and discussion of the issues beforehand, with the possibility that decisions could be arrived at sooner. He suggested all staff should be involved in the research for information and alternatives on agenda topics, school goals and issues of concern. Volunteer committees would research topics identified by staff, prepare possible alternatives and share this information with all staff. Charles volunteered the Steering Committee members as chairpersons or coordinators of the research committees. In addition to the need for information, Susan identified a need for more education and training in skills necessary for collaborative decision making.

**Question IV: Where and how do we find the necessary time required to involve ourselves in a collaborative decision making process?**

Many teachers expressed concern and frustration with the concept of time and their perception that school-based decision making would require more of their time. Susan believed,

“They are putting more and more obligations on the things teachers have to do but they’re not giving us more time. They’re putting more stuff on our plate to deal with, things we’re not trained to deal with.”

What should we do about this question of time? Although no one said, “Let’s work smarter, not harder,” several excellent suggestions were offered.

- Meet on Monday mornings for regular information items and short discussions. Use monthly staff meetings, professional development days and administration days for decisions requiring lengthy study, debate and discussion.
- The Steering Committee should be required to accept greater responsibility in the decision making process.
- Certain decisions should be made by those staff who have a vested interest in that topic. These occasions do not require the presence of the entire staff.
- All staff or those interested in the question should meet for fifteen to twenty minutes, two or three times a week for discussion and decision making.
- Students should be dismissed once a week after recess freeing staff to meet.
- Gather students in the gym for a presentation, freeing staff for collaborative decision making.
- Prepare staff bulletins containing information and announcements presently given to staff verbally during staff meetings. This would

allow for more time at staff meetings to discuss, debate and make decisions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **COLLECTING DATA: THE SURVEY**

#### **Introduction**

The story of the blind men examining an elephant is widely known and was one that came to mind as I read and analyzed the survey data. The first blind man feels only the elephant's trunk and thereafter confidently describes the beast as a great snakelike creature. The second blind man feels only the elephant's ears and announces that it is a bird that can soar to great heights. The third man examines only the elephants tail and "sees" an animal that is curiously like a bottle brush. And so on. So it is with any experience that members of a community share. Each participant perceives it in a different way and takes from the experience a different lesson than do his or her colleagues.

The survey or questionnaire would help me gather the many perceptions staff members had about our attempt at a shared decision making process. I gave each member the opportunity to express the degree of their involvement and participation in the collaborative process.

#### **The Instrument**

Two years ago, while doing research for a paper, I came across an article in the September, 1992 issue of "Educational Leadership" describing an instrument used for measuring the involvement of teachers in shared

decision making in schools. Russell, Cooper and Greenblatt (1992), the authors of the article and developers of the instrument, referred to their tool as “a systematic approach to school improvement using the principles of shared decision making.” The instrument was developed with two distinct purposes. First, to collect data on what was actually happening with shared decision making in the school and second, to enable practitioners to assess the dimensions of decision making already in place and plan for implementation of those that were not.

The description of the instrument appeared to be exactly what I needed to assist me in finding answers to my question. I wrote to the authors requesting further information about the instrument and a copy of the questionnaire. Upon receiving the Teacher Involvement and Participation Scale Two (TIPS-2) instrument and examining the contents, I recognized the tool’s usefulness in first, gathering information and determining how successful our staff has been in reaching the goals of our school project and secondly, using this information for my masters project.

TIPS-2 was described as an instrument which helped to assess the extent of teacher participation in eight key dimensions:

- Vision/Mission/Goals: the degree to which teachers are involved in developing and establishing the goals, mission and vision of the school.

- **Standards:** the degree to which teachers shared in setting standards for their own performance and for student performance and discipline.
- **Curriculum and Instruction:** the degree to which teachers participated in determining the school program, curriculum goals, textbook selection, educational materials and classroom pedagogy.
- **Staff Development:** the degree to which teachers were permitted to design and implement staff development activities that met their needs.
- **Operations:** the degree to which teachers were involved in the management of the building, its use, improvements and maintenance.
- **Budgeting:** the degree to which teachers participated in matters related to the design and implementation of the school budget.
- **Staffing:** the degree to which teachers were involved in making decisions about recruiting, interviewing, hiring and assigning staff.
- **Facilitating Procedures and Structures:** the degree to which teachers had adequate time, reduced teaching loads, waivers from contracts and regulations, and changed schedules to permit collegial work to occur.

Review of the TIPS-2 instrument revealed areas of study that were beyond those which the school staff had been involved in. As an example, the staff's participation in development of our school budget was limited to

areas of curriculum since our district had not yet moved to a school-based management model. Teachers had not been invited to assist in the selection and recruitment of other teachers. Despite these limitations, I chose to use the tool as published to obtain as much information from the staff as possible, to enable us to begin a review of our practices and develop plans and recommendations that would improve the decision making process. The TIPS-2 instrument can be found in Appendix B.

### **The Participants**

At the time of the survey, the school staff consisted of sixteen teachers and eight support staff. Of the teaching staff, three were new to the school and had a limited perception on many of the questions. Two of these three staff members taught half time at our school and half time at a different site. Participation in the study was voluntary and returns were to be kept anonymous. Twelve of the possible sixteen surveys were returned from the teaching staff.

I initially intended that the support staff also attempt to participate in the survey by completing the TIPS-2 document substituting “classroom assistant”, “secretary”, or “custodian” in place of “teacher.” Only one questionnaire was returned from the support staff. This prompted me to wonder “why?” and avoid similar results in the future. My brief inquires lead me to conclude that most of the support staff felt uncomfortable in completing the survey form because they did not have enough of the background

information to understand many of the items on the questionnaire. I will need to assist them more in the future to enable them to be more confident in participating in school and program evaluations.

A summary of the results of the survey, showing the twelve teaching staff responses, the item mean score (X) and the area mean score, are found in Appendix B. Preceding the comments and interpretation of each management area is a summary scan of the survey form. The numbers in the columns represent the number of staff who choose the rating of their participation in each of the categories during the past school year as well. The extreme right hand column contains the mean score.

- 5 represents "Almost Always,"
- 4 represents "Frequently,"
- 3 represents "Sometimes,"
- 2 represents "Seldom," and
- 1 represents "Almost Never."

If an item does not have twelve responses it is because some teachers chose not to indicate a choice.

## Summary of Survey Results, Interpretation and Comments

### Management Area I: Goals/Vision/Mission

	RATING -----					X
	1	2	3	4	5	
1. Teachers have developed the same shared vision for this school.-	0	0	7	2	2	(3.5)
2. Teachers participate in the goal setting process for the school. --	0	0	3	6	3	(4.0)
3. Teachers help to establish school priorities. -----	0	0	8	2	2	(3.5)
4. Teachers as a group accept the school's goals. -----	0	0	4	5	2	(3.8)
5. Teachers are able to get other teachers to support their vision of the school. -----	0	0	5	7	0	(3.6)
6. Teachers are able to get administrators to support their vision of the school. -----	0	0	8	3	1	(3.4)
7. The school's goals are consistent with my vision of this school. -----	0	0	5	6	1	(3.6)
8. Teachers contribute to the development of a plan to meet the school's goals. -----	0	0	4	7	1	(3.8)
9. Teachers play an active role in evaluating school goals. -----	0	0	6	5	1	(3.6)
	OVERALL X -----					(3.7)

The setting of yearly school goals was one of the primary objectives of our school project four years ago and in my opinion continued to be a high priority at the end and the beginning of every school year. For the past four years we had used a portion of our spring professional development day or our May/June staff meeting to review the goals for the current school year, to identify possible goals for next year and to select those we would attempt. It was surprising therefore, that item #2, "Teachers participate in the goal setting process for the school," had 3 teachers responding "sometimes." One of the comments at the end of the survey indicated a lack of awareness we had a project at the school. Overall this item did score a mean of '4' indicating teachers are aware of their "frequent" participation. Ratings for this

section ranged from a low of '3.4' to a high of '4.0' with an overall mean of '3.7'.

Why would so many teachers rate their participation in this area in the "sometimes" zone when we had worked at developing a Mission/Vision statement and goals? It has been four to five years since, as a staff we last formally deliberated on the development of a school mission statement. I recall the long and difficult task it was and the staff's ultimate acceptance of a statement more out of frustration with the exercise than agreement with the outcome. Since then we have not discussed or shared our hopes and aspirations for our school community on a formal basis even though individually we have voiced various opinions on what we should or do stand for. Has it been so long that staff have forgotten their previous involvement? Was the initial involvement of a superficial nature and therefore not meaningful? Answers to these questions will require future inquiries.

My interviews with staff members comment on the varying opinions of the staff and the difficulty members had in coming to agreements or consensus on issues. Although the staff had developed a strong camaraderie and showed signs of working as a team, there were individuals unable or unwilling to set aside their personal needs and agendas. These individuals did not consistently recognize that for the staff to function effectively each member must give up a certain degree of independence and begin to cooperate, share and work to find compromising solutions for the good of the team rather than serve individual goals. Perhaps now is the

appropriate time for staff to review our mission/vision. If our school community could develop a vision/mission statement all could accept and support we would have a basis for common ground and understanding. This common view would bring our community closer together as a team, shape the behavior and action of the group and enable individuals to see the common purpose and goals for the school.

After four years of struggle, I am beginning to question whether I have the necessary skills to organize the diversity of personalities on staff and develop a smoothly operating, productive team. Perhaps we need to bring in a facilitator to assist us in developing these necessary skills. On the other hand, outside observers encourage me to continue my efforts and affirming me in our attempts. I will need to address these two areas with the staff.

### Management Area II: Standards

	RATING	1	2	3	4	5	X
10. Teachers working together set their own work standards. -----		0	1	6	3	2	(3.5)
11. Teachers contribute to the standards set for discipline in the school. -----		0	0	6	3	3	(3.8)
12. Teachers set standards for their students' work. -----		0	0	0	2	10	(4.8)
13. Teachers help to set standards for student promotion and/or retention. -----		1	0	1	4	6	(4.2)
14. The school staff assumes responsibility for student performance. -		0	0	4	5	3	(3.9)
	OVERALL X -----						(4.0)

Overall, teachers scored a mean of '4.0' or "frequent" participation for this area, the highest overall score for any of the eight sections of study. 10 out of 12 teachers (mean score of '4.8') believed they "almost always" set

standards for their students' work. Most of the teachers, 10 of 12 ('4.2'), recognized their contribution in setting standards for student promotion and retention. These items had not been dealt with to any extent at the staff level, other than to make teachers aware of the district policy and Alberta Education's standards and guidelines. Teachers have made their own interpretations of these documents.

Teachers were less certain about their collective participation in assuming responsibility for student performance ('3.9') or contributing to the standards set for discipline in the school ('3.8'). I was surprised 6 teachers would rate item #11 as "sometimes" after all the work staff members did as a group in developing our Student Conduct Handbook. Again as in Area 1, it appeared my attempts at involving the staff as a whole in decision making were not always perceived or accepted as complete participation in the decision making process. This anomaly warrants further inspection and reflection.

### Management Area III: Curriculum/Instruction

	RATING -----						
	1	2	3	4	5	X	
15. Teachers have authority to make adjustments in the school's curriculum. -----	0	4	4	3	0		(2.9)
16. Teachers help to determine the pace of instruction for students. --	0	0	1	3	0		(3.8)
17. Teachers initiate changes in the curriculum. -----	1	3	4	3	0		(2.8)
18. Teachers participate in making school-wide curriculum decisions. -	0	1	7	2	2		(3.4)
19. Teachers participate in the selection of textbooks. -----	0	0	1	5	6		(4.4)
20. District-wide committees of teachers coordinate curricula. -----	2	6	1	2	0		(2.3)
21. Teachers participate in curricula development. -----	2	3	4	2	1		(2.9)
22. Teachers determine grouping for the purpose of instruction. -----	0	0	0	3	8		(4.4)

23. Teachers determine the instructional activities they use in their classroom. ....	0	0	0	1	11	(5.0)
24. Teachers monitor the effectiveness of curricula. ....	0	0	1	6	5	(4.3)
OVERALL X .....						(3.7)

The opinions of teachers varied greatly in this section of statements ranging from a high of '4.9' to a low of '2.3', with an overall mean of '3.7'. Teachers agreed they participated in the selection of textbooks and resources ('4.4'), determined the grouping of students for the purpose of instruction ('4.4'), determined the instructional activities they use in their classroom ('4.9') and monitored the effectiveness of curricula ('4.3'). Who had the authority to make adjustments or initiate changes in the school's curriculum was in question, with as many teachers saying they do so "frequently" as those saying "seldom." This division of opinion was also evident in teachers' expression of the degree to which they participated in curricula development. Were teachers aware of the opportunities that exist for personal involvement in curriculum development? Two or three staff members had participated in curriculum planning and the development of assessment tools at the district and provincial level. Perhaps that accounted for the three teachers who indicated a "sometime" or "frequent" participation in item #20, "District-wide committees of teachers coordinate curricula." Although I had heard discussions at administrators' meetings and meetings of teachers which favor the establishment of such committees, no such initiative had as yet been taken. Perhaps this staff should be encouraged to



As was observed in the previous section, the responses to the six budget statements were very scattered, reflecting the diverse views of staff members concerning how staff should participate in the decisions regarding the school budget. The responses ranged from an average low of '2.3' (seldom) to a high of '3.8' (approaching frequently) with an overall mean score of '2.9' (sometimes). It was difficult to make an interpretation to the responses of this section with any certainty. Even item #26, "Teachers are able to decide how they will spend their allotted funds," which received a rating of 3.8, could be interpreted in several ways. Does the item refer to decisions the "collective teaching staff" participated in or to decisions individual teachers made? Are the "allotted funds" those set aside for individuals, grade levels or subject areas?

From the overall score, I concluded that teachers do not see themselves participating in matters relating to the design and implementation of the school budget to the degree I had hoped they would. As we work toward implementation of school-based management and attempt to provide for greater involvement of staff in the decision making process of the school in areas such as the school budget, efforts must be taken to ensure that participating members have a common understanding of the task and have reached consensus on defined goals. To gain a clearer understanding of the staffs perception regarding their participation in establishing the school budget we need to discuss our expectations in regards to the six statements

in this area and from the information shared, develop a strategy that will suit our needs.

### Management Area V: Staffing

	RATING -----						
	1	2	3	4	5	X	
31. Teachers have a voice in the recruiting and selecting of teachers.	-9	3	0	0	0		(1.3)
32. Teachers help to decide teaching assignments of staff members.	-3	1	6	1	0		(2.5)
33. Teachers take part in staffing decisions including such trade-offs as using instructional aides, or hiring vice-principals, counselors, and other special area staff. -----	7	4	0	0	0		(1.4)
34. Teachers have a voice in the recruiting and selecting of administrators. -----	11	0	0	0	0		(1.0)
	OVERALL X -----						(1.5)

This is one management area where, with few exceptions, the majority of the teachers said they had little or no degree of participation in the decisions made. Responses to this area of the study had an overall mean of '1.5' with item #32, receiving a high mean of '2.5' and #34, a low of '1'. There had been few opportunities for teachers to have a voice in the recruiting and selection of teachers or administrators over the past seven years since few staffing changes have taken place, and those that have, were placed through the Superintendent of Schools Office. This past September, given the opportunity to add one full time equivalent teacher to our staff, I attempted to remedy this situation by requesting the assistance of the Staff Steering Committee in the recruitment and selection process. I was motivated to take this action partly by the staff responses I observed in the T.I.P.S. 2 instrument, but primarily because I believed staff input into decisions affecting

the school resulted in better decisions and decisions for which the staff took ownership.

On September first of the current school year, having confirmed our school enrollment warranted an additional full time teacher, I asked the Steering Committee if they were interested in assisting me make the selection. Their response was unanimously positive and appreciative. The committee approached the task with enthusiasm, professionalism and respect, resulting in the selection and hiring of a staff member who has quickly become one of the team. Since then, the Steering Committee has been involved in the selection process of three key support staff members. Based on this experience, I would not hesitate in seeking the assistance of teaching staff members or the Steering Committee in future staffing decisions.

As our school staff begins to take greater responsibility for school-based decisions, including the school budget and staffing decisions, I would expect the responses in this section of the questionnaire to have the majority of the responses on the right side of the ledger. Though not a major point, it was interesting to see the range of responses for item #32, "Teachers help to decide teaching assignments of staff members." I would credit the higher rating for this item to three factors. First, the first week of May all teachers are requested to complete a questionnaire regarding their personal preferences of grade placement and subject area. Second, if teacher placement for the following year had not reached consensus through these

teacher written responses, the teachers affected by those grade placements, met to discuss the situation and attempt to reach a mutually satisfying agreement. Third, when and where appropriate, teachers have made collaborative decisions regarding schedules and subject matter. Through these informal and indirect procedures, teachers have affected each others teaching assignments.

### Management Area VI: Operations

	RATING	1	2	3	4	5	X	
35. Teachers have a voice in the development of the schedule for the school. -----		0	2	4	5	1		(3.4)
36. Teachers paly a part in determining how the school building is utilized. -----		2	1	6	2	1		(2.9)
37. Teachers are involved in the development of plans to improve building facilities. -----		4	3	2	2	1		(2.4)
38. Teachers play a role in establishing building maintenance priorities.6		5	0	0	0	1		(1.8)
	OVERALL X -----							(2.6)

I agree with and accept the staff's perception of their low degree of participation in decisions regarding the school building's use, improvement and maintenance. It is a condition I am frustrated with myself. Under the present district policy and procedures it has been difficult to have our requests for maintenance and improvements met. Often I am required to submit several requisitions over a given school year requesting some form of action on the same job item before any action is taken. The resulting work is often incomplete or unsatisfactory. The staff are not always made aware of these circumstances and I have refrained from attempting to correct all but

the most critical of our plant needs until circumstances at the district level are remedied. With school-based management, I hope the situation will improve.

Some staff members were more vocal and demanding in expressing their classroom needs, seeking out attention and satisfaction. Since the squeaky wheel gets the grease, these teachers occasionally had their requests met or became aware of the reasons the work was not accomplished.

I was disappointed and surprised with the teacher response given to item #35, "Teachers have a voice in the development of the schedule for the school." Half of the staff saw their participation in the development of the schedule as "seldom" or "sometimes." Aside from the scheduling of French and Music classes, each teacher was responsible for their own class schedule. French and Music were scheduled by the administrative team because these subjects were taught by two or three teachers to several classrooms requiring the sharing of facilities and time. If this is an important issue to teachers, I must determine how to correct or adapt the scheduling process.

### Management Area VII: Facilitating Procedures and Structures

	RATING -----						X
	1	2	3	4	5		
39. Teachers have access to the information they need to make school-wide decisions. -----	1	1	6	2	2		(3.3)
40. Teachers are represented on a council or group that makes school-wide decisions. -----	0	1	3	3	5		(4.0)
41. Sufficient time is provided for teachers to share in decision making activities. -----	0	3	6	3	0		(3.0)

42. It is possible to obtain waivers from the teachers' contract for school-based decisions. ....	5	0	0	0	0	(1.0)
43. Teachers working together arrive at decisions on the basis of majority rule. ....	0	0	3	4	5	(4.2)
44. We would not make a decision until almost everyone is in agreement. ....	2	4	3	3	0	(2.6)
45. Decisions are not made until everyone can accept the proposal to some extent. ....	2	4	4	2	0	(2.5)
OVERALL X .....						(2.9)

Five of twelve teachers acknowledged teachers were represented on a committee that makes school wide decisions “almost always” and three more teachers responded with a “Frequently”. The yearly rotating procedure adopted by staff, required two new members replace two existing members on a two year rotation. After four years only three teachers had not yet had an opportunity to serve on the Steering Committee. This committee seldom made decisions which would be binding on the staff. Their mandate was to examine items being considered or suggested by the staff or administration. After due deliberation and study recommendations were brought back for the staff’s consideration and approval. Nine of the twelve teachers indicated that they arrived at decisions on the basis of majority rule “frequently” or “almost always”. The interviews supported this data, indicating many teachers preferred to vote when making a decision or choice. The responses for these two items, #40 and # 43, averaged a mean score of ‘4.0’ and ‘4.2’ respectively.

The overall mean for this section was ‘2.9’, indicating to me a less than favorable judgment on the degree to which teachers had adequate time,

information, and procedures for making shared decisions. Comments made during the interviews made reference to the need for information prior to discussions on issues affecting the staff. Time, as always, was a critical factor in the facilitation of effective decision making procedures and received a score of '3', from which it was difficult to make an interpretation. Attempts had been made to schedule one hour blocks of time during the school instructional day, enabling teachers to meet and attend to their identified needs. Teachers in division one had taken advantage of this opportunity on several occasions. Teachers in division two appeared not to have a common agenda and were reluctant to meet. Our weekly Monday morning gatherings for prayer, announcements and discussions, gave us few opportunities for in-depth decision making. Monthly staff meetings held at the end of a teaching day were often filled with announcements and other trivia. Professional Development Days held at the school-site and based on the identified needs of the staff allowed for the best opportunities to make shared decisions.

This school year we have attempted to place none but the most essential of administrative items on our monthly staff meeting agendas, inviting staff to identify their needs and agenda items. Only time will tell how successful this tactic has been in providing more time for fruitful shared decision making.

The two lowest mean scores for this section were recorded for items #44, ('2.6') and #45, ('2.5'). These items required teachers to make judgments on how the staff as a whole arrive at a decision. The range of

responses is an indication of the diversity of perceptions teachers have about the two statements. I interpret the low score for item #45 to be an indication of the staff's inability to arrive at consensus because of the variety of opinions and personalities. This interpretation was supported in the comments shared through the interview process. Responses to Item #44 reflected the staff's awareness of how much time is needed for effective consensus decision making and support the interpretation suggested for item #45.

If shared decision making is to work at our school, the items in this section will require more in-depth discussion and analysis. The data collected in this section indicates to me a need for further study and inservice by the staff on the skills needed for effective decision making. How do I make the staff aware of my observations in a non-threatening way, and through a collaborative process with the staff, find the time and resources to attend to these observations? I will discuss this item with my Associate Principal and together we will decide on the appropriateness of placing this item on the agenda of our Steering Committee for discussion, decision and action.

The five staff members who expressed an opinion on item #42, indicated it was not possible to obtain waivers from the teachers' contract for school based decisions. I would agree with this opinion considering the legal status of our Alberta Teachers' Association's collective agreement. I am of the opinion that if the contract has clauses that prevent school sites from

making school-based decisions that are beneficial and appropriate for the school, then amendments to the agreement must be considered.

### Management Area VIII: Staff Development

	RATING -----						
	1	2	3	4	5	X	
46. Teachers have access to current research on effective programs and practices. -----	0	0	7	4	1		(3.5)
47. Teachers help to determine the staff development they will receive. -----	1	0	6	4	1		(3.3)
48. Teachers have opportunities to share their expert knowledge. ----	0	0	9	3	0		(3.3)
49. Teachers participate in staff development activities. -----	0	0	2	7	3		(4.1)
50. Teachers have access to special training when necessary. -----	1	2	3	3	3		(3.4)
	OVERALL X -----						(3.5)

Staff development in our school division has, for the past four to five years, been primarily the responsibility of the school-site, with the school division planning taking responsibility for one of the three to four days scheduled into the school calendar for P.D. Themes for the division professional development day were generally chosen by a committee of teachers after some input from all school staffs. Topics for our school's staff development activities had been, in my opinion, suggested by Steering Committee and staff, and decided on by staff at a regular staff meeting. I was surprised at the '3.3' (sometimes) rating which item #47 received and will need the staff's assistance in defining how to better insure their involvement and participation in determining the staff development activities they will receive.

I believe, that if staff development is to be effective, teachers must have ownership and responsibility in defining their needs and selecting the manner these needs will be filled. My responsibility is to assist staff members by providing them with information in areas such as current curriculum and resource updates, and changes in Alberta Education and School Board policy and guidelines. I have suggested topics staff could consider for study and offered names of possible presenters. Perhaps this information has been perceived as more than a suggestion for consideration and has unduly influenced staff to make choices based on my suggestions.

Ten of twelve staff members participated “frequently “ or “almost always” in staff development activities (item #49). Teachers have not had an option regarding their attendance at professional development activities. They have been expected to attend although the degree of participation is a personal choice. ‘You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.’ If teachers had total control of the selection, planning and organization of the school-site staff development activity, would there be greater involvement and participation? Do all teachers wish to be involved and to participate? Should they be given an option to attend to their own identified professional needs if they choose rather than participate in the topic chosen by the staff or division committee? Do teachers have a choice in this matter? I should explore this item further with staff.

Item #50, “Teachers have access to special training when necessary,” received very scattered responses. Teachers have access to a fund allowing

each teacher the opportunity to attend a variety of conferences and inservices sponsored by A.T.A. Specialist Councils, The University of Lethbridge, the Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium and our own school division. Several of the present teachers on staff, have participated in a variety of professional activities each year, while others on staff have not accessed their available funds for three or four years. These have been personal choices. I do not understand the reason for the “almost never,” “seldom” or “sometimes” responses unless these responses refer to the individual teacher participation in P.D. activities rather than the availability or access of the special programs. This item also warrants further examination with staff.

Availability of current research on effective programs and practices at the school, (item # 46), had been limited to printouts of professional journal articles a staff member found interesting and wished to share with staff, documents from Alberta Education and subscriptions to eight to ten journals or magazines on specific curriculum and subject topics. There have been discussions by the Steering Committee on developing a more extensive professional library, however these suggestion have not been acted upon. Is it an area of attention teachers need and want?

Most teachers, 9 of 12, indicated that they have had “some” opportunities to share their expert knowledge. Does this mean they want more opportunities? Would this participation be limited to our school, the

school division or unlimited boundaries? This is another item which requires further clarification.

**Area IX: Overall Impressions**

Ratings for this section of the survey form used the following legend to indicate levels of agreement or disagreement:

- 1 represents "Disagree Strongly"
- 2 represents "Disagree Somewhat"
- 3 represents "Neutral"
- 4 represents "Agree Somewhat"
- 5 represents "Agree Strongly"

	RATING -----	1	2	3	4	5	X	
51. I think that teachers are accountable for decisions made through a shared process. -----		0	2	2	5	1		(3.5)
52. I think teachers' involvement in shared decision making is important								
for increased professionalism -----		0	0	1	3	8		(4.6)
for school improvement -----		0	0	1	2	9		(4.7)
for better school morale -----		0	0	0	2	10		(4.8)
for increased job satisfaction -----		0	0	0	2	10		(4.8)
53. Overall, I think shared decision making in my school is working well. -----		0	3	4	4	1		(3.3)
54. I would improve shared decision making at my school by: _____								
	OVERALL X -----							(4.3)

The diversity of views expressed in item # 51 is again a reflection of the individualistic opinions of staff and the unwillingness or inability of some staff members to let go of personal needs and agendas for the good of the team. The interview with teachers supports this interpretation and offers a

reason why our staff has difficulties in arriving at decisions through consensus.

The majority of teachers, (8 of 10), “agree strongly” that their involvement in shared decision making is important for all four of the listed categories. Item #52 is much like a “mother’s apple pie” statement. It is difficult to disagree with the importance of teacher involvement in shared decision making. Comments made by teachers during the interviews revealed that not all teachers wanted a total involvement in shared decision making. I should ask the question, “To what degree do teachers want to be involved in Shared Decision Making?” I think the responses would be scattered evenly across the five point scale, confirming the variety of needs and attitudes prevalent among the staff.

The focus question of my study, “Do you think shared decision making is working in our school?” is very similar to the opinion asked for in item #53, “Overall, I think Shared Decision Making is working well.” Based on the responses and the mean score for this item (‘3.3’), I am unable to draw a definitive conclusion to my question other than to recommend further discussions of questions raised through the study.

Comments to item # 54, asking how teachers would improve shared decision making at the school, included:

- Ensure that everyone’s opinion is allowed to be expressed as viable and valuable even though it may be different from my own,

and offer affirmation when appropriate. The staff should try to reach consensus rather than majority whenever time permits.

- Information should be shared with teachers to enable them to make informed decisions. Teachers are often quiet during discussions because they don't have the necessary information.
- Teachers should be comfortable in stating opposing opinions.

Teachers should demonstrate more involvement in matters relating to the school and the decision making process. The more enthusiastic teachers become about their work and involvement, the more effective the efforts. School and staff morale is actually improving by my observation. Teachers have begun working together cooperatively more often.

- Teachers should be encouraged to take risks by taking a position on contentious issues. Some teachers feel threatened on these occasions and prefer to sit on the fence.
- Teachers contribution to the standards set for discipline in the school lacks consistency.
- The diversity of personalities on staff hinders the shared decision making process and prevents the staff from arriving at decisions by consensus.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUDING ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

#### **A Need to Refocus the Interpretation of the Data**

As I examined the data contained in the survey and interviews, I came to the realization that I was unable to attend to the analysis and interpretation of this information, with the justice and integrity it deserves, in this first assessment of our staff's implementation of collaborative decision making. Much of the data requires further investigation, clarification, and continued study and discussion at the staff level to be of any value. I do not have the time or the opportunity to engage the staff in the continuation of this study at this time. In answering the question, "Do you think collaborative decision making is working in our school?", I will limit my interpretation of the data to two of the specific areas defined by the T.I.P.S. 2 questionnaire: (i) Facilitating Procedures and Structures and (ii) Overall Impressions. I chose these two areas because they best represent the staff's opinions in regards to the manner in which we have attempted to implement collaborative decision making in our school. I will use the remaining data to assist me in the analysis and interpretation of the responses contained in these two areas.

### **An Interpretation of the Past**

The collaborative decision making process has been described as a means to an end. It is based on the belief that, as a school community, we are responsible for what happens at our school-site; we know best what is needed at our school-site; and together we can make a difference. It was my belief in this concept which prompted me to introduce the process of collaborative or shared decision making to the staff four years ago and encouraged me to continue practicing the principles involved during periods of frustration and apathy.

Before I began my interviews and before teachers completed the T.I.P.S. 2 questionnaire, I often reflected on our attempts at collaborative decision making, and questioned the progress we had made. There were many occasions when I thought the staff demonstrated sincere involvement and participation in addressing school issues. Many of these problem solving situations resulted in decisions that were consentaneous. There were as many occasions, that as a staff, teachers showed little involvement or participation in our attempts at arriving at a decision. These occasions often resulted in decisions which were unproductive and inappropriate. Our attempts at collaborative decision making were inconsistent.

### **An Interpretation of the Present**

Two of the interviewees expressed the thought that we were “getting there.” The questionnaire data supports this notion since five of twelve teachers agreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that shared decision making is working well in our school. The data also reveals that there are as many teachers with a neutral or opposite view of our success. This data confirmed my earlier suspicions that there was a diversity of opinions and views to the question.

I do believe that all teachers recognize our attempts at collaborative decision making and the value of the process. Teachers were strong in their agreement that involvement in shared decision making was important but not all were ready to participate or be involved extensively. Some of the teachers do not like making decisions but prefer to be consulted and informed. They do not wish to participate in all decisions; they express a trust that the school administrators would arrive at decisions which were appropriate for the school community. These same teachers do want to be consulted and involved in decisions which directly affect the classroom.

I found it interesting that several teachers were unsure or disagreed “that teachers are accountable for decisions made through a shared process.” The interviews shed a possible explanation for this expression of opinion. There are staff members who are very protective of their right to exercise individual choices and decisions affecting their classrooms. These staff members are unwilling to compromise or negotiate these decisions even

though their decisions have an impact on other teachers and classrooms. These individuals do not consistently recognize that for a staff to function effectively, each member must give up a certain degree of independence, cooperate, share and work to find compromising solutions for the good of the team rather than serve individual goals. This observation offers an explanation to why our staff has difficulties in arriving at decisions through consensus. Mitchell (1990) tells us consensus is based on cooperation of individuals in the group. Alexander (1987) adds that the acceptance and accommodation of these various opinions is critical to the probability of reaching a decision based on consensus. To better ensure a positive outcome, Alexander asks that participants avoid behavior and arguments that suit their own needs and personal agendas.

Teachers tend to favor arriving at decisions on the basis of majority rule. The responses to items #43, #44 and #45 support this interpretation. Both the interviews and the T.I.P.S. 2 data support the notion that teachers preferred to vote when making a decision or choice. There is a general opinion that the staff does arrive at decisions before everyone is in agreement and that decisions are made even though some staff members have not accepted the proposal to some extent. In response to this observation, Mitchell (1990) and O'Haire (1995) would say our staff lacks several of the necessary skills, the first of which is team building. Mitchell defines team building as the heart of site-based decision making and a necessary prerequisite. The staff has begun to recognize and accept our

need to continue our team building efforts, and the Staff Steering Committee has recently proposed a formal inservice on this topic.

Closely connected to the concept of team building is the importance of establishing common group goals and vision building. Examination of "Management Area I: Goals/Vision/Mission," resulted in responses that were "middle of the road." There was a view that teachers "frequently" participated in the goal setting process for the school but only "sometimes" did they help to establish school priorities, contribute to the development of a plan to meet these goals, and as a group, accept the school's goals. It would appear that although I have provided the staff an opportunity to "participate" in the goal setting process, not all staff view this opportunity as meaningful nor have they taken ownership for the decisions. The interviews suggested that staff were willing to become more involved in developing solutions and action plans to meet the goals set by staff. This school year school goals have been assigned to various committees which staff voluntarily selected to serve on and for which they have accepted responsibility. Proposed solutions and action plans are brought to staff periodically as information, opportunities for comments and suggestions, and decision making. I see this as a positive step and one which attends to some of the above concerns.

Teachers "sometimes" had a shared vision for this school and "sometimes" this vision was supported by the staff and administrators. This expression of opinion leads me to conclude there is a need for the school staff, including parents, to reexamine the purpose and objectives for our

school. Alberta Education's and our School Board's new policies, require each school community to develop a mission or vision statement for inclusion in each school's yearly plan beginning in 1996. The Staff Steering Committee is developing a proposal regarding a Professional Development Day on Mission/Vision Building this school year. The proposed process will provide our school community with the opportunity to arrive at a vision which is common to all and supported by all. I recognize that if the exercise in vision building is to be successful, there are several conditions and factors which must be in place, such as Mitchell's (1990) concept of teamwork and Alexander's (1987) guidelines for consensus decision making. I remain confident that the vision building process, if accepted by staff, will assist the school community in overcoming the diversity of opinions and provide us with a basis for common ground and understanding.

Both the survey and interview data reflect the staff's desire to have access to information they need to make school-wide decisions. There is a lack of information in some instances, or the information is not presented early enough in the process to be effective in assisting the staff to make informed decisions. Teachers interviewed suggested that the responsibility for acquiring and sharing the needed information must be shared by teachers, support staff, parents and administrators.

The creation of time for collaborative decision making has been identified by Raywid (1993) and Leithwood (1992) as a necessary ingredient to school reform and improvement. It was difficult to arrive at an

interpretation based on teachers' responses to item #41. Efforts have been made to provide sufficient time for teachers to share in decision making activities. Some of these attempts were outlined in Chapter Three and Four. Examples of other approaches as outlined by Raywid (1993) in his survey of schools across the USA are summarized in Chapter Two. The staff will continue to investigate and explore other alternatives in our attempt at finding new opportunities for collaborative decision making.

Some teachers seemed unaware of the Staff Steering Committee and the responsibility this committee shares in making school-wide decisions. This committee has often brought back to staff decisions for their information or recommendations for consideration. I thought the committee provided the staff with adequate representation in the planning, researching and decision making process. I do believe it will continue to have a major role in our school-wide decision making process but requires further input from staff and possible changes. One of the major changes needed would be the inclusion of representation from the support staff and parent community.

Is it possible to obtain waivers from the teachers' contract for school-based decisions? At this time, I would agree with the five teachers who responded to this item with a definite "no." Even with the implementation of site-based management in our school region this year, I fail to recognize how a school staff could legally contravene the binding status of the teachers' collective agreement without the specific clause in question being amended. A more appropriate item for consideration might have questioned the

possibility of obtaining waivers from board policy for school-based decision making. This is an area which is presently being debated by the staff as they examine and comment on proposed School Board Policy.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **FOR CONSIDERATION**

##### **Conclusions**

The adoption and implementation of a collaborative decision making model in a school is no easy task. Identifying the principles, concepts and characteristics of the process and then attempting to apply them in the real life situations of a school culture and environment does not occur overnight. David(1989) suggests that the implementation of the process involves many factors and requires five to ten years. I have been too optimistic in my expectations that the staff would willingly and enthusiastically embrace the opportunity for participation and involvement in the challenges of decision making. Evans (1993) reminds us that when teachers have little history on meaningful involvement in decision making, and when they struggle with the process, their engagement and participation will be more reserved than leaders anticipate, particularly if the process is complex and requires a number of skills and practices.

I believe in the principles of collaborative decision making and teacher empowerment which Smith (1987), Glickman (1991), Bauer (1992), Leithwood (1992), Evans (1993) and Roy (1995) speak of in their writings. As I enthusiastically attempted to involve the staff in our school project, I neglected to share with them the many articles and texts that influenced my

behaviors and aspirations. The majority of the staff, as a result, have not been exposed to the same influences nor do they have a common understanding of the principles and criteria involved. As an example, Shantz's (1993) vision of the collaborative school emphasizes a school culture in which:

- The staff is engaged in vision building.
- There is an ongoing opportunity for teacher inservice and development.
- There is a safe and supportive environment which encourages involvement, participation and risk taking.

Although these elements are listed as some of the objectives for our school project, they have not been discussed or debated in depth and therefore are not objectives for which the staff accepts ownership.

### **Recommendations for Future Consideration**

What recommendations should be made for the staff and myself to consider in making our collaborative decision making process more effective than it is presently? From the analysis and interpretations of Chapter Five, eight main themes can be identified:

- Participation: Teachers do not wish to participate in all decisions.
- Consensus: The staff has difficulty arriving at decisions consentaneously, therefore many teachers prefer to vote.

- **Team Building:** The concept of team building and teamwork is in question.
- **Information:** Access to information is vital to decision making
- **Goal Setting:** Goal setting procedures and practices need to be assessed.
- **Vision:** The school community does not have a common or shared vision.
- **Time:** Finding time for collaboration is difficult.
- **Steering Committee:** Not all teachers recognize or accept the role the Staff Steering Committee plays in the decision making process of the school.

### **Participation**

If teachers do not wish to participate in all decisions, how do we distinguish between the decisions they wish to be involved in and those they do not? This question needs to have the input of all staff with the purpose of establishing who is responsible for which decision. What types of decisions should be made by parents, by teachers, by support staff, administrators and what decisions made through a collaborative process involving the various stakeholders? The development of procedures which encourage effective methods for group involvement and the definition of who, how, when and for what types of decisions each group is responsible, should become a school objective.

## Consensus

Consensus building has been described by Mitchell (1990) as critical to the success of school-based decision making. Alexander (1987) defines the ability of a group to make decisions based on consensus as a sign of its maturity and effectiveness. If we accept these two statements as absolute truths, what conclusions do we make about a staff that has difficulty at consensus decision making and prefers to arrive at decisions by voting? I remain optimistic that the staff will accept the premise that a solution can be found using consensus decision making and that collaboration and cooperation are important in reaching that decision. The process of consensus decision making can produce results that are superior to other kinds of decision making. To assist the staff in the process of collaborative decision making (CDM), we should:

- Provide staff development opportunities to explore and practice CDM.
- Provide opportunities to visit work sites where CDM is occurring.
- Build a resource library of books, articles, videos, etc. that describe models and concrete examples of CDM.
- Be realistic about the impact CDM will have in the short run.
- Document and report the impact of CDM activities to ensure that participants know they made a difference.

We must be clear and open about where collaborative decision making will be encouraged and where collaboration is not possible or appropriate. There

are many occasions where voting as a means of making a decision is the better alternative. The challenge is in ensuring that the “win-lose” or “lose-lose” outcomes are not detrimental to the relationships of the participants.

### **Team Building**

The staff recognizes the importance of team building and teamwork. Four years ago we invited two facilitators to present a one day workshop on team building. Much of our team building efforts of late have been focused around social events and activities. The staff has succeeded in enhancing the bonding and acceptance of each member of our school staff. They are empathetic, supportive and affirming of each other in times of sorrow and joy, success or failure. We have not yet succeeded in developing and practicing the personal skills needed to work together in a collaborative environment. We do not have in place all of the essential factors of teamwork outlined by O'Haire (1995) and summarized in Chapter Two. There is a recognition and acceptance of our need to continue our team building efforts in a more formal manner and the Staff Steering Committee should continue their pursuit to have a workshop on this topic.

### **Goal Setting**

If school goals are to be met effectively and successfully, the school staff must have a major role in establishing the goals, contributing to the development of a plan to meet these goals and collectively accepting and supporting the goals. A process which ensures these three steps, enables the staff to take ownership and responsibility for the success of attaining the

goals. Our staff must assess the manner in which present school practices prevent staff members from being participants and valid contributors in the process of setting school goals.

### **Vision**

Our school Mission Statement was developed four years ago and the experience was like "pulling teeth." The end product was a statement containing many motherhood principles not necessarily agreed to or accepted by the staff. It was not then, nor is it now, a vision supported and owned by all staff members. The 1996 - '97 School Plan requires that each school submit a mission statement as part of a larger plan and the steering committee is planning a professional development day with this task in mind. I welcome the opportunity presented to staff to attempt to develop a new mission or vision statement. My only hesitation is that teachers will perceive this request as yet another set of top-down demands imposed on them and therefore produce a statement which they do not value. In our preparations for the workshop we must accept that not all staff members will want to be involved in the development of the vision even though each member may have ideas and want input into the vision building process. How do we allow for the involvement and participation of all members of our school community in the development of a statement, which will shape the behavior and action of the group, and be accepted and supported by the entire school community? The engagement of a skillful facilitator in the planning stages, and for the workshop itself, must be considered.

**Information**

Access to information is vital for effective and successful collaborative decisions. The school community must be given information about budgets, curriculum, instruction, student achievement, professional development and group process. This list could be endless by including the titles of topics which come to staff for consideration and decision. The responsibility for acquiring and sharing the needed information must be shared by all members of the school community. We have often talked about creating a staff professional library. Now would be an appropriate time to establish a committee to take on this responsibility.

**Time**

“Time” is a key issue and an essential ingredient in the process of collaborative decision making. The present policies of Alberta Education and our School Board have placed new demands on school communities and finding sufficient time to enable teachers, parents, and administrators to involve themselves in the necessary collaborative dialogue will be a challenge. Staffs and parents must experiment with creative ways to make or find time for shared reflection. We must continue to investigate and explore alternatives which have shown promise or success in other school districts. The staff should consider the search for the time needed to examine, reflect on, amend, and redesign programs, skills and practices, as a priority. This search for time should become priority among the school goals set for 1996 - '97.

### **Staff Steering Committee**

It has been four years since the formation of the Staff Steering Committee and during this period of time we have not assessed the effectiveness of the committee or reviewed its purpose, structure or operating procedures. This task should be undertaken in the near future. Presently only teachers are represented on this committee which assists in making school-wide decisions. Representation should be expanded to include members from the support staff and the parents.

### **Closing Remarks**

These recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive or critical of the existing structure and procedures practiced by the school staff. Nor can the recommendations be adopted for implementation immediately. They are offered as suggestions to be considered by the staff to enable teachers, support staff, parents, students and administrators to build and improve on the many excellent procedures already in place.

Collaborative decision making does work, and when practiced effectively, it enables us to make a difference.

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## REFERENCES

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

# THE CHILDREN OF ST. MARTHA SCHOOL

206 McMaster Blvd.

Lethbridge, Alberta

T1K 4R3

Telephone: 381-8110 Fax: 381-0088

Mr. Kenneth Tratch,  
Principal

Mrs. Elaine Bolokoski,  
Associate Principal

May 31, 1995

Dear Staff,

Please find attached to this note a description of a study I would like to conduct regarding the decision making process at our school. The proposal outlines the history of our school project *Creating A Vision*, begun four years ago and defines what I hope to accomplish through the study titled *Creating A Vision: Revisited*.

As stated in the proposal, "Now would be an appropriate time to examine the course of action taken by the staff of The Children of St. Martha School these past four years to determine if we're moving in a direction acceptable to the current staff. ..." In light of the legislated directives from the Provincial Government and the Department of Education on Site Based Decision Making as well as our own School Boards move in this direction, an examination of our staff's perception and needs would be in order.

I ask the staff's assistance in gathering information about their involvement in the decision making process at our school. The assistance I require is two-fold:

- Completion of the attached T.I.P.S. 2 Instrument
- Participation by 8 to 10 staff members (on a volunteer basis) in an interview focusing on further clarification and interpretation of responses to the T.I.P.S. 2 instrument

Although the instrument uses the term 'teachers', I would like all staff to substitute the term 'staff' in this place as you read through it. Staff members are not required to sign their completed instrument unless they

wish to however they are asked to please identify the questionnaire as one coming from 'teaching staff' or 'support' staff so that I might analyze the perceptions of involvement and participation in the decision making process of each group individually and collectively to determine possible future alternatives and directions.

Some of the statements in the T.I.P.S. 2 Instrument may be difficult to answer because the areas and topics examined by the instrument have not been dealt with in detail within our school or district. Please answer these to the best of you ability.

If you require any further clarification or explanation please do not hesitate to ask me. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

**PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED INSTRUMENT**

**TO SHANNON OR KEN**

**OR PLACE IT IN KEN'S MAIL BOX BY**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 16TH, 1995**

Yours in Christ,

In the spring of 1991, prompted by a School Review scheduled for the spring of 1992 and the staff's perceived futility of school evaluations in the traditional format, the staff and administration of the school set out to develop a process for our school evaluation that would make it meaningful to the staff and result in constructive and purposeful information. Our adopted school project titled *Creating A Vision* had two objectives: first, to improve upon the traditional review format that we witnessed happening in other schools within our district and one promoted by Alberta Education, making the process more useful and meaningful to the school community, and second, to develop a practical model and some specific strategies for managing the planning, goal setting and action process for our school. The school staff set out to take ownership of the school review rather than have an outside group impose their evaluative agenda upon us.

We are concluding the fourth year of our project and there are many indicators that positive and meaningful changes have been initiated in several areas and flourishing in many others. A Steering Committee of six staff members meet every two or three weeks, gathering data, discussing, studying, planning and preparing proposals and presentations to staff. On the basis of the work of this committee the staff identifies three or four areas of focus for each year. For each area of study, goals and actions are discussed and proposed for staff deliberation and acceptance. Professional development days and inservice days are planned and scheduled based on

the specific needs of the school staff. We have taken a giant step towards what is commonly referred to as Collaborative Decision-Making.

The staff has been involved in developing a school timetable that would allow for common planning time between teachers and for staff team meetings enabling staff to meet for curriculum planning during the school day. They are instrumental in decisions affecting the school budget, the selection of classroom textbooks and the selection of classroom and library resources. Some staff members are beginning to visit other classrooms, observing and planning together. Individual teachers are attempting activities and projects they have avoided in the past. The conversations shared in the staffroom during recess periods are now often on topics of curriculum and instruction. Teachers share ideas more openly, reflecting on events taking place in their classrooms. Conversations between staff are less confrontational, with fewer judgments made on opinions expressed. Staff members individually or in small groups are initiating investigations or actions on curricular topics. There are more activities in the school involving students, staff, parents and visitors from outside our immediate community.

As principal of the school I am encouraged and delighted with the directions the school staff is taking. Now would be an appropriate time to examine the course of action taken these past four years to determine if we're moving in a direction acceptable to the current staff, the course set for

us by our new School District and one directed by the Department of Education. The purpose of the study would attend to this examination.

The study proposes to examine and review the school project begun four years ago, answering questions such as:

1. Have we adhered to the original objectives and goals of the project? If not, what have we overlooked, avoided or ignored? What has changed since 1991 that requires us to change our present focus? What additions, deletions and/or changes need to be made to the practices and procedures adopted to date to better facilitate the aims and objectives of the school project?
2. How valid are these goals and objectives in light of current changes and directions set out by our local school governing body and that of the province? A review of some of the literature on Collaborative Leadership and Site-Based Decision-Making would assist in answering these questions and in determining future directions.
3. How does the staff feel about the journey we've taken? ... about their participation? ... their contribution? ... their ownership? How active and involved are the staff in the decision-making process of our school? Do they have a real input into: Goal Setting, Curriculum and Instruction Development, In-Service Staff Development, Use of

Facilities, Budgeting, Assignment of Personnel, and the Facilitating of the Shared Decision-Making Process at the school-site?

The study will be conducted with a focus on three areas.

1. I will examine what we've attempted these past four years, identifying some of the more significant goals and objectives we've set, assessing how we accomplished these and examining the process used. The information and data gathered for this part of the study will come from:

- my own personal reflections and recollections and those of staff members who would help me
- study of the notes and minutes from staff meetings and Steering Committee meetings.

2. I will gather and analyze data collected through the use of the T.I.P.S. 2 Instrument (distributed to all staff) to determine to what extent the staff feels they have been involved in the decision-making process at the school. (A sample copy of this instrument is included.) Recognizing that it may be difficult to receive open and honest answers to many of the questions I might ask, I will follow up on some of the survey responses with a few personal interviews in order to clarify, enhance and better understand the data received.

3. I will review the process used for decision making in other models of school-based decision-making to determine what alternatives exist that might be adapted to our model to make the process better.

The end product of this study will give me, as principal of the school, a realistic perspective of the school project, where we've been and how the staff perceives our attempt at collaborative decision making. The study will determine what changes should take place in the process we presently use for goal setting and decision making at the school site. It will help define a future plan of action, integrating the school model, the district model and the model of decision making encouraged by the provincial government. The project allows the current stakeholders an opportunity for effective input into the assessment of what we've been attempting these past four years and through their involvement to improve on the current model.

The information and data gathered lends itself to a descriptive write-up as opposed to numerical indices and quantitative analysis. I therefore intend to conduct and record this study as a qualitative inquiry.

The Collaborative Decision Making Inservice I am presently participating in should provide me with valuable information and assist me in making better judgments about the future directions for our school project. Involving the School Steering Committee in the planning and action stages of

this examination will act as a check on the validity and reliability of my findings, analysis and judgments.

1

**APPENDIX B**

John J. Russell  
 Bruce S. Cooper  
 Ruth B. Greenblat  
 March, 1992

# T.I.P.S. 2

## TEACHER INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION SCALE Version 2

This instrument is designed to measure the involvement of teachers in decision making. Please read each statement carefully. Circle the number that indicates the degree to which you believe teachers in your school participated in each decision during the past school year. A 5 represents "Almost Always," a 4 represents "Frequently," a 3 represents "Sometimes," a 2 represents "Seldom," and a 1 represents "Almost Never."

I. Goals/Vision/Mission	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Almost Always</i>
1. Teachers have developed the same shared vision for this school. -----1	2	3	4	5	
2. Teachers participate in the goal setting process for the school. -----1	2	3	4	5	
3. Teachers help to establish school priorities.-----1	2	3	4	5	
4. Teachers as a group accept the school's goals. -----1	2	3	4	5	
5. Teachers are able to get other teachers to support their vision of the school.-----1	2	3	4	5	
6. Teachers are able to get administrators to support their vision of the school.-----1	2	3	4	5	
7. The school's goals are consistent with my vision of this school. -----1	2	3	4	5	
8. Teachers contribute to the development of a plan to meet the school's goals. -----1	2	3	4	5	
9. Teachers play an active role in evaluating school goals. -----1	2	3	4	5	
<b>II. Standards</b>					
10. Teachers working together set their own work standards. -----1	2	3	4	5	
11. Teachers contribute to the standards set for discipline in the school. 1	2	3	4	5	
12. Teachers set standards for their students' work. -----1	2	3	4	5	
13. Teachers help to set standards for student promotion and/or retention. -----1	2	3	4	5	
14. The school staff assumes responsibility for student performance. ----1	2	3	4	5	

		Almost Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always
<b>III. Curriculum/Instruction</b>						
15.	Teachers have authority to make adjustments in the school's curriculum. -----	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Teachers help to determine the pace of instruction for students. -----	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Teachers initiate changes in the curriculum. -----	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Teachers participate in making school-wide curriculum decisions. --	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Teachers participate in the selection of textbooks. -----	1	2	3	4	5
20.	District-wide committees of teachers coordinate curricula. -----	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Teachers participate in curricula development. -----	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Teachers determine grouping for the purpose of instruction. -----	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Teachers determine the instructional activities they use in their classroom. -----	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Teachers monitor the effectiveness of curricula. -----	1	2	3	4	5
<b>IV. Budget</b>						
25.	Teachers contribute to the development of the school budget. -----	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Teachers are able to decide how they will spend their allotted funds. 1	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Teachers manage their own budgets. -----	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Teachers have budgetary support to achieve the educational objectives of the school. -----	1	2	3	4	5
29.	When the school budget has to be cut, teachers help to establish priorities. -----	1	2	3	4	5
30.	Teachers receive a lump sum portion of the school budget to spend in their classroom as they see fit. -----	1	2	3	4	5
<b>V. Staffing</b>						
31.	Teachers have a voice in the recruiting and selecting of teachers. ----	1	2	3	4	5
32.	Teachers help to decide teaching assignments of staff members. -----	1	2	3	4	5
33.	Teachers take part in staffing decisions including such trade-offs as using instructional aids, or hiring vice-principals, counselors, and other special area staff. -----	1	2	3	4	5
34.	Teachers have a voice in the recruiting and selecting of administrators. -----	1	2	3	4	5

**VI. Operations**

	1	2	3	4	5
35. Teachers have a voice in the development of the schedule for the school. -----	1	2	3	4	5
36. Teachers play a part in determining how the school building is utilized. -----	1	2	3	4	5
37. Teachers are involved in the development of plans to improve building facilities. -----	1	2	3	4	5
38. Teachers play a role in establishing building maintenance priorities. -----	1	2	3	4	5

Almost Never  
Seldom  
Sometimes  
Frequently  
Almost Always

**VII. Facilitating Procedures and Structures**

39. Teachers have access to the information they need to make school-wide decisions. -----	1	2	3	4	5
40. Teachers are represented on a council or group that makes school-wide decisions. -----	1	2	3	4	5
41. Sufficient time is provided for teachers to share in decision making activities. -----	1	2	3	4	5
42. It is possible to obtain waivers from the teachers' contract for school based decisions. -----	1	2	3	4	5
43. Teachers working together arrive at decisions on the basis of majority rule. -----	1	2	3	4	5
44. We would not make a decision until almost everyone is in agreement. -----	1	2	3	4	5
45. Decisions are not made until everyone can accept the proposal to some extent. -----	1	2	3	4	5

**VIII. Staff Development**

46. Teachers have access to current research on effective programs and practices. -----	1	2	3	4	5
47. Teachers help to determine the staff development they will receive -----	1	2	3	4	5
48. Teachers have opportunities to share their expert knowledge. -----	1	2	3	4	5
49. Teachers participate in staff development activities. -----	1	2	3	4	5
50. Teachers have access to special training when necessary. -----	1	2	3	4	5

**IX. Overall Impressions**

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following:

- |  | Disagree Strongly | Disagree Somewhat | Neutral | Agree Somewhat | Agree Strongly |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| 51. I think that teachers are accountable for decisions made through a shared process. ----- | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| 52. I think teachers' involvement in Shared Decision Making is important:                    |                   |                   |         |                |                |
| for increased professionalism -----  | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| for school improvement -----   | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| for better school morale -----   | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| for increased job satisfaction -----   | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| 53. Overall, I think Shared Decision Making in my school is working well. -----              | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| 54. I would improve Shared Decision Making at my school by: _____                            |                   |                   |         |                |                |
| _____  |                   |                   |         |                |                |
| _____  |                   |                   |         |                |                |

**X. Demographics**

Please provide the following information about yourself by checking one response in each section.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 55. Gender 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Female 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Male | 60. To what extent do you participate in decision making at your school? |
| 56. Age  | 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Very little                                  |
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> 20-29 years old                                    | 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat                                     |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 years old                                    | 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Very much                                    |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 years old                                    | 61. My current school role is:   |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 years old                                    | 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher                                      |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> 60 years or older                                  | 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance Counselor                           |
| 57. Years teaching (include this year as a full year)                          | 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Administrator (building)                     |
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> 1- 5 years   | 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Administrator (central)                      |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years   | 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Support Staff                                |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years  | 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                 |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 years  | 62. Level of School:   |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 years                                 | 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary                                   |
| 58. Years in this school   | 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Mid-level                                    |
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year                                 | 3. <input type="checkbox"/> High School                                  |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> 1- 5 years   | 63. School (name or code _____)  |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years   |  |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years  |  |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 years  |  |
| 6. <input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 years                                 |  |
| 59. To what extent do teachers participate in decision making at your school?  |  |
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Very little  |  |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat   |  |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Very much  |  |

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**APPENDIX C**

# THE CHILDREN OF ST. MARTHA SCHOOL

206 McMaster Blvd.

Lethbridge, Alberta

T1K 4R3

Telephone: 381-8110 Fax: 381-0088

Mr. Kenneth Tratch,  
Principal

Mrs. Elaine Bolokoski,  
Associate Principal

June 22, 1995

To: All Staff  
Re: Teacher (Staff) Involvement and Participation Scale Instrument  
Part II: Follow-up Interview

---

1. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with the completion of the T.I.P.S. II questionnaire. I recognize the difficulty the staff may have had sharing an opinion on some of the statements contained in the questionnaire and appreciate your efforts in completing the survey.

2. If your questionnaire is not yet completed or returned, please try to return it by the end of the year even if not all the statements are answered.

3. I would now like to begin the follow-up to the survey responses with a few personal interviews in order to clarify and better understand the staffs perception of our present circumstance and gather suggestions for improvements to our efforts at a collaborative school based decision making process.

4. Time constraints prevent me from attempting to speak to everyone on staff. I have not yet determined how to make this selection without offending anyone. If you wish to volunteer to be interviewed please speak to me or drop me a note.

5. The questions asked are sometimes more important than the answers. Research and writing on School Based Decision Making suggests the following questions as guidelines in planning, implementing and evaluating school based decision making.

- What do we mean by school based decision making? Definition?
- What roles need to be redefined and how will we provide the necessary training and support?

- What new/different knowledge, skills, attitudes will be necessary for any partner in S.B.D.M.? (students, teachers, parents, school council members, superintendent)
- What are the expectations or limitations of S.B.D.M.?
- What underlying conditions must be present for S.B.D.M. to work? How can we clarify and communicate these conditions?
- What do we expect to achieve as a result of S.B.D.M.?
- What mechanisms need to be in place for implementation? What mechanisms are already in place?
- Where and how do we find the time that is often necessary to involve ourselves in a collaborative decision making process?
- How do we know when we've reached a "collaborative" decision or one that meets the "consensus" of the staff?

These are difficult questions to answer and I do not expect every staff member interviewed to be interested or willing to share a opinion on them. If you are please let me know.

6. I would like to hear staff opinions on the following questions:

- How does the staff feel about the journey we've taken to date? ... about their participation, contribution and ownership in decisions made pertaining to the functioning of our school? How active and involved are staff in the decision making process at our school?
- What decisions, if any, should be made by staff alone? ... by administrators alone? ... through a combined collaborative process? How do we arrive at an appropriate categorization of decisions to be made?

Have we adhered to the original objectives and goals of the school project begun four years ago? (See School Review: Mar. '91 - Sept. '92 P.

1) What has changed since 1991 that requires us to change our present focus? What additions, deletions an/or changes need to be made to the

practices and procedures adopted to date to better facilitate the aims and objectives of the school project?

Thank you for your time and consideration