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SCHOOL COUNCIL IMPLEMENTATION:
WOMEN PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES WITH
A POLICY FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of
the degree of Master of Education

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13 November 1998

Canada

DEDICATION

Through the genesis of this commonplace location, many souls have collaborated in the creation of new knowledge and understanding.

To my husband, Robert Stead (1975), and our children, Andrew Stead (1979) and Julia Stead (1982), for unstinting moral support, for frequently discharging or forgiving my household responsibilities, and for capably assisting with teaching duties that were constantly distracting me from the writing process.

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ABSTRACT

The 1995 Ontario initiative that requires representatives of all school stakeholder groups to participate in the new forum of community governance known as school councils is based on the premise that decentralized school administration is an improvement over traditional principal-based management. This study addresses the experiences of seven elementary and secondary women principals immersed in the implementation of school councils. Grounded in a theoretical review of leadership, principalship, leadership by women principals, and site based management, this study examines how these school leaders exercise authority, communicate with school stakeholders, adapt to an evolving practice of decision making within the context of shared, school council directed administration, and to what extent the presence of school councils is improving school leadership.

Not all early experiences are perceived as productive or even useful, and in many cases forced collaboration among historically antagonistic groups is counterproductive and demoralizing. Among the positive experiences reported by women principals are the collaborative spirit uniting stakeholders working toward a common goal, the opportunity for principals to "finally" share the heavy burden of school administration, and the creation of a leadership pool within which teachers, parents, students and administrators can review complementary perspectives and direct their various expertise toward the creation of a better learning environment.

Principals report difficulties in setting council priorities, in the failure of orientation and training programs, in teachers' and principals' resentment over increasing exposure to "well intentioned" parents, and in being required

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to share school governance with uninformed, inexperienced, and unskilled colleagues. Although initial hardships appear to outweigh short run gains, metamorphosis of the principalship into a collaborative, facilitative nexus of power suggests that temporary disruptions to school routine and student learning will ultimately be superseded by highly successful councils capable of meeting the idiosyncratic needs of their student populations.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Problem

<u>Introduction</u>

In April 1995, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (OMET) announced that site based management was to be incorporated into the governing structure of every school no later than September 1996 (Cooke, 1995). Traditional Home and School affiliates were to be superseded by school councils under the direct supervision of boards of education. In September 1995, OMET (Carrier-Fraser, 1995a) further advised directors of education that:

> Meaningful parental and community involvement in education is increasingly important and school councils will serve to reinforce the links between the schools and the community (p. 1).

Although welcomed by a small minority of teachers and principals, school councils were generally greeted with a high level of anxiety among all stakeholder groups. In this study, school councils' initial contribution to the improvement of school leadership is examined through the lived experiences of seven women principals serving in elementary and secondary schools. Of unanimous concern was the absence of adequate support for the development of school councils. Publication of OMET's <u>School Council Handbook</u> (1996), lagged sufficiently behind implementation deadlines that school boards, and ultimately principals, were obliged to formulate their own operating guidelines, resulting in an uneven and sub optimal experience.

The school board in this study (the Board) responded by setting up a review team of superintendents who in turn formed a steering committee consisting of principals, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and non-parental rate payers. Following current board channels for school administration, this committee established four zone based school improvement councils (SICs), each headed by a superintendent (Carrier-

Fraser, 1995b, p. 28). At the school level, each SIC provided information and procedural guidance to principals. At the system level, they collaborated to define school council structure and develop policy and training parameters that would maximize the success of learners at all grade levels.

At the bottom of this multi-tiered structure, and receiving little by way of Ministry or Board support, principals worked closely with one another to facilitate the emergence of representative school councils. During their early months of operation, Board directives continued to be incomplete, focusing randomly on councilor selection, terms of membership, and training.

Although theoretically administered within a framework that would guarantee consistency, no two school councils would take shape in the same way. Just as each school has its own distinctive culture and community, so would each school council represent a unique group of individuals and priorities for school development. The challenge facing principals was to involve all school stakeholders in the structuring and development of school councils, to facilitate broad-based stakeholder participation during the recruitment stage, and to support a healthy spirit of collaboration among all council members. This success of this objective was largely determined by (1) the principal's attitude toward school council policy, and (2) the established patterns of communication and commitment within each school community.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to explore, through women principals' experiences in the implementation of school councils, to what extent school councils contribute to the improvement of school leadership. This question is examined from the perspective of seven women principals serving in elementary and secondary schools.

Rationale

The relationship between school and community was closely examined as women principals discussed their lived experiences in the implementation of school councils and the transition from external to site based management. Women now represent over 34% of Ontario's principals (FWTAO, 1995) yet most leadership studies do not include women as an identified group. The need for more information about women's understanding of the principalship has been documented (Blackmore, 1989; Shakeshaft, 1989b; Glazer, 1991; Webber, 1994; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Rees, 1995; Marshall, 1995; Robertson, Wohlstetter, & Mohrman, 1995).

The Ontario restructuring report cited community education as one of four powerful engines of change driving Ontario's educational process toward the 21st century. It stated that, "each school principal devise an action plan for the establishment and implementation of the school-community council" (Bégin & Caplan, 1994, p. 44). Never before had Ontario's school administrators experienced such urgency in the wake of new legislation (Bégin & Caplan, 1995). The primacy of school councils stemmed from the belief that they would enable our schools to function more safely and more responsively by augmenting existing human resources and informing the public about our collective duty to raise all children in a nurturing community.

This study is valuable for two reasons. It augments Fennell's (1988, 1991, 1992, & 1995) studies of women principals/leaders, and addresses the ascendancy of decentralized site based councils as the dominant administrative instrument in Ontario public schools. It is highly important that we develop an understanding of their structure and relationship within the power networks surrounding elementary and secondary schools. From the standpoint of improving school leadership, this study examines ways in which women

principals interpreted and influenced changes in their own roles, the organizational structures of their schools, and the inclusion of community members in planning and decision-making.

As a research focus, this work also complements system level investigation in Ontario (Allison & Morfitt), Newfoundland (Collins), and Nova Scotia (MacMillan). It is important because of its unique examination of the school council issue from the perspective of experienced women principals. It approaches the problem without circumscribing issues of a theoretical or political nature and freely incorporates *a wide range of positive and negative experiences* that have not been predetermined but spontaneously encountered in response to school council development. From this rich harvest of individual experience deeper insight is made possible.

My preparedness for this research stems from professional teaching experience in the elementary and secondary panels, and from voluntary participation as the founding chair of a secondary school council. The decision to investigate the lived experiences of women principals was professionally accessible and highly appealing given my personal interest in becoming a school principal, my growing fear that school councils would initially if not perpetually weaken the quality of school administration, and my lifelong interest in effective leadership.

Methodology

In keeping with van Manen's (1994) description of lived experience as the way in which a person "understands the world as real and meaningful" (p. 183), the researcher employs phenomenology to discover how elements of key life experiences are described according to first-hand personal impressions. As the methodology of choice in this research, phenomenology is ideally suited to the in-depth exploration of individual experience, recollection and

reflection. It is predicated on the preservation of human freedom, and the belief that learning is possible through the study of individual experience (van Manen, 1994, p. 66). Subject to the ethics guidelines of Lakehead University and the Board of Education, data collection took place during a series of recorded conversations with seven women principals of elementary or secondary schools. In recalling personal experiences during the implementation process, respondents, identified only by pseudonyms throughout this study, offered contextual descriptions and discussed key themes and issues. Audio data were supplemented by written researcher observations and reflections both during and following each interview. Pseudonyms are used throughout to identify respondents.

Data analysis began early, occurring during the collection period when respondent and interviewer engaged in reflective dialogue, revisited recent discourse for more in depth discussion, and spontaneously collaborated in thematic analysis. Post collection analysis identified common areas of conflict and concern, similarities in leadership style and strategies toward policy implementation. This latter process was facilitated by direction from the thesis supervisor, thesis committee, and faculty/student members of the Graduate Student Seminar. Respondents will receive a summary of the findings of this research, and a copy of the published thesis will be placed with the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

For the purpose for the study, the following definitions were applied:

<u>Implementation</u>: the process of change, an actual departure from previous structure or policy rather than simply prescriptive change (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).

Leadership: the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals through the use of human[e] and technical skills in response to the requirements of a situation (Robbins, 1994, pp. 135-151).

Phenomenology: a descriptive method through which we come to know *mind, body, heart and soul* as we study the ways in which they appear to us, based on modes of reflection at the heart of thought about philosophy and human science. It is a discipline that attempts description of real world experiences through conscious acts of recall and reflection. It differs from ethnography and symbolic interactionism by its focus on self-reported meaning or *essence* rather than objective appearance (van Manen, 1994, pp. 184-185).

Principal: In Ontario, the Education Act [S. 236] defines a principal as a teacher appointed by a board [of education] to perform in respect of a school the duties of a principal (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993).

School Council: an advisory committee comprised of a school principal, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and other interested parties, established to increase communication between a school and its community, and to assume a responsible and active role in education programs and services within its local community (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1995).

Limitations

The following constitute the limitations of the study:

1. The validity of the knowledge of principals' experiences with the implementation of school councils was dependent upon their willingness to discuss their experiences honestly and consistently throughout the interviews.

Delimitations

The following constitute the delimitations of the study:

1. The sample of participants was limited to seven women principals in one school board in Northwestern Ontario.

2. Phenomenological conversations and researcher's observation notes were the sole means of data collection for this study.

3. The number of interviews for this study was limited to three per respondent over a three month period.

Assumptions

The following constitute the assumptions for the study:

1. It is assumed that the seven principals were honest and consistent in their discussions with the researcher.

An Overview of the Thesis

This research considers the experiences of seven elementary and secondary women principals to determine whether school councils improve school leadership. Chapter II examines the literature on leadership theory, the principalship, women in the principalship, and school councils. Chapter III details use of the phenomenological method to discover how women principals exercised leadership, communicated with school stakeholders and reflected on their role in the school council implementation process. Chapter IV states the findings in terms of council priorities, policy orientation and training, transforming communication and decision making, shifting roles and responsibilities, and incremental changes in school governance. Chapter V discusses the central themes identified in Chapter IV and their implications for practice and further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

To inform the direction of this research, the literature review addressed four key areas: (1) leadership, (2) the principal's role in educational leadership, (3) women in the principalship, and (4) school councils.

Theories of Leadership

The exercise of leadership has evolved in response to the emergence of increasingly complex and diverse organizations within society. Consider the nature of leadership required by the Centres for Disease Control, a United Nations peacekeeping initiative, or a postmodern system of public education. In each case, leadership is culturally defined and capable of influencing its constituents in the achievement of collective goals (Robbins, 1994, p. 135). This review examined the evolution of leadership theory from the early days of industrialization through the postmodern era of collaborative decision making.

Early leadership theory examined the circumstances of mass production within bureaucratic industrial organizations. Eighty years of development gave birth to the following perspectives: scientific management (Theory X), human relations (Theory Y), structuralism, systems theory, contingency theory, critical theory, organizational development, and poststructuralist feminism (Shakeshaft, 1989a; Glazer, 1991; Thom, 1993). Each wave of theory carried a peculiar focus: structure, locus of control, motivation, planning, human resources, work environment, decision-making, personal style, marginality, reporting, entitlement, power structure, or politics.

After the second world war, a school population of unprecedented size and variety challenged existing educational bureaucracies, and administrators found it expedient to invoke business-based organizational theory. Theorists

assumed that industry and public education were similar enterprises, ignoring the inherent differences between the development of precision instruments and responsible citizens. The industrially based rationale known as scientific management remains the foundation of contemporary leadership theory.

Scientific management. Theory X, Frederick "Speedy" Taylor's (1911) classical theory of scientific management, emerged in response to large-scale industrialization when the novelty of the assembly line provided labour with an attractive alternative to the drudgery of the farm. Viewing employees as unmotivated and unreliable, Taylor advocated autocratic leadership, strictly hierarchical organizations and the promotion of impersonal technical experts.

Human relations. In the aftermath of World War II, changing political alliances, economic associations, technological capacity, labour pools, and educational opportunities produced business relationships characterized by traditionally marginalized and dominant social groups. Flowing into the industrial sector these irresistible waves of change (Toffler, 1981) created a shift toward democratic, "employee-centered" leadership based on managers' beliefs in the implicit goodness and internal motivation of their workers. Elton Mayo's (1946) accidental discovery that increases in worker productivity were linked to employee recognition and opportunities for decision-making formalized human relations theory and became known as Theory Y.

Applying Theory Y, Likert (1967) ranked organizations according to their degree of democracy and worker participation. The highest ranked were characterized by cooperation, a predictable power structure, conflict-resolution skills, non-authoritarian techniques for motivation and control, and more open communication between managers and staff. Barnard (1938), the mastermind behind effectiveness and efficiency evaluation, agreed with Likert's principles, and held that authority lay in the ability to make

subordinates accept rather than merely obey orders. Like Theory X, Theory Y supported an authoritarian hierarchy, drew its tenets from predominantly white male work cultures, encouraged democratic leadership, and signaled the potential impact of worker attitude on productivity.

Structuralism. Webber's extended bureaucracy theory, or structuralism, emerged in response to human relations thinking (Abbott & Caracheo, 1988). It encouraged conflict among workers as a means of fostering company loyalty and deflecting hostility from management. Structuralism identified specialization of labor, supported a hierarchy of authority, geared organizational entry to technical qualifications, based promotion on seniority and achievement, promoted career employment within the same organization, and recommended an impersonal approach to staff relations (Campbell, 1977-78, p. 2). Formal bureaucratic structures were successful in creating temporary efficiency, but they overlooked the spontaneous formation of hidden, or shadow, organizations characterized by flexibility, poorly defined rules, common interests, and rivalry. Merton (cited in Campbell, 1977-78) predicted structural dysfunction, acknowledged conflict between intended and latent factions, and provided the theoretical framework for systems theory (p. 3).

Systems theory. By 1965, Easton's (1957) organizational theory acknowledged the impact of external factors on day to day operations. It identified politics as part of a global social system comprised of physical and cultural environments. Easton developed the systems model around homeostasis, classifying organizations as either open or closed under the benign direction of authoritarian male administrations. Applied to education, open systems incorporated concepts of controlled confusion, anarchy, chaos, and Lindblom's (1959) muddling through. Inputs were theoretically

transformed into outputs through an interactive process of decision-making, planning and evaluating which was itself dependent on the social environment. In closed systems, management exercised tight policy control and, by ignoring externalities, doomed their organizations to becoming economic dinosaurs.

Easton's respect for the importance of the environment spawned Lawrence and Lorsch's theory of "technological and market changes" (1961) in which a harmonious relationship with the environment facilitated a state of market equilibrium. Emphasizing the significance of internal and external environmental factors, Weick (1976) explained organizational dysfunction in terms of loosely coupled events which, though randomly responsive to each other, maintained individual identity within some form of physical or logical reference point such as a manager's office or inner circle of advisors. Weick attributed the fragile nature of organizational structure to the impermanence and instability of these loosely coupled systems.

Contingency theory. Recognizing the complexity of the organizational environment Robbins (1994) and Rossler (1992) identified two leadership styles: instrumental (task-oriented) and expressivist (people oriented). He held that because leadership behaviour depends on situational factors, individuals temper their administrative style to the exigencies of circumstance. In light of rapid technological change and an exploding population, contingency theory offered a welcome new perspective on management style.

Critical theory. Containing elements of radical structuralism and radical humanism that parallel Marxism (Thom, 1993), critical theory denigrated oppressive school administrators, admonished workers to recognize an inherent conflict with management and encouraged them to organize/unionize for their own protection. Whereas radical structuralism

supported authoritarian leadership, radical humanism promoted facilitative leadership and democratic decision-making grounded in values and beliefs, and based on "a redefinition of educational administration and leadership as a moral science and art within a critical knowledge context" (Thom, 1993, p. 177).

<u>Organizational development (OD)</u>. Beginning in the 1960's amidst male management thinking permeated by cooperation and a quasi-religious fervor, OD supported the human relations approach with a new emphasis on team building, collaboration and consensus (Robbins, 1994, pp. 273-284). Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), still a benchmark in motivation theory, called for the satisfaction of five ordered areas of need: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization (including intellectual, spiritual and psychic elements). Building on Maslow's hierarchy, Hertzberg's motivation-hygiene theory of organizational development recognized two characteristics of organizations: *satisfiers*, elements that generate happiness and commitment to the organization, and *dissatisfiers*, elements that irritate, but whose elimination is insufficient to generate company loyalty or a feeling of achievement (cited in Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959).

In response to changes in the external environment, OD represented systematic, planned change that would benefit employees and increase organizational effectiveness. Learning was actively encouraged through team involvement, participation in activities designed to sustain planned cultural change, an ethic of deep personal belief, commitment to a set of community values, and emphasis on fairness and accountability. This climate of more people-centred leadership precipitated interest in theories of motivation.

By the early 70's the focus of leadership theory had shifted from worker motivation to creating team oriented organizations along the lines of Japanese

Quality Circles (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, p. 505). Feminist theory advocated promoting women to positions of leadership within organizational hierarchies, opening the doors to minority participation and industry wide employee empowerment. By the 1980's, pressures created by the information revolution led leadership theorists to examine the value of rigidly hierarchical management systems in favour of decentralized power networks that responded to the need for frequent structural change and collaborative leadership (Robbins, 1994, pp. 273-274, Thom, 1993, p. 151, Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 155). This anticipation of incessant change and growing demands for collaborative decision making is characteristic of poststructuralist feminism, the most recent repository of leadership theory.

Poststructuralist feminism (Poststructuralism). Although the manifestation of another evolution, this period is still closely associated with postmodernism. Poststructuralist feminism is described by Hekman (1990) as the conjunction of rationality and experience, postpositivism, and extended from Hodgkinson by Evers and Lakomski (1991) to embody ethics and subjectivity within a science of administration based on sound theoretical knowledge, and transformational theory. It is acknowledged by Robbins (1995) as including charismatic leaders who induce their followers to transcend personal interest, and encompasses diverse elements of contemporary leadership theory: distribution of power, decision-making, motivation, evaluation, communication, leadership style, conflict resolution, equitable political representation, structure, culture and change (Shakeshaft, 1989a pp. 194-214, Thom, 1993, p. 160-162, Lorber, 1994, pp. 282-302). It redresses marginalization according to race, religion and gender, and advocates inclusion, consensus and facilitative, morally driven leadership. Bennett, Rohlheiser-Bennett and Stevahn (1991) recognized how to promote learning

through cultures of change within individual school boards and schools, anticipating the success of school council policy advocating decentralized leadership and shared distribution of power, decision-making, motivation, evaluation, and communication.

Poststructuralism emphasizes leadership based on an ethical imperative to facilitate the following: democratic and open communication, shared decision-making, conflict resolution by the parties involved, and planning for continual change. Ogawa and Bossert (1995) stated that all organizations have a predisposition toward leadership, that it inheres in every role and shapes the meanings adduced from all organizational structures and situations (p. 225). Sergiovanni (1992) shared this belief in the leadership potential of all members of any group. His emphasis on personal morality, accountability and stewardship reflected the poststructuralist ethic of cooperation, consensus, avoidance of confrontation and shared decision-making.

The evolution of leadership theory from scientific management to postmodern transactionalism is a testament to lasting and fundamental social change. No longer is leadership defined as the autocratic exercise of power over ignorant and obedient subordinates, but rather as collaborative facilitation among diversified stakeholders. Further refinement into the meaning of leadership took place as the focus of inquiry shifted to the realm of the principalship.

Principalship

In keeping with post modern educational theory, Shakeshaft's (1989a) twelve dimensions of leadership elucidated its complexity: representation, demand reconciliation, tolerance of uncertainty, persuasiveness, initiation of structure [task], tolerance of freedom, role assumption, consideration [maintenance], production emphasis, predictive accuracy, integration, and

superior orientation (1989, p. 178). How effectively these responsibilities are administered is determined by the personal values and leadership characteristics of individual principals.

   The importance of values. Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) stressed that effective principals share values which endorse cognitive learning and student happiness above all else (pp. 333-334). Hodgkinson (1983) expanded their argument stating that

> ... executive action and the administrative endeavour
> which embraces it make philosophical demands ... a
> knowledge of human nature which includes motivation
> but reaches beyond it into the domain of value
> possibilities. (p. 53)

Begley (1990) cited Hodgkinson's categorization of human values into three classes grounded in personal preference (Type III), consensus (Type II) and underlying principles (Type I) (p. 5). Values based on principles form the ideal basis for administrative decision-making because they are anchored in the broader social ethic of rightness and justice. Rallis (1990) incorporated values into his definition of organizational leadership in which corporate identity is created by bringing together people whose values and cultural beliefs are held in common (p. 204).

   Building on Cubberley's argument (cited in Beck & Murphy, 1992) that efficient management and spirituality are key factors in the principalship, and declaring conscience the quintessential expedient for success, Thom defined educational leadership as a "moral science and art within the context of critical knowledge" (1993, p. 177). Elmore (1995) added further support to the importance of principals' values stating that teacher motivation and training will not promote learning outside of an environment supportive of personal effort, respect, freedom to question and risk-taking (p. 365). The perspective afforded by an exploration of the need for values in education

established the tone for an inquiry into the specific ways in which principals exercise leadership.

Characteristics of leadership. Beck and Murphy (1992) pointed out that principals are required to make decisions in very complex and sometimes unprecedented situations (p. 393). They promoted principalship based on efficiency, excellence, justice and compassion. Immegart (1988) identified the enduring leadership traits of intelligence, dominance, self-confidence, and high energy (p. 261). Fennell (1988) cited four attributes essential to the principalship: personal vision, deep personal values, specialized knowledge, and technological and interpersonal skills. Garvie (1992) recommended that principals have a positive vision of life, and the ability to trust others who are in positions of responsibility. Guided by overlapping forces of politics and evaluation, Heck and Glasman (1993) identified four interconnected strands within the principalship: roles, outcomes, standards and structures, with the interplay between responsibility and control permeating each of these constructs (p. 140).

Webber (1994) stated that capable principals function well as: problem finders, negotiators, teachers and systematic problem solvers. Good principals consulted with teachers, delegated effectively, accepted failure, asked for information, gave credit to teachers, believed in their staff, fostered collegiality, sustained harmonious public relations, and implemented educational constructs such as effective schools, teacher empowerment, and site based management (p. 108). Decisions principals took depended on a set of priorities ordered by knowledge, skills and personal values, and together these personal attributes determined how effectively principals were able to identify and discharge their responsibilities.

Responsibilities. The Ontario Education Act (R.S.O. 1993, Chapter 29, Section 236) lists the duties of principals to: maintain order and discipline, develop cooperation and coordination of staff efforts, register, record and where necessary transfer pupil attendance and academic records, establish and adhere to a school timetable, hold examinations subject to supervisory officer approval, promote pupils who are deserving, verify the use of appropriate textbooks, submit reports about the schools' physical condition, disciplinary climate, student achievement and materials inventory to supervisory officers and the Ministry, give "assiduous attention to the health and comfort of the pupils", report the outbreak of infectious disease or a breakdown in school sanitation, refuse admission to school property to persons infected with communicable diseases,

> subject to an appeal to the board ... refuse to admit to the school or classroom a person whose presence ... would in his judgment be detrimental to the physical or mental well-being of the pupils ... (p. 526)

and maintain a visitor's book in the school if required by the board. Principals' execution of these duties is subject to challenge and review by supervisory officers within their boards and by any member of the public according to the protection accorded by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The American researchers, Stufflebeam and Nevo (1993), offered a slate of duties for principals which contrasted with that stipulated by Ontario: educational development of each student, maintenance of a positive school climate, school improvement, improving instruction, personnel management, administration and fiscal/facilities management, student management, school and community relations, professional growth, and academic development (p. 35).

Much like superintendents, principals are experiencing "the growth of educational cultures in which responsibility for leadership is a shared responsibility" (Sergiovanni, 1994), an expectation that is transforming the role of principal from godlike ruler with impeccable judgment and perfect knowledge to group facilitator with outstanding communication, organizational and implementation skills. However, personal values, leadership characteristics and school based responsibilities do not entirely account for success in the principalship. The complementary of personal leadership style and elements influencing school climate determine the degree to which individual principals thrive within this new administrative culture.

Factoring in school climate. Initially tied to concerns over technological development and population explosion, contingency theory first suggested the importance of cultural context to leadership strategy and effectiveness (Rossler, 1992). Contemporary trends in institutional settings favour collaborative decision-making, shared authority and emphasis on morality, stewardship and personal values (Thom, 1993). The principalship was first and foremost a cultural phenomenon rooted in principles of free education and public accountability, irrevocably restricted by antiquated and contradictory laws entrenched in overlapping jurisdictions. In addition to principals' personal values, leadership characteristics, and site specific responsibilities, the complex cultural context completed this review of the role of principals.

Rothberg and Pawlas (1993) attributed the evolution of organizational climate to social maturation from industrial to informational society, from autocratic school management to team leadership, from unilateral, top down arbitration to collaborative multidirectional consultation and decision making,

from principal as godlike creature to principal as transforming facilitator who engenders leadership in others, from teaching as repeating facts to teaching as "informing, guiding, intervening and coaching", from curriculum as discipline based and textbook oriented to curriculum as multidiciplinary with concern for knowledge, skill acquisition, and problem solving expertise, from local to global orientation, and from "parents as supporters to parents as advisors" (p. 72).

This historical sketch of changes in educational climate, incorporating key factors of communication, leadership procedures, curriculum content and community involvement, highlights important features of the environment within which principals exercise their duties as school leaders. Consideration is now given to the particular ways in which women principals approach the task of school administration.

Women in Principalship

The existence of gender as a basic organizing principle (Lather, 1991, p. 71) suggests that women have specific ways of approaching tasks. They have demonstrated a gendered approach toward the accomplishment of educational projects within the social and cultural context of their own school communities, as exemplified by the life of Betty Murray (Harris, 1995, p. 174). A closer examination was made from the vantage point of the cultural context, barriers to access, leadership style, gendered leadership skills, language as knowledge, and the application of power.

The cultural context. The importance of gender was flagged by Martin (1981) as a fundamental concern of girls and women within schools and adult learning communities, and cited by Sergiovanni (1992) as an integral element in the effectiveness of leaders who promote stewardship among their colleagues and subordinates (p. 135). Thom (1993) stated that "leading with

conscience" requires that administrators not only eliminate existing barriers to female participation, but introduce gender inclusive criteria for assessment that will recognize "*true competence* and merit" within students of both genders (p. 178). On a global scale, Blackmore (1988) challenged as inadequate, explanations of leadership based on abstract individualism precisely because they do not take into account a gendered perspective of identity (p. 94).

Barriers to access. In analyzing access to the principalship it was crucial to identify the political climate operating against women's efforts to become leaders. Sadker and Sadker (1994) inveighed against a practice that not only failed to train women for office but educated females to anticipate exclusion from positions of authority.

> When girls do not see themselves in the pages of textbooks,
> when teachers do not point out or confront the omissions,
> our daughters learn that to be female is to be an absent
> partner in the development of our nation. (p. 8)

Reynolds (1995) identified two endemic social barriers encountered by women seeking leadership roles: male supervisors' fear of sexual involvement and incentives for hiring males. Rees (1995) attributed administrative and promotional problems faced by women administrators to the expectation that they function within traditional organizational systems according to bureaucratic routines based exclusively on male experience and preference (p. 33).

Glazer (1995) referred to the duality of *male dominance* and *female subordination* within educational practice (p. 324), connecting this to the impasse arrived at by women administrators who confront androcentric structures designed exclusively to accommodate male organizational routine. Strike and Soltis (1985) raised the spectre of due process gone amok which in the context of promotion takes the form of inflexible union contracts that promote high levels of inefficiency, insensitivity, inflexibility and

demoralization (pp. 27 - 30). Among local women principals whom the researcher perceived as nurturing inclusive and relational leaders, *there was no perception of a need for authoritarian, competitive structures* within which to legitimize the power of the principalship.

Leadership styles. Research into leadership style has traditionally been guided by quantitative methods of investigation. Two qualitative research methods, ethnography and phenomenology, have evolved along hermeneutic lines with renewed interest in the personal values exhibited by leaders (Sergiovanni, 1992). Such subjective research paradigms favour *inductive* exploration into the full complexity of respondents' lived experiences. Ethnographic and phenomenological findings have been incorporated into feminist research, and in turn, have made recent contributions to transformational leadership theory (Borg, Gall & Gall, 1993). Transformational leaders facilitate the success of those around them, delegate to those with ability, and consistently and inclusively offer support and encouragement.

With higher numbers of women assuming leadership roles in education, Gougeon (1995) noted the importance of examining how women led, approached problem-solving, viewed their authority, allocated resources, and exerted a positive influence as leaders. Women principals were also identified as exercising leadership in ways that were qualitatively unique, specifically in regard to the interpretation of crisis and opportunity (p. 157).

Myers and Hajnal (1995) studied nine women principals who defined themselves through leadership roles, leadership styles, and ways of leading. Women principals were recognized as being more naturally inclined toward verbal rather than physical problem-solving (p. 135), a skill increasingly in demand given the burgeoning problem of violence in schools. The openness and fluidity expressed within these constructs was unmistakable. Women

principals perceived themselves as team members, collaborating, cooperating, coaching their staffs and facilitating inclusive communication. They were committed to the task of assisting staff in "adapting to the changing environment and learning to work towards a common goal" (p. 111). This research on women who have achieved positions of leadership unveiled a range of characteristics that was historically omitted from scholarly inquiry.

Shakeshaft (1989a) identified four channels through which women administrators conceptualize:

 (1) Relations with others are central to all actions.
 (2) Teaching and learning are the major foci.
 (3) Building community is essential.
 (4) Marginality overlays work life (pp. 197-198).

Marshall (1992), citing women's inner emotional and intellectual capacities, and prolonged capacity for change and adaptation (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986, p. 170), described the *promise* offered by women administrators through their "views of schooling, priorities, ways of managing, and ways of structuring interactions" (p. 370).

Bolman and Deal (1992) stated that women generally perform well, tend to be favourably judged for organization and rationality, and that their under representation and under compensation in administrative positions does not reflect their ability (p. 328). Gougeon (1995) argued that "female principals provide significantly more intrinsic motivational experiences to all teachers than do male principals" (p. 168). Shakeshaft (1989a) also recognized women leaders as team members, defining them as "women who cooperate to facilitate common group goals" (p. 206).

Eagly, Karau and Johnson (1992) noted that women principals tend to be more democratic than authoritarian, are usually task-oriented, and actively use well-developed interpersonal skills. Robbins (1994) claimed that the charismatic leadership style displayed by some women is based on strong

interpersonal skills, the encouragement of universal participation, the sharing of "power and information" and demonstration of a commitment to "enhance followers' self-worth" (p. 147-148).

Myers and Hajnal (1995) cited the following traits of successful women leaders: participatory management, cooperation, collaboration, interpersonal listening, responding [not *reacting*], empathizing with coworkers, and demonstrating superior ability in observing "verbal and non-verbal language" (p. 111). Of importance to these women leaders was encouragement from mentors, found usually among family members or colleagues at work, and the persistent desire to influence others. These women's motivation sprang from pride in accomplishment, and personal belief that guidance was all that was required for people to solve their own problems (p. 112).

Shakeshaft (1989a) described how women leaders allocated their time before, during, and after school hours. She pointed out the importance they placed on affiliation, and cited informal conversations with students, staff, parents, supervisors, and members of the community as typical examples of daily interaction. Strong communication skills, and the intrinsic motivation to share information frequently with all members of the learning environment were inherent characteristics of successful women leaders. Taken collectively women leaders' ability to communicate openly, motivate colleagues, bind school communities around common goals and resolve conflict through collaborative leadership argued strongly in favor of increasing their representation among educational administrators. Given the significance of effective communication within school communities, further inquiry was taken into women principals' ability to facilitate verbally.

The power of language. How leaders used language influenced their transmission of power and the quality of communication, especially during

decision-making and conflict resolution. Evidence showed that women principals intentionally worked to empower, to facilitate, and to encourage all members of their school communities to express themselves frequently and openly (Fennell, 1995). Defining knowledge as the accumulation of *everyone's* experience, Marshall (1995) used this maxim to inform her understanding of the language of leadership. She stated that women leaders spoke to *share meaning and information, and to include rather than to dominate others.* In conflict, they chose solutions that favoured continued community relations rather than adherence to precedent.

> Women as educational administrators are more attuned to
> teaching, curriculum, instruction, and children and
> women educational leaders frequently interact positively
> with the greater school community (p. 488).

The emancipating power of knowledge from a gendered perspective added additional weight to the importance of women leaders in a community made up of both male and female learners (Habermas, 1971). From an ethnographic perspective, Valverde and Brown (1988) addressed the way leaders used language and epistemological categories to construct and control cultural and social realities (p. 155) while Fennell (1995) created distinctions based on women principals' use of metaphor demonstrating how the relationships between power, leadership, responsibility toward subordinates, and duty to nurture infused these women's administrations. She further identified women principals' propensity to console, introduce new perspective, and discern constructive channels for handling power as "facilitative, flexible, nurturing and transformative" administrators (pp. 124-125).

Given the gendered views on responsibility, power, and winning, which impacted on women's appointment and support as principals (Webber, 1994, p. 29), Blackmore (1988) viewed power as *multi-dimensional* and *multi-*

directional, subject to context, and sitting latent within all members of an organization, regardless of their position. She contended that women leaders' priorities included a relational world view sensitive to caring, reciprocity, respect for friendship and family ties, and having extensive political roots in participatory democracy.

In her caution against the perpetuation of systemic violence, Epp (1997) stated that educational leaders have a twofold "power over" their subordinates by virtue of (1) their authority and (2) superior knowledge (p. 37). She also stated that women administrators share power "to modify the interpretation [exercise] of authority at the centre of a revised notion of education and society" (p. 51). Young, Staszenski, McIntyre, and Joly (1993) identified care and justice as predominant concerns in the exercise of authority by women in educational leadership. Operating from positions of power, these leaders synthesized intellectual and relational information with both individuals and groups making them ideal candidates for the implementation of community based school councils.

School Councils

From the standpoint of school council implementation, this review examined (1) the introduction of new parties into the human resource pool and (2) the redistribution of power and decision-making among old and new players.

Mandate. The Ontario Ministry of Education launched its policy shift toward site based school management in April 1995 with the stipulation that community based representation be incorporated into the governing structure of every school as of September 1996 (Cooke, 1995). Traditional Home and School affiliates were to be superseded by school councils under the direct supervision of local boards of education. In September 1995, the Assistant

Deputy Minister of Education (Carrier-Fraser, 1995a) advised directors of education that

> ... meaningful parental and community involvement in education is increasingly important and school councils will serve to reinforce the links between the schools and the community (p. 1).

Thus school councils were established as school board adjuncts defining parents' expanded role in advising principals and teachers as colleagues in school administration, though the handbook for administrators and council chairs was not published until much later (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1996).

Under the jurisdiction of each board, school councils were to meet at least four times per academic year, advising the principal, and occasionally the school board, on all issues related to school policies and goals. As specified by the Minister, councils' specific focus would be: curriculum and program priorities, assessment and accountability, selection of principals, school budget priorities, involvement of community support agencies in schools, the school-year calendar, schools' codes of behaviour, and community use of school facilities. In other words, school culture would no longer be determined by principals, teachers and support staff making decisions based on system-wide board policies. School councils have been mandated to influence every conceivable aspect of a schools' day to day operations and policy development.

The Ontario government's interest in setting up school councils was part of an international push to increase the participation of non-educators in the leadership of educational systems (Beare & Boyd, 1993). In Canada, this movement was kindled by political sensitivity to American economic activity, and by domestic concern over regionalized multicultural demands (Lawton, 1993). Recent amendments to education legislation in several provinces

provided evidence of Canada's involvement in the devolution of regional school board authority in favour of site based school councils.

Membership. School council structure fluctuated with individual site complements of students, teachers, principals, other staff, parent, and non-parent neighbours. Council membership, term of office, authority and revenue all varied according to board and school structure, ultimately reflecting the political climate, cultural preferences and expectations of each regional community. Beare (1993) suggested four configurations of the "site council", each of which hinged on a different perspective on school structure: (1) a company of learners, (2) a professional corporation, (3) a public service, or (4) a community owned enterprise (p. 212).

As of January, 1996, Edmonton had the only Canadian public school board that formally endorsed school management based on the model of a community owned enterprise. By comparison, Ontario's policy supported the vision of school as a public service. It called for school councils that were representative of all stakeholders, but mandated only to advise administration, and lacking authority over school budgets.

Decision making policy. Ontario's school council policy supported community-based administration, teacher initiative and leadership that took into consideration all members of the school community. In October, 1994, the Federation of Women Teachers Associations of Ontario (FWTAO/FAÉO) formally endorsed school councils as representatives of community diversity, and advocated council representation by "parents, students, school staff members, aboriginal, racial ethno-cultural communities, persons with disabilities and other people in the community concerned about education" (FWTAO/FAÉO, 1995, p. 157). It proposed an evolution of school council structure and policy responding to each community's particular needs and goals and recommended

an orientation program incorporating child care and transportation subsidies for all potential council members, including principals, staff and community representatives.

Anderson and Shirley (1995) described the potential for successful school reform beginning with Fullan's framework of *local characteristics* (system administrators, community members, and teachers), *characteristics of change* (the need for a specific change, the complexity of a proposed change, and procedural clarity), and *external factors* (laws and regulations, and interagency involvement) (p. 407). From this vantage point, they defined three essential constructs: (1) community, (2) school-relations, and (3) classroom-relations, contending that principals who serve as catalysts for change and strive to influence both school and classroom opinion, will be the most successful. Their position echoed that of Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), who held that "effective principals work toward their goals by attempting to influence a complex set of classroom-based and school-wide factors" (p. 334). The success of school council implementation would seem to depend heavily on the leadership skills of the principals in charge.

Gunter (1995) assumed that leaders of schools and colleges are seeking "stability, reciprocity, consensus and consistency" (p. 9). She warned that failure to develop inclusionary strategy would guarantee failure in educational management, basing her argument on chaos theory which stated that for successful educational management, principals needed to facilitate regeneration (p. 6). They must also encourage "political activity, a climate of open debate, the capacity for people to self-organize and self-motivate, and [a climate of] tolerance" (p. 19). This view was supported by Robertson, Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1995) citing the high-involvement model in their

argument for greater employee participation in organizational decision-making (p. 377).

With initial school council investment costs yielding very high growth in both student learning and teacher satisfaction, Fennell (1991) advocated the transfer of substantive, functional administrative responsibilities from central boards to local, school-based ones. She championed site administration vested in a tightly-coupled group comprised of principals, teachers and elected community representatives which prompted schools to become flexible, diversified and responsive to their students' needs (pp. 16-17). Given such positive theoretical support for site based school councils, it would appear that the Ontario school council mandate constitutes valuable reform.

In reviewing the literature on leadership theory, the principalship, women as principals, and school councils, the researcher has traced the evolution of educational administration from objective scientific management to team-sensitive leadership. The contemporary era of poststructuralist feminism endorses an inclusionary approach to school communities founded on personal values and sustained by non-hierarchical communications networks. School councils, particularly when facilitated by women principals, appear to offer their learning communities unprecedented opportunities for student-sensitive administration and curriculum delivery. Chapter III describes the research process that made it possible to link this theoretical heritage with the reality of principals' practices in light of Ontario's school council mandate.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

A phenomenological study was chosen as the research method for inquiry into women principals' lived experiences with the implementation of school councils because it was believed by the researcher to be the most effective means of discovering meaning within new experience. Phenomenology is defined as:

> a descriptive method through which we come to know *mind, body, heart and soul* as we study the ways in which they appear to us, based on modes of reflection at the heart of thought about philosophy and human science. It is a discipline that attempts description of real world experiences through conscious acts of recall and reflection. It differs from ethnography and symbolic interactionism by its focus on self-reported meaning or *essence* rather than objective appearance (van Manen, 1994, pp. 184-185).

Phenomenology is ideally suited to an in-depth exploration of individual experience, recollection and reflection, predicated on the preservation of human freedom and the belief that learning is possible through the study of individual experience (van Manen, 1994, p. 66).

As a growing field within the area of qualitative research methodology, phenomenology is ideally suited to the in-depth exploration of individual experience, recollection and reflection. It is predicated on the preservation of human freedom, and the belief that learning is possible through the study of individual experience (van Manen, 1994, p. 66). In researching lived experiences, it is possible to collect information through conversation, observation, and reference to print materials such as literature and autobiographic journals. Planning took into account theoretical and practical considerations of the time frame, ethical requirements for field entry, sample selection, interview protocol, data collection, data analysis and interpretation

of the findings. Consideration of these elements began with the interval available to the researcher in which to conduct personal interviews.

Phenomenological Research

From the premise that what is known by one can be discovered by others, this inquiry aimed to examine new knowledge based on meaningful personal experience (van Manen, 1995, pp. 35-52). Such exploration into the realm of human consciousness took place during interviews in which recollection, reflection and reconstruction were interwoven to determine how individuals constructed meaning from lived experiences, a narrative process often requiring substantially more time than the precipitating circumstances.

Phenomenology was a method of qualitative research embodying design flexibility, open-ended enquiry, and incorporating "tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty as well as trust in the ultimate value of what inductive analysis will yield" (Patton, p. 62). Rooted in the process of experiencing, describing and reflecting on real life situations, phenomenology incorporated the initially preverbal sensations of (1) the passage of time, (2) orientation in physical space, (3) bodily comfort, and (4) the satisfaction of personal relationship (van Manen, 1994, p. 102).With an inclusionary focus of inquiry, phenomenology added to our knowledge by taking into account the unexpected, the unpredictable and the unknown, as it addressed the purposeful attempts of conscious beings to communicate the meaning they have created from lived experiences.

Time Frame

This study was completed over a period of twenty-five months. Literature review and preparation of the research questions extended from October 1995 to March 1996, followed by the interview period from April to June 1996. Analysis of the data occurred in two phases, July through October

1996, and September to October 1997. Interpretation of the findings, supplementary literature review and revisions were ongoing.

Field Entry

The right to conduct research in the field was granted by the Ethics Advisory Committee, Lakehead University (Appendix A). A request for permission to conduct research within a local school board was made using a Research Application Form (Appendix B). Subsequent approval was granted by a Superintendent of Education (Appendix C). Accompanying the Research Application Form was a letter of invitation to individual principals (Appendix D) and a letter of undertaking from the principals (Appendix E) that included the researcher's disclosure of risk and guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity.

Sample Selection

A sample of seven women principals was randomly selected from a set of twelve administrators within one of two municipally based school boards. These respondents ranged in experience from four to twelve years as school administrators with at least one year's experience in leadership at the system level.

Karen was principal of R. J. Massey, an elementary school of 310 students with programs in English and Core French. At the system level she had led workshops on curriculum and special education, and facilitated policy development about safe schools and library restructuring. With four years of administrative experience and now serving in her second school, Karen was optimistic about a school council though fraught with trepidation over its introductory phase.

Monica had been a principal for eight years. Now in her second year as leader of her third school, Monica headed a bilingual K - 8 school with 390

pupils taking classes in English, Core French and French Immersion. Her previous system experience included two years as an education officer in the curriculum department followed by one year as assistant to the curriculum superintendent.

In year ten as a principal, Nancy was in her fifth year at her second school. Courses in English and Core French were available to a secondary student population of 580. At the system level Nancy had designed school improvement policy and was currently a member of the Board's school councils' steering committee responsible for translating Ministry policy into regional policy and procedures.

In charge of three schools over a five year period, Paula was in her first year as principal at a K - 8 school with a student population of 570. Instruction was offered in English, Core French, French Immersion and a Hearing Impaired program. At the system level Paula had worked as a curriculum programmer for one year, an enrichment programmer for two, a coordinator of communications and assessment for three, and a psychometrist for four years.

With twelve years' experience as a principal, Ruth was in her second year of administration at her third school. A student population of 305 was divided into English, Core French and Primary, Junior and Intermediate Special Education classes. As an education officer, Ruth had assisted one of two zone superintendents in developing metapolicy for affirmative action and outdoor education and designed proposals targeting school closure and relocation of some French Immersion programs.

Sylvia, recently appointed superintendent after four years in the principalship, had successfully directed the amalgamation of students from seven feeder schools into a new K - 8 bilingual school of 500 students where

programs were offered in English, Core French and French Immersion. Sylvia had coordinated the French as a Second Language program for three years at the system level after two years as an education officer in the same program.

Wendy, a principal with six years of experience at three schools, was in her first year as leader of a 4 to 8 school with 310 students. Teaching was done in English, Core French, French Immersion and a Junior/Intermediate L. D. class. During her two years as education officer with the curriculum department Wendy had been responsible for the publication of teaching guidelines in a variety of subjects.

Each principal was initially telephoned to canvass her interest as a participant in school council research, establish the feasibility of the interview schedule, and confirm her willingness to be audio taped. She was then sent a letter of introduction outlining the focus of the study and potential benefits to participants (Appendix A). Seven of the first eight women contacted volunteered as respondents, and the eighth expressed regret that she was precluded from participating by the opening of a new amalgamated school. Respondents ranged in age from mid thirties to mid fifties, had at least five years' experience as elementary or secondary principals, and had been system level coordinators for at least one year.

<u>Data Collection</u>

Three open-ended questions guided the research:

1. As a woman principal, what were your experiences with the implementation of a school council?

2. What experiences did you perceive as problematic?

3. What experiences did you perceive as contributing to its success?

These questions were designed to facilitate maximum recall, spontaneous reflection and emotional reconnection (van Manen, 1992) to actual events

while each narrator discussed and evaluated her lived experiences. Together they prompted respondents to construct meaning and draw insights from the implementation process.

Most of the data for this research was collected over an eleven week period during three one hour conversations with each of five principals. Two hour and a half conversations were conducted with a sixth principal and a single half hour session took place with a seventh. Supplementary data collection and clarification occurred through phone conversations between the researcher and the principals. Conversations in all but one case were conducted in the principals' offices, the seventh migrating from a supply cupboard through two classrooms out into a disused corridor. Two days prior to each conversation, the researcher contacted the principal by phone to confirm the time and suitability of the upcoming appointment. During only one of these calls was an conversation rescheduled at the principal's request so that she might attend an emergency board meeting.

Permission to take notes and make audio recordings during conversations had been obtained from each principal prior to beginning the research. All conversations were preceded by a few minutes of informal conversation and by last minute requests from staff members for advice, signatures or appointments.

The use of a tape recorder during conversations enabled the researcher to maintain regular eye contact with the respondent, construct written records of her observations, note theoretical queries, identify points for clarification, and refer to written prompts based on previous conversations. The opportunity during conversations to replay short excerpts from an audio tape also made it possible to minimize the effect of any distractions in the

conversations caused by unavoidable interruptions. Audio tapes were transcribed immediately following each conversation.

During each phenomenological conversation the researcher created an atmosphere of trust in which memories, impressions, personal anecdotes and intuition were comfortably shared. The researcher enhanced recall of significant events by tactfully interjecting open-ended questions in a neutral but supportive tone of voice (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993, p. 196). The quality of narrative varied as both parties became more familiar with one another and with the focus of research.

The researcher began first conversations by summarizing the purpose of the study, acknowledging the principals' valuable qualifications as research participants and recognizing their kindness in volunteering to participate. This format provided a critical interlude during which respondents could emotionally separate from their prior mental state and become focused on the purpose of the conversation. During initial conversations it was sometimes necessary to restart the narrative with a brief summary of what had just been said or with a follow-up question such as:

> Could you give an example? What difference did that make?
> How would you explain that? When did you notice that?
> Who was responsible for that? Why was that important?
> What should have been done? Why did that happen?

In contrast to these first conversations, second and third meetings were characterized by fluid narration interrupted only by the occasional pause for a sip of water or a question about the amount of time remaining until the respondent had to resume her regular duties. Beginning with silence, each respondent's voice combined to create a narrative that contained "multiple ways of interpreting experiences ... through interacting with others" (Bogden & Biklin, 1992, p. 34), enabling the researcher to understand the implementation of school councils from each principal's point of view. The

route of inquiry depended on the respondent's state of mind, competing memories, self awareness, and analytical interest in her own narrative. Narrative fluctuated between description and reflection, with the path of conversation depending on the participants' levels of recent memory, self awareness, and analytical interest in the description of her experiences.

Principals' education, knowledge of policy, training, experience with parallel occurrences, expectations, personal skills, ambitions, and relationships were collectively disclosed in identifying what they found personally significant during their experiences with the implementation of school councils. Respondent and researcher became immersed in the recollective process of reliving, reviewing and reconstructing situations within which respondents had found meaningful experience. Over and between the course of multiple conversations, researcher and respondent made reference to the conversation transcripts which contained a written record of their ongoing dialogue. These transcripts gave both parties a flexible opportunity to revisit previously recorded experiences in search of deeper meaning and relationship.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

Prior to any attempt at data analysis, the researcher practiced epoche (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), shedding personal prejudice and assumptions so as to more openly discern the meaning within each principal's narrative (p. 193). Multiple readings of each transcript were required before a series of thematic strands began to emerge. Frequent rearrangement and reorganization of these strands into a variety of sub themes became necessary as principals revisited a particular event thereby changing its relative prominence (p. 160).

Starting with the preliminary reading of every transcript, a set of five characters was inserted at the beginning of each paragraph. These characters formed a code indicating respondent, conversation sequence, theme, and thematic strand. For example, a passage beginning C2R10 referred to respondent C, conversation 2, theme R, thematic strand 10. Decoded this meant Ruth's (C) discussion during her second conversation (2) of the recruitment (R) of parent volunteers (10). G3B04 was Sylvia's (G) narrative during her third conversation (3) about her concerns (B) over shared decision making (04). Whenever a collection of closely related thematic strands accumulated they were regrouped into a new theme.

Once a code was assigned, it was not changed, and if in the editing process a thematic strand or theme was subsequently renamed or rejected, its original code was simply deleted from the master list, preserving the sortability of the data and the integrity of the coding system. The list of themes and thematic strands underwent multiple revisions as repeated exposure to collective narrative cast new meaning on categories of personal experience. Eventually, recurring concepts formed a stable framework of five themes and twenty-one thematic strands forming the skeleton for formal analysis and interpretation of the data.

Presentation of the data combined researcher description with excerpts from conversation transcripts and quotations from the literature. The process of data interpretation began with researcher notes during the first conversation, continued through all subsequent meetings and was sustained as a parallel activity during transcript review. As comments, questions, observations, and points for further research accumulated, they were tracked and coded by thematic strand. A summary of themes and thematic strands is presented on the next page in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of themes and thematic strands

Themes	Thematic strands
Top Priorities for New Councils	Improving student learning Commitment to inclusive recruitment Building stakeholder networks Preserving best practice
System Support for School Councils	Orientation programs Procedural dilemmas Recommendations for future training
Exploring New Opportunities for Dialogue	Early council meetings In search of a common mission Obstacles to collaboration
Restructuring School Governance	Expanding the role of parents Implications for teachers Redefining principalship Future expectations

Research Findings

Discussion of the research findings focused on council priorities, policy orientation and training, communications and decision making, shifting roles and relationships and incremental changes in school governance. Council priorities were not unanimously shared within schools nor among principals, but mutual concern was expressed about improved student learning, stakeholders as active council members, inclusive recruiting practice, and preserving effective infrastructure. Policy orientation and training, variously experienced by principals and small groups of councilors from most schools, was not a unanimously positive exercise. Ministry and Board training failures, procedural dilemmas, and recommendations for future training were also discussed.

The arrival of school councils impacted heavily on traditional systems of communication and decision making, requiring a new kind of stakeholder

participation, a clearer voice for parents, and a reconfiguration of professional dialogue. Redistribution of power, parents' changing roles, renewed accountability for teachers, greater opportunities for students, principalship restructuring, and principals' prevailing fears emerged as major concerns.

Researcher notes, audio tapes, and transcripts will be held in safekeeping by the principal researcher for an interval of seven years following completion for the study, or turned over to the university in the event that she discontinues her affiliation in the interim.

Summary

In Chapter III phenomenology was discussed as the methodology of choice in creating new knowledge from women principals' lived experience. Procedures governing the time span, field entry, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis were presented. Experiences shared by women principals during the course of research suggested ways to improve school council implementation, examples of proficient leadership despite uncharted educational policy, elements of best investigative practice, and school councils' potential strengths.

Chapter IV next examines these issues within four major themes: (1) top priorities for new councils, (2) system support for school councils, (3) exploring new opportunities for dialogue, and (4) restructuring school governance.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of Findings

Introduction

This chapter contains the data of seven women principals' experiences with the implementation of school councils. A phenomenological inquiry, this research required the identification of themes in a reiterative process replete with revisions, regroupings and renaming in response to the appearance of multiple relationships among a plethora of thematic strands. In "capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" (van Manen, 1994, p. 87), the researcher conducted analysis outside of her own experience clearly favouring an open-ended approach unlimited by personal bias in surveying the unknown.

In answer to the overarching question, "As a woman principal, what were your experiences with the implementation of a school council?" the findings from each principal's narrative are presented according to four major themes: Top priorities for new councils, system support for school councils, exploring new opportunities for dialogue, and restructuring school governance.

Top Priorities for New Councils

New councils varied in their identification of top priorities, and these did not always reflect the preferences of resident principals. Table 2 summarizes their experiences with new council priorities. Although Karen's school council was still in the formative stage without full representation when this research took place, it identified student learning, full stakeholder representation and working toward building a collective voice for decision making as areas of concern. The commitment to improving student learning was paramount among parents, teachers and administration. Sensitive to the existence of visibly distinctive student populations within their community,

Monica's school council declared themselves committed to inclusive

recruitment as a way of bringing representatives of all students to the council

table. They also supported Monica's wish to maintain those policies and

procedures which had served her school well in the pre-council era.

Table 2
Experiences with school councils

Karen	I think that for some of the kids, knowing that their parents are on a council makes them pretty special. You know, they get special communications to take home or ... they feel proud that Mom's coming to the council meeting.
Monica	... the parents have found all of the people for election during this second phase. ... When the staff comes into place next fall the elections will be held for staff members ... We will appoint a community representative and our Student Leadership Council should also have it's representatives available to us ...
Nancy	What impressed me was the students' entire approach. It was very mature and I said that if we don't allow students to be heard, adults will never know what really matters to them. Even their approach in coming and asking me how they were going to [reverse] a process that resulted in our getting three teachers to teach four classes [in the same subject] was unprecedented and outstanding.
Paula	On the concept of pushy parents ... all the way through the '80's, educators have said, "I know best. Don't bother me about whatever you want to say about your child." I think we've done that to ourselves, and now, suddenly, we're in a very different milieu in education. We can't do it all. We know that parents have to be involved in their children's education if they're going to have success.
Ruth	I'm sure it will affect the quality of education at the school in general ... we may not feel the impact for a long time, or we may not even recognize it, but if school councils are impacting on the school, they're impacting on everyone.
Sylvia	There are benefits to doing it. I'm not just doing it because I'm told I have to ... it has it's place and it can influence education and make it better. I believe that it'll be an improvement, the more that parents get involved, and that'll be up to the parents to do some of that.
Wendy	It all starts with effective schools. That is a world-wide phenomenon ... the school improvement initiative. Whether you call it a school growth team or a school improvement team, you would have the names of all those parents and teachers ... to draw from for school council representation.

Paramount among Nancy's concerns in the wake of school council

legislation were student learning and the need to integrate representatives

from all stakeholder groups within her new advisory board. Paula's long-

standing support for equality in public education translated into council policy that endorsed improved student learning, inclusive recruitment, extensive stakeholder networking and care in preserving established standards of excellence.

In Ruth's academic community, student achievement was the main concern. With the introduction of school councils, a priority was placed on working within this new framework to enhance learning opportunities for all students. Ruth recognized the impact school council would have on all members of the school community. Identifying herself as the school's conscience, Ruth stood poised to reap the benefits of an expanded support network capable of suggesting and implementing new programs for her students. She also visualized council as a means of controlling single issue parents and converting their energies into activities that would benefit the entire school community.

Sylvia favoured full stakeholder representation and the equitable provision of opportunities for all students. She believed strongly in the educational value of meaningful dialogue among parents and teachers and visualized school council as an effective forum for developing it. Only as a fully integrated community did Sylvia feel that her school could best deliver an effective program that would maximize student learning.

Wendy's school council voiced strong support for the inclusion of all stakeholders in the formulation of school policy and procedure, stressing the importance of broad based council representation and system led improvements. Wendy recognized the advantages of involving experienced volunteers on school council and advocated recruitment among parents and teachers already initiated into collaborative teamwork, particularly those previously involved in her school growth team. Wendy also cited the need for

clear job descriptions as a mandatory factor in successful school council recruitment, and the need for system support in training new councilors.

As indicated in the following description of findings, collectively, these principals identified as top priorities the four areas of improving student learning, commitment to inclusive recruitment, building strong stakeholder networks, and preserving best practice .

Improving Student Learning

Karen believed strongly in the indirect benefits that accrue to students whose own parents chose to make a commitment as council representatives. This extra recognition and respect among their teachers and peers would translate into increased motivation in the classroom. Since Karen personally held school council members in high esteem, she set a tone of respect for volunteers and their families that was communicated throughout the school community. Karen also visualized school council's potential for improving schoolwide student learning through the involvement of representatives from all school stakeholder groups.

Nancy cited new opportunities for students to access administration as a strong council benefit.

> Some students came to me indirectly, removed from a class, with concerns with how the work was being taught and the [teacher's] attitude and the comment was, "We didn't want to complain." Now they weren't complaining; they had valid concerns. They weren't acting inappropriately, but they were dealing with other issues which really came down to making the classroom a safe, comfortable environment and that is important.

Nancy's encouragement in urging these students to bring their concerns before council enabled them to reach a receptive audience and strengthen their communication skills. Two of Nancy's student representatives on school council voiced a concern that they had felt unable to express through other channels.

> You're afraid to really say what you think to a certain
> teacher because you think that he or she's going to fail
> you. The student is afraid that will occur.

Nancy attributed her students' new found candor to their awareness of council's mandate within the school. The students' input enabled her to make better, more informed administrative decisions in relation to her teaching staff.

Paula welcomed the exchange between parents and teachers that school councils would foster, although she acknowledged how potentially threatening such exposure would be to teachers in the short run. Recognizing the complementarity of teacher expertise and parent knowledge, she supported their collaboration in meeting the needs of the whole child. Parents' unique ability to provide background information about children's academic, social and personal histories enabled them to give teachers insight into their students that would provide a broader foundation for individual instruction. Paula held that the involvement of parents as teaching partners was one of school councils' greatest strengths and for such an opportunity to be fully realized, it was necessary to recruit parents from all stakeholder groups.

Sylvia supported school council implementation as an effective force for improving student learning and teacher effectiveness. Although conscious of the pressure being exerted by the school board to have a council in place, Sylvia's endorsement was also grounded in the belief that school councils' mandate to incorporate representatives from all stakeholder groups would facilitate more productive parent involvement.

Commitment to inclusive recruitment

Karen favoured the Ministry's policy of including representative parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds. In order to successfully recruit from single parent and lower income families she recommended the provision

of support services that would enable stay-home mothers to become active council members.

> ... if there were just ... a hundred and fifty dollars, set aside for baby-sitting ... If we could just say, this is so important to us as a school that we'll baby-sit your kids for an hour and a half. But where are we going to get the money to do that unless it comes out of our own pocket again?

Another group Karen targeted for inclusion on school council were low income parents who lacked the self esteem to volunteer for school activities.

> Hopefully the City Square parents will say, "Hey, maybe they are willing to listen to us" ... I can't imagine anything being more significant than making these families feel they're an important part of the school and the school council can achieve that.

Karen felt strongly that all stakeholders were entitled to an equal voice on council and stressed the importance of creating non threatening opportunities for communication among all school stakeholders.

Within a climate of declining government support for education, Karen predicted the further redistribution of authority from Trustees to parent dominated school councils.

> I believe ... that school councils ... within five years will have the power ... similar to Australia, or New Zealand or New Brunswick ... Any jurisdiction that has had school councils or school advisory Boards has ended up giving them the power and the authority. The government will say this is the way it's going to be.

Karen chose a young police officer for the role of community representative hoping to quell student misbehaviour while generating respect for school council among her staff and students.

> It's really exciting ... we don't brag about our community police officer to other schools but we're just thrilled with how well it's working. The kids wrote a song, and they sang it. They just love him. They call him Constable Rob and you know he's a fixture here. He's not a stranger. So he's developing a rapport with the kids that they need.

Expanding the range of positive adult role models available to students within her school was one way in which Karen took advantage of school council to expand the network of school stakeholders.

With Monica's support and leadership, experienced parent volunteers in her school responded to the school council mandate by actively encouraging their peers to stand for election. Given what Monica considered to be sufficient direction from the Ministry, she favoured an emergent approach to defining councilors' roles.

> Developing both that knowledge and that skill base is required before people can say this is how we conceive of the role of community advisor or parent, or teacher representative on that advisory council ... I think there's enough structure in the direction that we'll get from the Ministry and the school Boards that we'll have a general working formula for implementation.

Strong organizational skills enabled Monica to oversee recruitment and anticipate early success with minimal supervision.

Responding to the provincial mandate to include all constituent groups within her school council, Nancy devoted her energy to the difficulty in attracting broad-minded parents to serve on council.

> The biggest challenge ... is to get parents involved ... How do we get parents who are so busy ... coming out and ... taking the time to learn? ... The second challenge is, you don't want single interest parents. You want parents who are interested ... in students in general, in children in general ... in curriculum.

Within these parameters, Nancy concentrated on targeting highly motivated people within all stakeholder groups.

> My biggest concern was getting the right people ... who would really be interested ... I felt personally that we have to make custodial staff feel a part of it ... Secretarial staff hadn't been included and we felt that they were part of the school ... The other group that is so important ... is the community link and our partnership which was formalized a couple of months ago when we opened our new lab.

Nancy visualized her school council as a way of allowing student input to help shape school culture and suggested one way to encourage students to become involved.

> Maybe we as a school council need to do a little random survey, with students in particular, sort of a "Did you know that we have a school council?" survey, a "Did you know that we have student representatives?" I really want more kids other than the student council to become involved ...

In order to extend the membership term of one of her student councilors, Nancy recommended that he become a community representative after graduation.

> He commented at our meeting last week. He said, 'Oh, I'd like to continue but I'm going on to university.' I got the brain wave ... through my involvement at the system level ...why couldn't we say that one community rep or adult could be a recent graduate?

By taking this approach to the role of community representative, Nancy simultaneously strengthened her school council and offered direct personal support to a valuable stakeholder.

Paula supported the introduction of a school council that would enable families from all of her student constituencies to help determine school policy.

> I see that a school should reflect the community, and a school council certainly is going to reflect the community ... It's important that it does.

Paula was determined that parents from all backgrounds have an opportunity to participate as respected members of her school council.

Despite firm support for parent participation on school council, Sylvia felt somewhat stymied by recruiting parents and convincing them of the importance of their commitment. She asked, "How do you have parents get involved and understand what an impact they can have and dedicate their time?" Like Paula, Sylvia identified the need to transform a culture of teacher

self-sufficiency into one supportive of parent teacher collaboration and broadly based community involvement.

Building stakeholder networks

In this connection Paula committed herself to creating better learning opportunities for all parents.

> I would hope that all parents would start to feel comfortable being in Fern Valley School ... if all the parents who came would want to be here ... because they wanted to learn ... That would make the school a terribly exciting place to be and as a result of parent involvement we would have a direct impact on students' learning.

Paula was confident that the school council would facilitate collaboration and the positive exchange of information in ways that had never happened before. Wendy encountered initial delays in securing a community representative partly because the requirements of the job were not clearly defined.

> ... we had someone lined up to be a community member and we had trouble getting a hold of him and then he just sort of evaporated, so we've not pursued that this year. I was a little uncomfortable with it but as I'm reading the directions that are now coming out I see that the school council should be choosing or electing their community rep so I think that'll be a good phase-in for next year.

Wendy exercised her own judgment in adjusting council policy to fit the exigencies of her particular school community.

Monica's confidence in the value of broadly based dialogue enabled her to feel positive about the unpredictable way council would impact on her thinking as principal.

> I don't know where it's going to lead but ... I think that discussion is healthy because it does create an awareness ... They'll have a lot of advice for us in terms of how to maximize our resources, how to add to them, and how we can reduce some of the [superfluous] things ... Once they know the problems involved, they'll have to help us decide where to focus our energies.

Monica welcomed council's mandate to consider the allocation of physical and human resources as an important step in the development of productive cooperation among volunteers and professionals.

Nancy anticipated that school council would provide an opportunity for all school stakeholders to work together more productively than they had in the pre school council days.

> ... whether we realize it or not ... parents, students ... feel a we/you [relationship] and I'm on one side as a principal, and they as a parent or a student are on the other, but we're working together and the council will facilitate this ... My goal is to empower the council to function independently ...I wasn't giving direction, but I thought maybe they'd wonder, "Why is she so quiet? ...Is she lazy or something now? Is she sick?" (Laughter) .

Nancy's decision to stop giving direction gave parents an opportunity to direct the course of conversation and assume the leadership role intended for them on council.

Nancy was quite taken with the way school council facilitated communication among people who had never before held a conversation.

> The key is that with a school council you have the three constituent groups talking ... a group of individuals, a representative group ... there's lots of noise and excitement, and interaction and commitment.

Sylvia voiced the hope that school councils would create effective stakeholder teams, not just loosely coupled networks. By matching school council's voice with her own, she was optimistic that all students' needs might be recognized and addressed. In addition to concern for her students with special physical and learning needs, Sylvia cited the importance of including those students who are self-isolates within the school community. She stated:

> There's always a student, or a few students in the school who are loners ... with different social skills. We talk about building inclusion for special ed. kids and yet we can't build inclusion for those students who are socially isolated ... Where does that come from? We're not teaching teachers to isolate these kids. School council could

> probably really help if the isolation of special ed. kids
> became a focus, but the school council ... I really hope, that
> when it speaks, it'll be the voice that'll be heard, not just
> mine. That's how I see it should happen.

Again echoing the theme of school conscience, Sylvia made it clear that, for her school council to be a positive agent of change, it must address both the physical and social needs of all members of her school community. Toward this end, Sylvia expressed the need for strong support at the system level.

Preserving Best Practice. Recognizing the recent strides in parent/teacher collaboration made by school improvement teams within her board, Monica favoured working school councils into existing infrastructure in order to take advantage of already successful relationships between parents and teachers. She stressed the importance of building effective working relationships on school council before attempting to set goals or objectives.

> The structure has to be there so it's almost like someone's
> coming and picking up a framework to be embellished in
> whatever way with the talents that they've got. That's the
> kind of business that you have to take care of before you
> get at ... the real work of the school council ... It's also a
> good way of getting discussion going so that we can see
> things from both sides, our side as well ...

Monica couched her commitment to school council in terms of previously successful experiences with collaboration.

> I guess it all depends on what your centre is. You either
> look at things positively or negatively. Never have I ever
> worked with parents and the community toward a common
> goal and not had the results be deeper and richer and more
> powerful for children than I could ever have made them
> by myself in isolation.

Monica cited her positive track record as a collaborative decision maker as shaping her receptivity to school councils and her feeling of confidence over being a school council facilitator.

Paula described her personal strategy for successful interaction with potentially difficult parents, a practice that would carry forward into the school council era.

> With single issue parents, I think you have to go directly to the person, maybe privately. Initially it's tough to do, but I think you're setting yourself up by ignoring the problem ... and it's my experience that when I've done that people are absolutely amazed that I know and that I'm going to talk to them about it ... if you encourage open discussion and a variety of views, you're going to come up with a better solution.

Paula was speaking from the experience of reintegrating a school community that had been bitterly divided just prior to her assuming the role of principal.

System Support for School Councils

Contradictory policy statements from the Ministry of Education, Board zone superintendents, the Board's school council steering committee, and the media diluted the delivery of an effective support program for principals. Inconsistencies about when school councils had to be in place, when parent elections had to have occurred by and how community representatives had to be selected were some of the main points of dispute. Principals, faced with interpreting conflicting policy mandates in the absence of consensus from their supervisors, took the initiative in directing council recruitment and election procedures as they judged most expedient within their own communities. The decision whether or not to participate in local training opportunities also varied from school to school, and not all principals who bought into Ministry or Board orientation programs found the experience beneficial.

Monica's beneficial experience with orientation was largely due to her positive approach to opportunities for personal growth. She evaluated the training options available to her school council and suggested some areas for future training that would benefit all schools in her region.

Like several of her colleagues, Nancy felt confounded by the timelines required for council implementation and unsupported at the system level. As an experienced principal, she exercised discretion in following Board policy.

Early training programs were inadequately planned and lacked substantive documentation by way of reference materials and implementation manuals. Paula specifically targeted enhanced participation at the regional level, a longer orientation process, and the need to teach communication skills as additional areas requiring immediate attention at the system level.

Ruth's approach to system resources focused on their need for support with scheduling, agenda guidelines, documentation and operating manuals for council volunteers, and greater input into the structure of training sessions.

Sylvia found the Board uncharacteristically lacking in support for the implementation of school councils. Although sympathetic to the inconsistent direction foisted on her superiors by the Ministry of Education, Sylvia would have appreciated more thought and preparation going into the training sessions and documentation made available at the school level. She specifically commented on the problems associated with the orientation program and lack of useful guidelines for use during initial council meetings.

Wendy's experience with the Board training session was unsatisfactory and she found the various manuals for council implementation somewhat impractical. Despite her willingness to involve members of her school community in accessing system support, Wendy did not find the opportunities for school council training advantageous. Individual attitudes toward system training are listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Attitudes toward system support during school council implementation

Karen	We did invite a parent to go to the Ministry session on change, at the beginning of the whole idea of school councils and working together, and she really saw that as beneficial, but I was really tense the whole time ... wondering whether the parent found the session useful.
Monica	The Board is planning on moving beyond just talking to administrators. ... they're saying they need leaders and they're going to provide more opportunities for principals to come with their school councils ... and give us some training so we'll know what we need ... Our trustees and our administrators have enabled our policies and procedures to have flexibility to allow for transformation rather than creation ... and for us to take the time that we need.
Nancy	I think you have to move through a growth period ... You can't hurry a group ... they have to learn what the issues are in a school, what's going on ... I've reflected a lot about the council because I think it's a structure with an incomplete formula. There may be a formula but the key thing is, if nobody comes to the meeting, if nobody wants to serve on council ... you've got to get the people.
Paula	... a session the Ministry put on for principals and school councils was really quite fine. I had gone thinking I'd only stay for the morning, but I ended up staying for the whole day because there were principals from not just our board, but from the other board, and from out in the area.
Ruth	There were a few areas the parents were very concerned about. They recognized that the document was very comprehensive ... but it just goes too far too quickly ... It's confused them at this point. They thought they knew what they were going to do and now they see their role has shifted from one of advisor to taking a lot more responsibility for things than they had ever intended.
Sylvia	... a parent was there, a teacher, a student and myself and I believe the custodian came. The Thursday night session was excellent. Friday, up until 12 it was good. After that we became a little frustrated because it became the Board's agenda, not ours ... We got some phenomenal, some excellent information, but we haven't had time though to sit down and apply this ... not as a group as a school ... I was really frustrated because the student came up and I could tell that the student, and the parents were going to think they had wasted their time here ...the student was the only student that age in the whole sessions ... and the custodian ... he ended up in a group that used a lot of big words ... You know I was hurting for all of them. They wanted, we all wanted to be together as a school.
Wendy	There was the one forum that was an evening one, and certainly a lot of people intended to go, and not as many people went as had indicated would go, so that was a little disappointment to me ... you know build small, and people have commitments and I don't like people to feel guilty.

Orientation Programs

Although Karen took advantage of the Ministry's one training session, it was an uncomfortable experience for her. Karen disliked the structure of school Board training programs for council volunteers, citing one training meeting that turned out to be nothing more than an unguided conversation.

> This year there were sessions that were coordinated by the Board and one was a 7:00 to 10:00 pm session one evening, a school evening, so I just told the staff that this was going on, I was going to go and I would bring back information. I sat with the group from Seven Maples [her former school] and ... it turned out people from different schools were just talking about how their councils worked and we weren't really there to hear how councils work.

Neither Karen nor several of the parents in attendance found this session instructive.

Karen's training experiences left her feeling uncertain about her approach to council implementation.

> I wonder whether I'm doing it right and whether I'm asking too much or not asking enough in terms of even scheduling the meetings ... We don't have a parents' group that meets once a month, so I begin to wonder ... I don't want to meet for the sole purpose of meeting and neither do parents, so I guess I'm just concerned that I want to be sure that we're meeting every parent's need and whether the advisory council is enough.

Karen's self doubt, fanned by exposure to other schools' integration of school council into multitiered volunteer organizations, characterized her desire to structure an inclusive school council, satisfying the needs of every family within her school community.

Monica explained how her Board would structure school council orientation and what the responsibilities would be for individual principals. The introduction of flexible policy and timelines provided Monica with the structural support she needed to ease her school community through the implementation process.

Paula described an orientation session in which she enjoyed professional dialogue with principals from outside of her own particular board. Paula took comfort in knowing that other principals were struggling to cope with some of the same problems that she was facing in her role as council facilitator.

Ruth objected to the Ministry's failure to provide the training it had promised for council facilitators. She related:

> Now, one of the problems I can see is in the [external] leadership ... the Ministry guaranteed training would be provided for all advisory council members ... we're [still] waiting for training. And then one of the last things I saw said ... principals would do the training now ... and I thought okay.

Ruth also criticized the board's approach to training as being improperly structured given the idiosyncratic needs of individual school communities.

> The training that was available prior to our council getting rolling was not training that we bought into ... So it was restrictive in that way. The timing is sometimes not right, and ... you can't problem-solve for a system and then apply it at the school level.

Collectively Ruth considered system attempts at training to have been unsupportive and a waste of time.

Sylvia described the Board sponsored session that she found disappointing because she had so little ownership in what was being discussed, and the advertised opportunity for her representatives to meet as a school did not materialize. Sylvia described such unwanted and unwarranted separation as very counter productive to the advertised goal of building community within individual school councils. In Sylvia's case, participation in the training session caused more harm than good and failed to address any of the procedural concerns already identified in anticipation of later steps in the implementation process.

The timing of the first orientation session did not coincide favourably with the implementation process at Wendy's school. Parents were generally feeling rushed into making a fuller council commitment and found the expectation to attend formal training very premature. Given the community's reluctance to participate more fully, Wendy felt squeezed between Board requirements and the knowledge that her parent community was more concerned with its upcoming amalgamation with a primary school than the provincial mandate to support school council.

Procedural Dilemmas

Karen anticipated that parent elections might pose a problem by placing too much pressure on shy, nonpolitical and unpaid volunteers.

> It's hard enough to get people involved ... but the school council is such a small part of the school itself, and you only have so many hours a day to devote to it ... I don't think anyone, with the socioeconomic situation as it is now and the pressures on the family, I don't think that they'll be rushing to be elected.

Karen also questioned two year membership terms for parents as being too short to enable parents to make an optimal contribution.

> They're only supposed to be in place for two years ... which to me is too fast. I don't see people champing at the bit to get involved. It takes a long time to have enough knowledge in how schools operate to be effective.

Nancy questioned the length of time available for council implementation. To her, the interval during which she was expected to establish an independent school council seemed far too short.

> I support the concept of school councils but don't necessarily support the time lines ... I believe that a group feeling has to evolve, and I think policies and procedures sometimes suggest that this happens more quickly than it really does ... you have to be very sensitive to who becomes involved and to their agenda ... you have to be careful that you don't start dealing with the paper part, the policy part, versus the people part.

Finding the implementation timeline unmanageable, Nancy disregarded it in favour of the need to develop relationships properly and plan carefully.

Paula predicted that the Ministry would eventually align its policy on deadlines for elections to school council more closely with the wishes of principals and parents in light of widespread objections.

> I suspect now the Ministry will start auditing, when they go to a school and talk to the principals and teachers and see what's in place.

She feared repercussions to those principals who chose to abide by the Board's more flexible guidelines while ignoring the Ministry mandate to hold elections for parent representatives by September 1996.

Foremost among the problems Ruth faced in launching her school council was finding a meeting time that was convenient for all of her stakeholders. She queried:

> Do we meet during the day? Do we meet during the evening? When are people willing to come? ... A number of people who came to the lunch time advisory committee worked during the day so this was part of their work day. They would still represent their community. ... we tried to entice people with a hot dog lunch ... But, if you meet during the school day ... you have to meet at lunch hour because the staff has to be back in school. If you meet in the evening ... it's not as easy, especially in the winter, especially when people have long distances to drive.

Ruth expressed concern over how to structure her council agenda in a way that would hold the attention of all stakeholders. She considered:

> On the other hand, I don't want people to come and be bored. People are so busy, they just don't want to go and sit at a meeting unless they feel that they can make a contribution and unless they're interested in what's going on.

Ruth also warned that if principals were not adequately prepared for their roles as council facilitators, parents would sense the lack of direction and be prone to argument.

> If the stage is not set and parents come in and they don't know their role and the principal doesn't know their role and they tend to get themselves involved in things that the school doesn't want them involved in particularly, then I can see there's just going to be conflict and you would not want them in the school. I can certainly see that.

Ruth objected to her board's shortsightedness in trying to convert school improvement teams into school councils and to the vagueness which she perceived in the Ministry's school council mandate.

> I think the attempt was made to minimize the amount of work ... to move from the school improvement team into an advisory council ... but I don't find it helpful in this particular school. ... We had some concerns about the objectives in particular. Is the advisory council an autonomous body that decides what it wants to do and within the guidelines of the Ministry what it chooses to advise on, or is it a working committee that will be given things to react to by the Board?

In Ruth's opinion, another major obstacle to successful orientation was the school council manual, Partnerships: The Formation and Maintenance of School Councils (The Lakehead Board of Education, 1996). Although it was a second generation guideline based heavily on the earlier document School Councils: Making Them Work (The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, 1995), most parents found its complexity overwhelming. Many parents felt overwhelmed and misled by the new role they were being expected to play without prior consent or adequate preparation.

In light of the way parents were being roughly herded into their role as school councilors, Ruth expressed reservations about the speed with which implementation was expected to occur.

> I think it's really important that you do things slowly and in the order that they need to be done, so you don't have to change your council because they're all so mad at you because you've misled them. The process has to be comfortable for everybody.

Ruth drew attention to procedural inconsistencies between the guidelines published by the Ministry and those circulated by the Board.

> We've been confused because the Ministry's saying one thing and our board has given us a different direction ... I think the direction from our own board seems to be to turn school improvement committees into advisory councils and to me, that's liking turning apples into oranges.

Ruth's objection was to imposing the school council mandate with its heavy responsibilities onto a voluntary, non-elected parent/teacher committee geared to single project curricular improvement.

Electing parents to school councils represented a substantial break with traditional Home and School style volunteerism.

> ... now we're forced to do a very formal process which is not an instructional leader kind of process ... I don't see having elections as a drawback because those people who are putting forth their names are going to give us 150%, because they're committed to the task and belong in the job ...

Sylvia had mixed feelings about the new political approach to parent representation on school councils.

In addition to the timing of school council training, Wendy pointed out the uselessness of being given the Board's implementation manual after her council had already been formed.

> I was thinking about that the other day because we received this wonderful binder about the school council and policies and all the support material and I thought well this was really nice, but it's after the fact. We've already started.

Despite what she perceived as an inadequate system support, Wendy reported that council implementation had posed no major problems for her.

Recommendations for Future Training

Karen showed a clear preference for being trained by one of several highly skilled individuals within her own Board, and for having money put at her disposal for use on site at her own school.

> There're a lot of skilled people in our Board ... I think with the experience people have with school improvement teams, we've sort of had a head start on working with parents and teachers together. ... I'm very comfortable with my school council ...We're just going to do it the way we think it should work at our school ... I'd rather have the time and money spent right here at my school ... as baby-sitting, food, money for brochures or whatever we want to do ... relief time for teachers ... as flexible as that.

Karen endorsed personalized, self-directed sessions during which her own council could meet and reflect on past practice.

> What I would have wanted was time to sit down and talk with my own team and say this is what I think we should be doing, and what do you think about this, and just some time to talk amongst ourselves ... I'm not afraid to say that we tried this and it didn't work and people were crabby and [laughter] they fought. That's part of the process and it's all part of learning. So the session didn't really meet my needs and I felt more frustrated than anything besides ... small schools like Seven Maples weren't represented

Karen's comments echoed several colleagues who favoured hiring local experts and having an in house budget to support council training activities. She proposed mounting specific programs to teach conflict management and consensus building in order to create an inclusive foundation for protecting the voice of all schools, regardless of size.

Monica favoured working with an external evaluator as a way of identifying specific training needs for her council.

> The opportunity to have a facilitator actually do some observing of the way that the different components of the school council operation function, and give feedback, would be extremely helpful ... The other thing would be to provide some training opportunities for school council ... practical skills are going to be extremely helpful because we're linked right into the school association. It's a risky

thing for people to be able to take a look at how they do things, and do some reflecting, but I think that also creates the most powerful learning for people.

Monica also focused attention on the need for high quality trainers and supported the idea that facilitators have a strong say in what kind of training their own school councils would receive.

> In future training programs, the quality of the trainers is essential ... hiring people on a consultative basis who come with the proper credentials is really important ... some data has to be gathered from the school councils themselves ... they have to keep going back to the well and finding out what people need.

Monica helped initiate a successful approach to long term council development by identifying an ongoing need for evaluation and training.

Given the hindsight of a few council meetings, Nancy was alerted to many councilors' need for specific training in committee procedure.

> We have to remember that people come to school council with very varied backgrounds and expertise ... We're going to need more training as we become more sophisticated. ...I wouldn't force a parent to chair if a parent hasn't had the experience.

Nancy targeted future training as a way of helping her councilors learn to understand and respect each other's backgrounds while becoming familiar with the skills required to perform specific roles on council.

Paula suggested that instruction in communication skills be made available to school council volunteers.

> At the Board level there need to be more training opportunities for parents and council as a whole on conflict management, appreciating other viewpoints, developing trust ... setting common goals ... it's very easy when you have a common issue. If you say the school's going to be closed ... everybody's there. (Laughter) Everybody's working.

Paula advocated system support in training her council members to overcome philosophical differences and competing personal agendas.

Ruth's priorities for future training focused on standardizing committee procedure.

> The sort of training I think these people need is on
> Robert's Rules of Order or something ... how to run a
> meeting, how to set an agenda, not let's get together and
> talk about what our role is, and what we should be involved
> in. And yet those are the sorts of workshops that tend to
> occur for people.

Ruth expressed concern that the failure to provide training in basic committee relations would disadvantage some of her stakeholder groups and defeat the purpose of the school councils.

Exploring New Opportunities for Dialogue

School councils not only opened up but primed previously untapped channels of communication among school stakeholders. Arising from such unprecedented access to collaborative discussion were issues concerning early council meetings, the discovery of a common mission and obstacles to collaboration. Some of these concerns are capsulized in Table 4.

Karen welcomed the expanded communications network that school council injected into her school. She was convinced that more involvement from teachers, parents, and community representatives would improve students' learning and make for better school leadership.

In the expanded area of communication and collaborative decision making, Monica focused on creating a common mission, strengthening the voices of parents, and avoiding some of the problems associated with governing by consensus. Her system responsibilities made it natural for Monica to visualize school councils as part of a collective network of school governance which extended from the Ministry into the classroom.

Although personally supportive of the school council mandate, as a principal Nancy was forced to accept added responsibilities and find solutions

on her own to complications among council members arising from early attempts at collaboration. A tradition of distrust among parents and teachers initially made it extremely difficult to facilitate productive conversation on council between members of these two groups.

Table 4
Some concerns expressed during early council dialogue

Karen	When you look at Maslow's hierarchy [of human needs], you certainly have to have all those things in place before students can learn ... Parents may be leading us in a fruitless direction, because they don't recognize learning priorities, or how learning is connected to other more basic needs.
Monica	The impact for trustees and administrators is going to be really powerful, because what's going to happen is that the people in the community, empowered by all of these skills and all of this knowledge, are going to be able to get the attention of the administrators at the Board office and at the Ministry of Education.
Nancy	When we started out as a very quiet group you could have heard a pin drop. I can clearly remember when and where and asking myself, "Oh my God, will this work?" And now when I think of the number of meetings we've had, far more than the minimum which was four per year ... the fact that the people are talking, interacting, communicating, is incredible.
Paula	... community use of school facilities ... our place is rented out all the time, but I bet people don't know that ... one of the items [principals are expected to provide] is development of professional activities, and that's what you have to make sure that parents are part of, that they don't respond to on an ignorant basis.
Ruth	I can't say that I've experienced anything that I've considered problematic, probably because I've held off to the point where I felt comfortable ... I wanted to make sure I had a good understanding and when I think particularly about the way I started the council here, it was very directed.
Sylvia	Before parents and teachers can work together you have to have a common goal, a common mission and in the case of one school where there was the harassment issue, they had a common mission ... In our case, where you don't have a catalyst like that, we have to start from ground zero for what our common beliefs are, and make sure we share them.
Wendy	Wendy had no comment on these issues..

With the advent of school councils Paula found herself at liberty to discuss issues with staff and parents that had previously been reserved for administrative eyes only. This change of venue heralded opportunities for

community wide planning and greater parental influence but also created new avenues for conflict.

Ruth described her early council experiences as well planned and clearly directed. She clearly welcomed the formalization of collaboration among all of her stakeholder groups.

Most significant among the changes in school culture posed by the introduction of school councils was the expectation that parents and teachers would now collaborate as equal partners in the decision making process. Although the onus placed on both groups to lay aside former prejudices in favour of unwavering trust and openness was enormous, a few brave souls took up the torch and made the commitment to effective school councils. Their efforts resulted in stressful, though often effective results. Sylvia shared elements of her council's early attempts to establish consensus.

Early Council Meetings

Nancy described her first council meetings as initially painful encounters in which everyone felt awkward and unsure of their positions. Ruth described the smooth implementation of her school council, attributing the lack of difficulty to her clear instructions as chair of the first meeting. Subsequent conflict did arise, however, among parents who misinterpreted council's mandate. Ruth described a meeting in which parents moved to bar her from requiring students to move their desks to a new classroom at the end of term.

> I said that it was important that I heard your views and that I would act on them, but not because you were making a motion. So that particular message got across pretty loud and clear (laughter) and it was quite funny actually. But those are the sorts of things that parents have to be reminded of. This is your role, to advise. You don't make those decisions.

Countering in this way, Ruth reminded council members of their status as advisors only.

In Search of a Common Mission

Karen's vision of school council reflected the opportunity for teacher representatives to have direct input into the decision making process within the school. Karen put equal faith in the contribution that parents had to make on school council, trusting that, with time, parents too would acquire the confidence necessary to raise issues for discussion without first garnering the principal's approval.

Monica visualized school councils as useful vehicles for improving communication among all school stakeholders including trustees and Ministry personnel. Monica also believed that school councils would create more decentralized, inclusive channels of communication and initiate decision making on a community-wide basis. She believed that her administration would be strengthened by this feedback.

> If we have a really good path into the community via the people who are on our school council, we'll benefit from a chance to gather information, talk about how people think things should be done, identify what we need more of, what we do well, and what we don't do well ... Then the administration of the school and the staff can put that into action.

Though favouring this forum for direct discussion, Monica worried about how she would facilitate respectful and legitimate communication among the very diverse group of stakeholders on her own school council.

> How do you create mutual respect so that people will listen to rather than confront each other? ... we have a really diverse group and I think my job is to help those people to work as a unit ... the greatest challenges ... are how to find a way to know what our teaching staff think, what our parents think in our community ... we only have a few people actively involved and how do we know what the great silent majority is thinking?

Monica expressed ambivalence over the way school councils were creating a further layer of bureaucracy between administration and the classroom.

> I think that the further away your administration is from
> the action which is between the teacher and the classroom,
> the less you tend to have a grip on the reality of what it's
> like to be a child who's learning.

To Monica, the extra burden school councils were imposing on principals seemed at this point to outweigh their potential benefits as administrative aids. Referring to early council meetings, Paula welcomed the relaxation of traditional taboos in favour of more open discussion about formerly classified issues such as school performance on standardized tests.

> In the past, we didn't hang our dirty laundry out in public.
> Well now we are ... schools are talking about their results
> in terms of system averages ... That would never have been
> shared in the past, ever, whereas now what we're doing is
> saying that these are our difficulties and we need to come
> up with some solutions.

Paula emphasized her administration's reorientation to an expansive, inclusive process of identifying and solving problems.

Ruth supported the openness precipitated by school council cherishing the opportunity to involve all stakeholders in discussions that had previously been off limits to non-administrators.

> It's an opportunity to bring up issues that don't come up in
> any other forum and have them responded to by a group of
> people who are not represented in any other way ... This is
> a real luxury ... This is the sort of involvement we've
> always wanted to encourage but never had a legitimate
> means of recognizing ...

Ruth advocated the creation of school councils because she saw them as a forum for improved decision making.

> Parents will be able through contacts with their friends to
> bring back concerns to the larger group, to say this is
> what I'm hearing in the community from a couple of
> people or one person even, and is this a general concern?
> ... I think the advisory council's going to be giving us
> advice on things like what parents value and what sorts of
> values they want to see us reinforcing at the school.

Like many of the respondents in this study, Ruth was optimistic about council's role to provide her with valuable and otherwise unavailable information.

After only a few meetings, Ruth praised the quality of communication within her school council, attributing constructive changes in her professional outlook to relationships and experiences within this group of advisors.

Sylvia described school council implementation from the standpoint of generating shared goals and the need to establish shared beliefs. In addition to common beliefs, Sylvia stressed the importance of building trusting relationships among teachers and parents in order to create an atmosphere conducive to collaboration and collective decision making.

> I think the school council is going to take a while to build those trusting relationships ... for teachers to have enough self-confidence to express themselves and not feel as if they're going to be knocked down by parents ... it's hard to deal with parents who are negative about the issues that council needs to discuss, and this type of parent was one of the voluntary co-chairs. So that sort of puts a different light on it the whole time and it's really hard to get over that.

Sylvia cited the lack of cohesiveness that she perceived in school administration, welcoming school council as an opportunity for more coordinated and successful school government.

> I really think the difference right now is it's ... ad hoc, crisis management. When there's an issue, parents and teachers get together and they solve the mystery. School council will formalize the overall running operation of a school and its community. There's still going to be some ad hoc decision-making ... but I think school council will focus the operation, what we believe in, and therefore, how we operate as a result of our beliefs.

Obstacles to Collaboration

The council mandate to engage in shared decision making created a problem for Karen that was shared by several principals.

> ... to the Old Boys network ... school councils might have
> been seen as being very threatening because
> [traditionally] the principal had made all the decisions, did
> not consult, and what he said went ... I also saw it as a
> threat and I was quite concerned about that ... though I see
> some of my colleagues who used to be in that Old Boys club
> running quite successful school councils, which is to their
> credit.

Not only were principals threatened by council's looming authority,

Karen's teaching staff raised objections to the council mandate.

> My sense is that the staff is generally okay with parents in
> the school. Some aren't comfortable. I think they're going
> to realize that no more support is available, that we really
> need to depend on our parents to help our kids out.

This reference to an absence of support alluded to the impact of funding

cutbacks, decreased teacher and student contact with curriculum partners,

and higher student/teacher ratios in the classroom.

Karen was also concerned about needing to limit the demands that

school council would put on her parents and staff.

> The parents are really young women, and I don't want to
> burn them out ... I'm very aware of the time constraints on
> parents and staff ... I'm wiped after school. I just want to go
> home myself.

Next she raised the issue of potential conflict among stakeholders that would

impede constructive decision making.

> As an advisory group somebody might come up with some
> idea that is so bizarre that ... there's not even any use
> talking to the teachers about it. So how do you work that
> out ... if your members are really assertive and aggressive?
> ... I think most principals ... have so many skills ... that we
> probably already have the answer.

Despite her extensive training as a principal, Karen felt anxious about

handling aggressive parents who might try to take advantage of their position

on school council. She also experienced ambivalence over consensual decision

making with parents who might be very ignorant of school policy and

procedure.

Describing her personal feelings about being a school council facilitator, Karen depicted implementation as a very stressful, intrusive process that she had no control over. Even after a couple of parents indicated their support, Karen continued to find the challenge very stressful and the rewards not immediately apparent.

> The development of the school council in terms of either being an intrusion or an opportunity ... was an intrusion. I found that I was quite resentful, that it was just another thing that we had to do and I didn't like that.

Karen's first council meeting was characterized by considerable tension between parents and teachers.

> At first it was really awkward, because nobody really knew anybody and the women representing the parents were all brand new parents ... All their children are young and they themselves are young. They appear to be very keen about what's happening at the school. Initially, they were a little intimidated because they weren't familiar with the teachers and those relationships had to grow.

The parent and teacher volunteers on Karen's school council did not know each other and they all lacked experience as school committee members.

Though personally predisposed toward collaboration, Monica pointed out that disagreements arising between individuals or constituent groups might pose problems or disrupt council meetings..

> When people are volunteering their time, they do so with a great commitment to the learning of their children, but they don't necessarily share the same philosophy, nor do they necessarily have a common ability to conceptualize the situation ... that can lead to confrontation.

Monica reported that her early council meetings were dominated by volunteer conflict and were lacking in productivity. One issue she faced was disarming parents' objections to having an unpopular teacher serve on council.

> Some days, it doesn't feel like you're getting that far. You have to allow for conflict and change. (Laughing) Those things cannot be rushed ...

Another challenge arose in dealing with parent volunteers who had difficulty establishing positive relationships with others in a committee setting.

> The vast majority of parents in the school are supportive
> of their teachers' initiatives, although there is a minority
> who have ongoing objections. Often those communication
> problems have existed for them for their entire lifetimes ...
> and so we have to help people like that as well, as much as
> we can.

Many of these difficulties sprang from the realignment of communication channels caused by the introduction of school councils.

Nancy's experience with council implementation differed somewhat from what she had been led to anticipate by Ministry documents. The time required to establish successful group dynamics had been understated and no incentives had been offered to encourage parent participation.

Nancy expressed concern about council's potential as a forum for negativism toward teachers and school procedures.

> You've also got to realize you're dealing with real people
> and ... there's a lot of sensitivity in terms of parents
> talking openly with teachers and vice versa, and .. people
> will be elected ... you have to be sensitive to the fact that
> you don't want them to use this council process as a
> venting.

Nancy faced a further challenge given the dynamics between her Home and School Association and school council. The Home and School parents, with a coordinating body at the provincial level and a history of being the senior advisory body to the principal, were loath to give up their authority and switch allegiance to a new and as yet unproven advisory council.

> The dilemma is, if you have an issue you'll have to take it to
> both groups, because the Home and School has the
> provincial link. So I see that occurring.

Jurisdictional disputes, challenges to traditional parent teacher relationships and participation of parent councilors unfamiliar with basic committee

protocol presented presiding principals with formidable obstacles to early council implementation.

The historically strained pattern of communication among many parents and teachers lay the groundwork for one of the biggest challenges facing Paula in her role as council facilitator..

> I think we've missed the boat ... as a result of saying that teachers know what's best for your kid ... teachers have actually come to believe that ... and we no longer have the support of society as educators. Being a teacher is not a popular profession these days.

Now, by forcing teachers into frequent dialogue with parents, the introduction of a school council created defensiveness among some teachers and put extra demands on Paula to coach her staff in collaborative thinking. She stated:

> I also believe that we have a very educated group of parents and that they're not going to accept us as being the gospel for anything. They're going to question what we do and I think teachers find that threatening. In fact it amazes me. Teachers who have been teaching for twenty years ... terror ... cold terror runs through their heart when there's a phone call from a parent or a parent questions ... and I think teachers become very defensive about their program. I say ... "Don't become defensive. Listen to what the parent's saying, and then think about how we might work together."

Disarming parents and teachers was a major concern of Paula's as she attempted to facilitate productive relations among council representatives. Paula's frustration was less a product of impatience than dread over the likelihood that uninformed parent councilors would make shortsighted decisions and prove incapable of carrying out their objectives without supervision by their principal. That parents would feel ill equipped or unprepared was unlikely to deter them from service on school council, but hostility from teachers might prove extremely troublesome. Paula explained:

> People are not comfortable, see I mean teachers. We all say, "Oh, parents are very welcome in schools. We want parents

in school." Well I think we give it a lot of lip service and
I've been quite open about this, not just in the schools but
at the Board level. We play the game, but we really don't
put a lot of heart into it.

Paula also identified the friction with teachers caused by some parents'

single-mindedness, lack of respect for teachers' professional training, and

virtual ignorance of the learning process.

Some parents volunteer for school service because they
have a personal ax to grind, single issue parents ... It's a
matter of educating the parent about the reality of a
classroom, and of teachers dealing with a wide range of
kids ... It's really important for parents to know and
understand that when it's Grade 3 on the door, you still
have students inside who are functioning at a Grade 1 or
Senior Kindergarten level as well as at a Grade 6 level, and
the span becomes greater and greater.

As obstacles to collaboration went, overcoming parents' mistaken perception

that each grade represented as clear a delineation of student ability as it did

curriculum content was probably the most challenging. Once parents began to

understand the considerable challenge facing teachers from this learning

readiness perspective alone, common ground for constructive dialogue could

be reached.

Sylvia attributed her mild reluctance to participate in decision making

by consensus to an unpleasant experience with one of her parent volunteers.

The only situation I had was with the president of our
Home and School last year ... at a school improvement
forum ... this person wanted complete control over the
group ... she was very much a person who believed in the
title of president and we were all subordinates and that's
how we were treated and that's how the parents on that
committee were treated. It was awful.

Sylvia's ongoing concern stemmed from the unbridled opportunity parents

would have to speak their minds during council meetings.

Restructuring School Governance

The immediate issues accompanying school council implementation all

arose from the forced redistribution of power away from the principal and

into the hands of parents, teachers, students and community representatives. Major themes included expanding the role of parents, implications for teachers, redefining the principalship and direct benefits for students. Individual responses to these issues are highlighted in Table 5.

Monica fully endorsed the way school councils would help parents work together with the school community. Her concerns had to do with the extra pressures councils would place on teachers and principals who were already feeling pressured, threatened and potentially undermined by unprecedented cutbacks in provincial funding for public education.

School councils heralded changes in school procedure that would impact heavily on parents, teachers, principals and students. Nancy expressed concern over the growing role parents would be expected to play, the pressures being placed on teachers, the simultaneous loss of control and increase in responsibility for principals and the potential benefits that councils would confer on students.

School wide dissemination of the authority of the principalship manifested itself as both threatening and appealing. While creating pressures and opportunities for teachers, principals, students and parents, in Paula's mind, this unprecedented redistribution of power, posed the greatest threat to teachers. Ruth welcomed school council policy as an improvement in school administration, favouring the direction of its stakeholders over the influence of traditional Home and School associations. She embraced this opportunity for parents to move beyond personal issues into the realm of improved learning for their whole school. Sylvia welcomed parents into the administrative process, anticipating the advantages of more broadly based decision making, the opportunity for closer working relationships, and the advantages to students of greater parental involvement.

Table 5
Individual responses to restructuring school governance

Karen	I see it as an opportunity to engage parents in the life of the school ... through knowing what's going on and why we do things the way we do to get them on our side, or whether it's a hands-on experience in the school ... I was thrilled after our last meeting ... we broke through the ice. Parents started saying, 'Can I talk? Can I bring up a couple of things that I've been thinking about?' ... I was just hoping it wasn't really stupid. (Laughter)
Monica	I think if we do things in a focused way, taking on small projects, parents will know that the school is a place that listens to their concerns, that it has a body that gives advice, and communicates back to them what the results are of any initiatives that they undertake.
Nancy	I think that educators, especially at the secondary level, are very content driven because there are guidelines and material to cover within 110 hours. With the direction that we now face for the 21st century, if teachers hear from the students and the public, they will start recognizing that they have to be accountable. They have to listen, they have to hear
Paula	... it seems to me that the people who seem to be struggling most are men ... who were appointed 10 or 20 years ago ... Whereas I think with the newer women principals we have a tendency to be more nurturing and open to working together ... I have worked with some women who need to have tight control as well and that's part of the issue ...
Ruth	But you know, parents are not going to be involved in everything in a planned way. They're going to have to be selective and I'm not going to take on the responsibility for seeing the outcomes or directing them towards outcomes. They have to come up with those things themselves, where they want to be involved.
Sylvia	I see already, the two parents that have been on the committee this year, the one was very, very new and stepped into the middle of the process and certainly felt ... shy. She is a professional, so recognizing my own way, when it's something new, you sit back and listen, and I have no doubt that person will be very, very effective.
Wendy	Wendy had no comment on these issues.

Expanding the Role of Parents

With the selection of her community representative, Karen overcame

the feeling of being threatened by her school council. So positive was her

students' reaction to "Constable Rob", that Karen began to anticipate school

council as a comfortable forum in which parents could ask questions and

share ideas. She now felt confident in leading the implementation process through to a successful conclusion.

Karen shared another positive experience in which a previously reticent parent had gained enough confidence through exposure at council meetings to ask a question.

> One of our parents wanted to make some suggestions so she referred back to a Board document saying, "You know, we are an advisory group ... so I'm bringing a couple of things to your attention and I wonder if we could discuss them?" It was really a breakthrough.

To Karen, school council also seemed to accommodate potentially difficult parents.

> That mum ... may have had a personal ax to grind but she never brought it up at council ... I don't think parents would be that aggressive at a council meeting ... that might be my naiveté but it might be because I'm saying to them, 'We're here, we're figuring this out together.' (Laughing)

Karen expressed hope that the comfort felt by her parent volunteers was based on trust, on a belief that they would never be put down for making respectful contributions during a council meeting.

Karen targeted positive changes in parental attitude as one of the greatest benefits of having a school council. She visualized parents becoming advocates not just for their own children but for other parents and for the school as an interconnected community of learners.

> When they hear that school council has been responsible for revising the school code of behaviour, or some budget issue ... I would like them to say that, "My kids are being looked after because we not only have the teachers and the administration looking after them, but we have parents there who are working in the best interests of their children and they'll look after mine too."

Given parents' increasing responsibility as policy evaluators, trainers and council chairs, Karen's primary objective for them was to become independent and skilled committee members.

> What I wanted to see this year was some parents wanting to coordinate PD [professional development] for parents ... cooperative learning, computers in the classroom ... I'm anxious to get things moving but I realize that change has to be slow and you have to give people a chance to get to know each other really before they're willing to take on responsibilities and trust one another.

Monica liked the way school councils would strengthen communication among parent volunteers. Monica envisaged the responsibility for giving parents feedback/recognition for their efforts as something to be shared between the principal and the school council.

With the introduction of school councils, Nancy felt that parent volunteers stood to inherit a blend of duties previously carried out by principals and school trustees.

> It's important to have the community involved. I can't as principal get on television and say, "My goodness, this is a wonderful school." I think it's important that other people do it, so their role will change in that sense.

Nancy foresaw council's mandate as a means of engaging parents as public relations advocates, relieving her of the sole burden of championing her school within the community. Ruth was conscious of the responsibility that parents would eventually have to take for setting council agendas and supervising council driven initiatives. Unlike some of her colleagues, Ruth had no compunctions about removing herself from the responsibility of setting council's goals and monitoring its outcomes.

In describing the heightened role parents would play in directing school policy Ruth assumed the vantage point of one year in the life of her school council.

> I think that when we look back in hindsight, a year from now, we'll see a lot of things that would not otherwise have been accomplished simply because parents have brought forward some things that are of concern to them. ... I think the outcomes have to be determined by the council, what they want to accomplish, and then in hindsight we'll see if they've accomplished them. Probably they won't

accomplish everything they want to, but they will
accomplish things they didn't expect to.

Ruth's tolerance for risk and belief in the virtue of parent engagement in
student learning enabled her to function successfully amidst the onslaught of
unpredictable changes precipitated by school councils. Her projected optimism
created an air of expectancy that provided badly needed support for parents
and a sense of security for teachers and students.

Sylvia embraced the way school councils would not only expand the
focus of parent energy from fund raising to policy review, but systematically
attract a new breed of parents with previously untapped talents.

These parents don't want anything to do with fund raising.
They want to get down to the brass tacks of what we're
teaching and how we're doing it. These are policy makers
and would be more interested in procedures ...

Sylvia also cited these parents' interest in curriculum development and
delivery, and in how time is spent in school by all stakeholders.

Implications for Teachers

Karen viewed council participation as an unprecedented opportunity
for teachers who wished to engage in discussion at the system level while
remaining actively involved with students in the classroom. She described
teachers' participation on council as a way for them to gain stature among
parents and enhance their own sense of personal worth.

Teacher learning is being affected by school councils. Just
listening to what is going on in the system is good for them
too ... it might give them more opportunities to learn ... to
share what they know so they shine in front of parents ...
How does that kind of public respect and recognition
contribute to learning? I think it makes for a better
atmosphere in the school because everyone feels valued.

In addition to the positive force that higher teacher esteem would
generate in the classroom, Karen predicted that opportunities for teachers to

demonstrate leadership as concerned educators would result in more constructive relationships among teachers and parents.

> I think school council facilitates teachers' relationships with parents beyond their own classroom and that parents will get to know teachers as being real people instead of crabby people ... as teachers who want to contribute to the life of the school and who are concerned about student learning. Also I think it gives teachers an opportunity to show leadership skills.

Karen suggested that by sitting on school councils, teachers might enhance their reputations schoolwide, gaining increased respect and recognition among parents, teachers, and students.

> At a higher level in the community there's some recognition that school council plays an important role in the life of a school ... teachers belong to the school council and their involvement is appreciated.... They're first to receive any information before other staff members do, so hopefully that would show them that they're important to us.

Making staff feel important and supported was one of the cornerstones of Karen's principalship.

Monica articulated a firm belief in the power of school councils to improve the quality of teaching in schools.

> It would be really wonderful to see school councils supporting teachers in an informed and productive way, because whether we like it or not, the community brings much power to bear on the performance of teachers.

Monica warned that the presence of a school council might be unwelcome to some teachers. She feared that the pressure of increased parental scrutiny might prove disturbing to experienced teachers used to a high level of independence and disinclined toward changes in procedure.

> I think teachers are in a very fragile state right now. They have huge stresses upon them. They bring with them, because of their average age, a remembrance of things past, a reality of what today is like to live in by comparison, and in some cases, a fear of what next year will bring.

Monica cautioned repeatedly that the amount of uncertainty surrounding the teaching profession was demoralizing and counterproductive.

Nancy was convinced that school councils represented a positive change for teachers, giving them new opportunities to work with parents, students and other community stakeholders.

> You're changing hats, and that's okay because I feel much ownership and excitement, and I checked it out with the one teacher [who was serving on council] and he said, "Oh yes!" and his face just lit up. He said, "I've enjoyed the parents, I've enjoyed the students" ... and that's what's different.

Before the existence of school council, this teacher's contact with parents and students was restricted to his own classes and limited by the mutual expectation that he would only discuss curriculum objectives and student performance.

Nancy also welcomed school council as a potentially nurturing environment for teachers in which they would get professional feedback and personal affirmation from parents and colleagues.

> I think a good teacher will become even better ... People will mention the best teacher they ever had and school council will create an opportunity for these people. You don't get much recognition as a teacher. The greatest compliments I've received are from students whom I taught twenty years ago. They say, "Oh, I remember you. You were terrific!" and I think well that only took twenty years." (Laughter)

On the subject of increased teacher accountability Nancy stated that the school council would bring welcome recognition to many but formidable criticism to those who had failed to remain conversant with the key issues facing contemporary society. Despite the hard work in store for a nonproductive minority, Nancy favoured school council implementation and the advantages that it would offer to most teachers.

Paula supported greater teacher involvement in the school leadership process. She cited the excellent contributions made by teachers on her school

improvement committee as grounds for promoting staff continuity during the transition to school council governance. She stated:

> I would hope that the school improvement reps would continue next year because it's the comfort level and knowing these people that's really, really important. Once people trust each other and feel they can communicate easily, then you can get back to business ... it wouldn't be a drastic change.

On the other hand, Paula raised the problem that public opinion toward teachers is not necessarily supportive. Paula spoke of council as a threat to teachers because of the pressure they would face from parents about programming, pedagogy, evaluation and curriculum choices.

> I do not view council as a threat but teachers find it threatening. Teachers struggle with parents who are going to be telling them what to teach, how to teach. They struggle with what decisions must, should be made at the school.

Of mutual concern to administration and teachers was the danger of unintentionally breaching student or teacher confidentiality. Paula commented:

> ... interestingly, as we led up to our big fund raiser, we did have teachers who made what I think were inappropriate comments within earshot of parents and I think you have to be very careful. Teachers have to be careful. Parents have to be careful, because you all have to work together ... Many teachers are nervous about school councils ... concerned about it as more and more parents become involved in the school ... One of the teachers said that they thought the staff room was supposed to be for staff and not for parents.

Although Paula sympathized with the pressures teachers were facing from increasing parental scrutiny, particularly in relation to the loss of privacy and opportunity for professional dialogue, in her mind these inconveniences did not outweigh the importance of parents learning to work collaboratively with teachers.

Ruth voiced skepticism about the general value of a school council to the teachers on her staff. Although genuinely interested in new ideas, Ruth maintained a cautious level of expectation when it came to altering the course of administration in her school. She speculated:

> How useful is it going to be to the teachers? I have no idea. We're not there yet. I could tell you maybe next year if you come back, but I don't want to try and anticipate things that may not happen. I have no idea. Maybe it's going to flop but I'm not worried about it.

Ruth also questioned what advantages would accrue to teachers who were elected to school council. She contrasted the pleasure derived from instructing children to that gained from committee work, down playing the status of a seat on council.

> What personal benefit is there, or satisfaction even, from serving on an advisory council that you wouldn't get from conducting the choir with a group of kids? To me it's not a status position. It's not elevated in any way.

Redefining Principalship

Karen visualized school council placing additional demands on her to provide parents with an opportunity for a virtual daily evaluation of her performance. She responded to her own heightened exposure to parents by attempting to project an attitude of open-mindedness, receptivity and support for inclusive stakeholder collaboration.

> It will have a real impact on my role as a school principal, keeping us on our toes, keeping us accountable. It sets a tone throughout the community that we're willing and ready and open to hearing from parents, that we're approachable ... it gives a strong message that we're willing to work together ...

Chair of her own school council until a parent felt prepared to assume the position, Karen expressed eagerness to relieve herself of that role and determination to evaluate her council's first year of operation.

> At this point I chair the meetings and plan the agenda and I want that to change, probably by just raising it at a

> council meeting, perhaps the last one. I'd like to review
> the year, how things have been going ... and how I can do
> better. That's always scary, but that's the way you learn.

In committing her school and herself to an annual evaluation, Karen revealed the depth of commitment to academic performance and personal excellence.

In her capacity as school council facilitator, Monica welcomed the opportunity to exercise leadership and the feeling of liberation that came from being able to share the burden of office.

> ... for me the greatest impact is watching other people
> develop skills, whether they're communication, technical
> or processing skills ... because once they click, they can
> put them into their repertoire of strategies for
> communicating with other people ...

She was very positive in describing the role of council facilitator/chair as an opportunity to withdraw from debate, provide direction when asked, and lead council through consensus to accomplishment.

> The other thing that has been very freeing is the fact that
> I have stated that I am the facilitator ... That allows me to
> play a helpful role ... and to enable council to say we've
> gone through a process and with one voice this is what we
> are saying ... and you can put that down in writing because
> we believe we have talked the whole thing through. We
> are all comfortable with this.

Monica found satisfaction in the way school council enabled all stakeholders to develop their analytical and communication skills, and found shared responsibility for school leadership an acceptable and personally satisfying alternative to isolated decision making.

One of Nancy's major objections to her relations with a school council was that it would distract her from keeping focused on improving the learning performance of students within her school.

> We get so caught up as educators in the process, the
> contract, the legal end of it, that we don't stop and ask
> what's best for kids ... sometimes we turn around and say
> well that's how the contract is set up. We assume that we
> know everything that's going on, that we have all the

> information. Do I think it's right? No, and yet my hands
> are tied.

Nancy's exasperation stemmed from a feeling of frustration over being held simultaneously responsible for the implementation of a school council and the administration of quality education within her school community.

Disregarding the Ministry's pressure to activate fully independent councils, Nancy cautioned that school councils should not be allowed to involve themselves in decision making for which they were not properly prepared.

> What we have to be careful of is that the provincial policy
> and our Board policy outline all of the things that council
> can deal with ... for example, dealing with the school code
> of student behaviour ... Curriculum, school budget
> priorities, program goals and priorities are areas in which
> you need some learning .... Parents have got to know how
> much money we get and what our curriculum priorities
> are, that they're cyclical, not the same every year ...
> There's so much for them to learn before they start
> making decisions ...

In continuing to cite curriculum development, budgeting and school climate initiatives as areas in which uninformed parent participation would be damaging and demoralizing, Nancy voiced strong reservations about school council's capacity for helping her make better decisions in most areas of school governance.

Using school board amalgamation as the backdrop to school council development, Paula expressed concern over principals' loss of control within their own schools, and their diminishing presence as individuals within expanding school board catchment areas.

> ... my sense when I've talked to other principals is that
> they seem to be really concerned about losing power,
> losing authority ... They're really struggling with this
> concept of a school council because they're not willing to
> ... reach out and work with parents. They want to have the
> parents on their terms and I think those days are gone ... I
> think we have to be working as true partners ... If you're

> going to only give it lip service ... parents become very
> frustrated and of course it's not going to get off the ground
> and maybe that's the intent of some of the principals who
> feel threatened by that loss of control.

Paula identified longer serving male principals as being more reluctant to relinquish their power and cited newer female principals as being typically better collaborators. Paula's view that some women and most men are loath to relinquish the traditional power of the principalship communicated her ambivalence over councils' ability to make a positive contribution to public education.

Ruth expressed concern about the extra burdens placed on principals during the early stages of council implementation.

> They're still relying on me quite heavily to provide most of
> the information on any agenda that they have and I don't
> know how long it will continue ... I see my role as being
> one of ... the conscience of the group, or of at least
> providing a different perspective from theirs ... sometimes,
> as a group of parents, they get really involved in wanting
> to go in a certain direction and I have to say, "But what
> about these other things?"

Keeping parents and other stakeholders alert to the complexities of council's deliberations put added pressure on Ruth as council facilitator during the early stages of implementation.

Uncertainty about the future path her council would take was initially a source of anxiety to Ruth.

> I don't know where the advisory council is going to go.
> There's a strong person chairing it, so, I mean, it could go
> in any direction and I'm not sure what my role will be in
> terms of providing information or of keeping the topics
> there and keeping them interested, or whether I'll just
> have to hold them back and say, "Whoa! We can't do quite
> that much."

Ruth's inability to predict her council's needs for motivation, restraint, goal setting or supervision intruded on her ability to plan and made it difficult to visualize what her role would be during the upcoming months.

Ruth objected to the potential for conflict that increasing council authority would create, superimposing further responsibilities on already busy principals and threatening their authority to maintain standards within their schools. Her concerns also addressed the unknown element of future Ministry directives.

> Depending on what the Ministry does in the long term and whether parent council becomes much more powerful ... I can see some conflicts further along. I don't see councils threatening at this point. I don't see that they're going to become threatening again, unless the Ministry gives them powers that they do not have at this point ...

Ruth disagreed vehemently with the degree of power vested in school councilors whose sole job qualification was popularity, fearing that such an absence of rigour in eligibility for service would leave them susceptible to ignorant and uninformed opinion.

> They don't have the rights of school boards to make decisions which they give to me or the school staff to implement. That is scary, not so much because of the type of decisions they would make, but because of the amount of time ... Well, the work cn only be given to the paid employees to do and you know, they can only work 100% ... As soon as you have other layers of decision makers that are establishing priorities that you don't feel are priorities then your time is split.

Ruth's concern that council business would disrupt her chain of command and the efficiency of her school office arose from the added workload being imposed on school staffs by the introduction of school councils.

Sylvia discussed how her relationships with parents were changing as a result of school council. She anticipated that the appeal of the council mandate to a broader cross-section of parents would be very positive, encouraging the exchange of new ideas and information. Sylvia also observed that the committee experience would probably help her solve the problem of the parent with a personal rather than a community based cause to champion.

> I'm fighting to get to the parent that doesn't agree with us.
> But if there's a group of people that firmly believes this is
> what we stand for, you know, we eliminate that person-to-
> person conflict and they either start working with us or go
> somewhere else. So this is a strengthening of our position
> as well. Absolutely.

Future Expectations

The transfer of authority from salaried Trustees to school-based

stakeholders constituted a decentralization of power from locally elected

school boards to site based management councils. Because change of this

magnitude was unprecedented in Ontario, Paula found it difficult to predict the

cycle of school council development. She commented:

> I would bet that in ten to twenty years schools will be run
> by parent groups ... I think it will be like Australia, where
> school councils started ... I would hope that the principal
> still has a strong say, but ... I expect that's going to change
> ... right now they talk about councils being involved in the
> selection process of a principal ... I suspect if it's
> principals, it's going to be teachers ... right now you hear
> the government talking about amalgamating a number of
> boards [effective January 1/98] ... and that's going to
> happen, there's no doubt about it ... Before, I'd have said
> ten years and you'll start to see that shift. Things are
> happening too quickly now for it to be in ten years.

Paula's optimism about the benefits of school councils was tempered with

considerable concern over the rate of change and lack of government

accountability. This concludes the presentation of the findings.

Summary

The introduction of school councils was experienced differently by all

seven principals in this study. The lack of implementation direction by the

Ontario Ministry of Education and, at the former's discretion, the Board, left

principals subject to personal whim when it came to scheduling school council

agendas. It came as no surprise to the principals involved that these agndas

ranged from consideration of council priorities to an examination of the

strengths and weaknesses of system based training procedures. Of additional general concern was the unprecedented expectation that parents and teachers now work in consort to improve the quality of school based education for all students. A final theme emerged surrounding redistribution of school authority in response to decentralizing the power of the principalship. Discussion of these issues, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research are presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER FIVE

Interpretation of Findings and Implications

Introduction

The women principals' collective narrative was distilled into four major themes which were council priorities, system support, new opportunities for dialogue, and restructuring school governance. Implications for practice addressed school council procedure, the principal's changing role and relationships, future council directions, and councils' impact on education. Suggestions for further research included the impact of school councils on student learning, teacher effectiveness, parental involvement, and school administration. Although responses to the research questions varied from principal to principal, in all cases their narrative encompassed key aspects of the implementation process. Within the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, support was found for some but not all of these findings. In this chapter, discussion moves from positive experiences, through those which were problematic during the implementation process, to a set of implications for practice and future research. The chapter concludes with the researcher's personal reflections on the research process.

Among the most positive developments that principals cited during the implementation process were setting council priorities, exploring new opportunities for dialogue, and specific, short term improvements in school administration. Based on consultation among all school stakeholder groups, these changes permanently altered the way principals visualized and executed their responsibilities. Though fraught with conflict and confusion, this early period of transition was characterized by improved collaboration and understanding within entire school communities. Early signs of successful growth were already apparent in the setting of school council priorities.

Setting New Council Priorities

Council members' early concerns centered on improving student learning, inclusive recruitment, and the need for collaborative decision-making. Initial emphasis was successfully placed on councils' role in improving the delivery of quality education to all students.

Improving student learning. All seven women principals defined improved student learning as an increase in the learning of all students within the same school. Their defense of student learning as the top priority for school councils was consistent with Shakeshaft's (1989a) identification of teaching and learning as one of the following four ways in which women administrators conceptualize their responsibilities:

(1) Relations with others are central to all actions.
(2) Teaching and learning are the major foci.
(3) Building community is essential.
(4) Marginality overlays work life (pp. 197-198).

This continuity may have reflected not only women principals' priorities for school councils, but also the voice of parent councilors, the vast majority of whom were women.

Five principals specifically tied participation on school councils to improved learning outcomes. Ruth stated that more parent involvement would improve all student learning, and Sylvia stated that school councils would improve both student learning and teacher effectiveness. Nancy cited examples of greater student confidence, candidness and personal satisfaction as a result of involvement in school council meetings. All three positions were supported by FWTAO's (1995) earlier endorsement of school council diversity (p. 157), and Fennell's (1991) article advocating the transfer of substantive, functional administrative responsibilities from central boards to school-based ones enabling schools to become flexible, diversified and more responsive to

their students' needs (pp. 16-17). Sylvia's related concerns about integrating asocial and learning differentiated students was consistent with Stufflebeam and Nevo's (1993) belief that principals should advance the educational development of each student (p. 35).

Paula believed that, as parents became more familiar with school issues and teaching personnel, they would criticize less, help more, and student learning would improve. Karen visualized enhanced social status for students whose parent(s) sat on council, a privilege which would increase these students' motivation in the classroom. Both observations reflected Robbins' (1994) claim that some women principals have a charismatic leadership style based on the desire to encourage universal participation, share "power and information" and demonstrate a commitment to "enhance followers' self-worth" (p. 147-148).

Of unprecedented promise in these findings was a belief in the introduction through school councils of a new procedural framework that would guarantee parental involvement in school decision making at the policy level. The act of formalizing this relationship and putting it under the jurisdiction of school principals suggested a new and widely supported Ministry commitment to parental empowerment. In addition to the spirit of optimism surrounding the school council mandate, principals' determination to maintain some vestiges of their former administrations was also seen as a positive move in the interest of students.

Finally, one principal who wished to remain unnamed in this matter, stated that school councils might have sufficient influence to solve the persistent problem of the inept or unwilling teacher. Strike and Soltis (1985), who advocated the laying aside of due process when it becomes incapable of serving its original objectives (pp. 27 - 30), supported the argument that

teacher job protection should be challenged by school councils in order to improve student learning.

Interference with student learning. Four principals commented that the stress put on teachers by an increased parental presence may have caused an initial drop in classroom learning. Beare's work (1993) supported this possibility, suggesting that only site councils functioning as "a company of learners" would advantage students (p. 212). Nancy concurred with this view and expressed frustration over being held responsible for the implementation of a school council while being expected to maintain the quality of education within her school community. Concerns over loss of school quality stemmed from the principal's workload and the feeling that valuable volunteer groups were being displaced.

Preserving best practice. Monica stressed the value of incorporating proven school improvement team practice into the theoretical framework being applied to school councils. She strongly advocated recruiting experienced teachers and parents who had already experienced the rewards of collaborative decision making in the school setting. Paula emphasized her ongoing responsibility for dealing with potentially disruptive, single issue parents, despite their legal right to lobby school council. These tendencies to support participatory management, cooperation, and collaboration, were also cited by Myers and Hajnal (1995) as characteristics of successful women leaders (p. 111).

Threats to established practice. Three principals protested that the extra work required during the early stages of council implementation would interfere excessively with their ability to perform other important duties as administrators. Monica was adamant that school council be prevented from eclipsing the productive group relationships already established in her

school. Cyclical events such as graduation and in school tutoring had evolved successfully under existing parent groups. Nancy cautioned that school councils should not be involved in decision making for which they were unprepared, such as "curriculum, school budget priorities, and program goals", and challenged school council's capacity for improving her decision making in any areas. Ruth felt taxed by the struggle to maintain a tone of respect among new members who carried only a superficial knowledge of school infrastructure and procedure. Exacerbating these concerns among principals was the uncertainty caused by system deficiencies.

Building stakeholder networks. Another highly positive experience reported by six principals was the commitment to enlist stakeholders on a community wide basis. Karen recruited an extroverted community police officer as a supportive role model for her disadvantaged students while Nancy stressed recruitment and orientation of all interested parties. These concerns for care and equality of opportunity were consistent with Young, Staszenski, McIntyre, and Joly's (1993) predominant principles in the exercise of authority by women in educational leadership. Nancy also wanted student stakeholder recruitment to move beyond the purview of school council elections, a position substantiated by Bennett, Rohlheiser-Bennett and Stevahn (1991), who also redressed marginalization in favour of inclusion, consensus and facilitative, morally driven leadership.

Despite a Ministry mandate to the contrary, most principals ended up recruiting parents, teachers and non-teaching staff in order to meet implementation deadlines. Wendy and Paula insisted on including the parents and teachers who had worked so well together on their school improvement teams. Epp (1997) supported this kind of stand stating that by virtue of their authority and knowledge educational leaders should exercise power "to modify

the interpretation of authority at the centre ... of education and society" (p. 51). The only unexpected discovery was reported by Nancy. She marveled gratefully at how easily some parents, teachers and community representatives, while meeting each other for the first time, were able to launch into productive discussion under the auspices of a school council meeting, and reaffirmed her personal belief in the promise of collective decision making.

Problems with stakeholder recruitment. An abiding problem expressed by all seven principals was parents' reluctance to participate in school council elections. Those with Home and School experience felt elections would be premature and those without prior volunteer affiliation were intimidated by the process or indignant over having to vote for candidates they hardly knew. Only one principal was successful in holding parent elections for her school council. Positions at the remaining six schools were filled by acclamation.

Three principals voiced further objections to the recruitment process because of the onus it placed on parent volunteers. Sylvia stated that it was very difficult to get responsible and skilled parents to voluntarily commit themselves to school council. Prospective parents cited job pressures, family needs, and the schools' duty to provide educational leadership as reasons for not getting involved. Wendy attributed the recruitment problem to a lack of clear role descriptions for council members.

Although FWTAO/FAÉO (1995) had recommended an orientation program incorporating child care and transportation subsidies for all potential council members, including principals, staff and community representatives, no funding was provided in these areas. Karen stated that any attempt to involve low-income parents was pointless without free transportation, refreshments or child care. Given such widespread support for low income parents, its

absence suggested a deliberate, cost saving measure. In addition to the problems of rushed parent recruitment and inadequate funding, some principals expressed concern that school councils would interrupt established patterns of student learning.

Commitment to representative decision making. A third area of success, according to six respondents, was the commitment not only to representative membership but to consensual decision making. Paula argued that school councils representative of all student backgrounds would put their trust and support behind proven administrators, a context which Monica viewed as auguring well for setting priorities and making decisions as a council. Gunter (1995) assumed that leaders of schools and colleges were seeking "stability, reciprocity, consensus and consistency" (p. 9) and Gougeon (1995) identified the way women allocated resources, exerted positive influence and exercised leadership in ways that often turned crisis into opportunity (p. 157).

Nancy was committed to involving all school employees on council, especially custodial and secretarial staff who had been traditionally left out of the consultative process. Robertson, Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1995) cited this high-involvement argument for greater employee participation in decision-making (p. 377) as did Beare and Boyd (1993) in terms of an international push to increase the participation of non-educators in the leadership of educational systems. Monica spoke passionately of her belief in collaboration, echoing Thom's (1993) position that contemporary trends in institutional settings favour collaborative decision-making, shared authority and emphasis on morality, stewardship and personal values. Paula's support for collaborative decision-making process reflected Ortiz and Marshall's (1988) findings that women principals successfully used their offices to foster

collaboration, equitable distribution of decision-making, inclusive conceptualization, and frequent communication (p. 134).

Sylvia supported parents as policy makers and curriculum partners while Ruth conceded that school councils would make a stronger contribution than traditional Home and School associations. Both principals reflected Rothberg and Pawlas' (1993) identification of principals as transforming facilitators who engendered leadership in others in aid of teaching, curriculum and problem solving, and who recognized the need for parents to relinquish their roles as critics in favour of becoming advisors to their principals (p. 72).

Monica's vision of council as a network within the community reflected Beare's (1993) configuration of councils as providers of a public service (p. 212). Ruth's support for school council as a forum for shared decision-making where parents could address community concerns and make school administration take them seriously matched Beare's (1993) company of learners (p. 212). Collectively, Karen, Monica and Ruth's optimism over school councils' great potential for enlightening the ways in which principals administer their schools was described in Blackmore (1988), who stated that women leaders' priorities included a relational world view sensitive to caring, reciprocity, respect for friendship and family ties, with strong roots in participatory democracy. Rohlheiser-Bennett and Stevahn (1991) also supported decentralized leadership, shared power, group decision-making and flexible channels of communication.

Optimism, trust and professional competence combined to enable the majority of principals to anticipate representative decision making with optimistic trepidation. Although unable to predict the future course of council deliberations, these women leaders felt confident that concerns shared by the

stakeholder collective would be in the interests of their students. The next step in council implementation lay in laying the path for successful dialogue.

Exploring New Opportunities for Dialogue

With school councils including representatives from all school stakeholder groups, six of the seven principals reported the likelihood that all minority concerns would be considered and that a climate of mutual respect would guarantee enlightened decision-making within a democratically representative school committee. For the first time, a framework was available to offer all stakeholders a say in their destiny.

Successful orientation programs. Only two principals made favourable reports about system support for implementation. Monica supported her Board's flexible training initiatives in keeping with Barnard's (1938) notion of respect for authority based on acceptance rather than force. Paula's positive evaluation derived from the opportunity to meet with administrators from outside of her own board, a macroeconomic approach recommended by Lawrence and Lorsch (1961) who stated that leaders' comfortable familiarity with the greater market environment facilitated better decision making. Next in the quest for productive dialogue came the hurdle of the first council meeting. Three principals faced the challenge head on and met with success.

Unsuccessful training initiatives. Ruth cited the Ministry's circulation of a single, comprehensive user's guide for both supervisors and stakeholders as a deterrent to effective council development. Nancy questioned the merit of relying solely on a policy manual to inform principals about the developmental stages in committee relationships. In effect, the Ministry failed to provide principals with adequate training in school council procedure. Although Ruth was not overwhelmed by the prospect of training her own council, she was frustrated by the Ministry's inability to support its own

policy. Karen criticized their failure to recognize that diverse groups of councilors needed individual training, and the role they played in creating what Elmore (1995) described as an environment unsupportive of personal effort, respect, freedom to ask questions, and risk-taking (p. 365).

Despite Ministry promises that a manual would be forthcoming (Cooke, 1995), publication delays made it impossible for local boards to design effective support programs. Official policy gave no consideration to regional differences (Carrier-Fraser, 1995a) nor did it recognize the value of existing infrastructure. Wendy pointed out the uselessness of being given the Board's implementation manual after her council had already been formed. The way training sessions were structured, parents were expected to profit from the same presentation as principals and other school staff, despite very disparate levels of knowledge about schools. Further obstacles faced Ruth because of the expectation that she "transform the school improvement committee into a school council". Stufflebeam and Nevo (1993) supported Ruth's position that on site principals should have full responsibility for administration and fiscal/facilities management, school community relations, and academic development (p. 35).

As an efficient and spiritually guided administrator, consistent with Cubberley's view of an effective principal (cited in Beck & Murphy, 1992), Ruth resented the general inefficiency surrounding school board training. The timing of the session was poor and the agenda did not reflect her school's interests or needs. One session that was billed as a general training session manifested itself as an informal review of the minutes of one school's council meetings. As Karen complained, there was no opportunity for participants at earlier stages of implementation to exchange ideas or to take advantage of peer coaching. Such interest in collaborative decision making dominates current

leadership theory as a major tenet of poststructuralist feminism (Robbins, 1994, pp. 273-274, Thom, 1994, p. 151, Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 155, Harris, 1995).

Sylvia made this comment about the same training session, a forum advertised as an opportunity for all members of school councils to learn together. "My student was the only one in the whole session, and the custodian ended up in a group that used a lot of big words." In this case, participation in the training session caused more harm than good and failed to address any of the procedural concerns Sylvia had already identified concerning later steps in the implementation process. Karen's training experience left her feeling uncertain about her approach to council implementation. "I wonder whether I'm doing it right and whether I'm asking too much or not asking enough?" At Wendy's school, parents were collectively feeling rushed into making a council commitment and found the expectation to attend formal training too premature. This degree of mismanagement could have been avoided by drawing on women principals' superior ability to interpret "verbal and non-verbal language" (Myers & Hajnal, 1995, p. 111) in gauging the specific needs of multipartisan groups.

Early council meetings. Karen attributed early school council success to the role played by her community police officer whom she had personally recruited as a law-abiding role model, student companion, and symbol of the authority of her council. The scenario which she designed exemplified Anderson and Shirley's (1995) successful school reform which included external factors such as interagency involvement (p. 407).

Nancy claimed steady growth at her school council meetings, substantiating Robbins' (1994) claim that charismatic leadership and strong interpersonal skills among some women tended to encourage universal participation, shared "power and information" and a commitment to "enhance

followers' self-worth" (p. 147-148). Ruth responded to the encroachment on her authority as principal by communicating clear expectations to all volunteers at the outset of her first school council meeting. She set norms that would preclude personal antagonism and promote dialogue. Nancy also stressed the need to keep council meetings interesting and productive, exemplifying one of Heck and Glasman's (1993) four duties of the principalship, the need to exercise a balance between responsibility and control (p. 140). A final platform in councils' movement toward ongoing and productive dialogue lay in the positive experiences of principals who focused their teams on the need for a common mission.

Discomfort during early meetings. Both the Ministry and the Board failed to provide principals with enough guidance to structure their first meetings successfully. Sylvia's biggest challenge was to generate interest and commitment among parents who resented the restructuring imposed by school councils. Nancy described her first council meetings as painful encounters fraught with awkwardness and uncertainty. Karen saw council as a threat and found it stressful to handle parents, including a co-chair, who were negative toward issues that council needed to discuss. She found it difficult to make parents and teachers feel comfortable working together, and depicted implementation as a very stressful, intrusive process that she had no control over: "Parents may be leading us in a fruitless direction, because they don't recognize learning priorities, or realize how learning is connected to other more basic needs."

Sylvia's early council meetings were sabotaged by intimidated teachers and an unconstructive parent, preventing her from instilling a spirit of collaboration or optimism. Monica was also faced with having to convert non-supportive parents and even had to come to the defense of a participating

teacher. Her early council meetings were generally dominated by volunteer conflict and lacked productivity. Although sincerely committed to council policy, Monica's narrative exuded fatigue, frustration and resignation to the inevitable flow of conflict that council would precipitate.

Other procedural dilemmas. Nancy challenged the assumption that parents would willingly volunteer to perform work that principals had previously been well paid to do. She also felt that although incomplete, her fledgling council was being rushed in a way that would inhibit the natural development of relationships among members of a voluntary body. Nancy also warned against pressuring councilors to start drafting policy before they felt comfortable with their authority. "You have to be very sensitive to who becomes involved and to how and what's on their agenda." Ruth echoed the same fear about forcing people to commit themselves prematurely:

> I think it's really important that you do things slowly and
> you do things in the order that they need to be done, so you
> don't have to undo and re-do and change your council
> because they're all so mad at you because you've rushed or
> mislead them.

For these reasons, principals flatly objected to the imperative to hold parent elections by June 1996, and the Board responded by postponing the deadline indefinitely. Paula feared repercussions to those principals who chose to abide by Board policy given the Ministry mandate to hold elections for parent representatives by September 1996. Sergiovanni (1992) endorsed the need to develop the leadership potential of group members in a timely fashion, placing emphasis on personal accountability, stewardship, cooperation, consensus, avoidance of confrontation and shared decision-making.

In his 1995 memo, Education Minister Cooke stated that "parental and community involvement" would strengthen "the links between the schools and the community". Although this message underscored the need to treat

parents and all volunteers with a high degree of consideration, Wendy expressed concern that meetings were not being scheduled at the convenience of school council volunteers. Ruth found it impossible to choose a meeting time that was convenient for all of her stakeholders, and warned that if principals were not adequately prepared for their roles as council facilitators, parents would sense the lack of direction and be prone to argument. She also expressed concern over how to set a council agenda that would hold the attention of all stakeholders.

Another major obstacle to successful orientation was the school council manual, <u>Partnerships: The Formation and Maintenance of School Councils</u> (The Lakehead Board of Education, 1996). Although it was a second generation guideline based heavily on the earlier document <u>School Councils: Making Them Work</u> (The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, 1995), most parents found it overwhelming. Many felt misled by the new role they were being expected to play without prior warning or adequate preparation. As Ruth and Sylvia pointed out, the majority of parents were willing to commit themselves to individual projects within a given school year, but the scope of the school council mandate was too large. At the other extreme, Karen and Paula were frustrated by the way parents would be replaced on council just as they began to understand their mandate, and objected to inflexible membership terms. Taken collectively, these procedural dilemmas presented a substantial impediment to the implementation process.

<u>Collaborating toward a common mission.</u> Paula welcomed the relaxation of former taboos and the creation of what Thom (1993) called a preferred institutional setting supportive of collaborative decision-making and Robbins' (1994) emphasis on team building, collaboration and consensus building (pp.

273-284). Monica avowed that school councils would strengthen schools' voices in dealing with higher authorities, including the Ministry in the absence of local Trustees and boards. By effectively restructuring her principalship into a legislative school council and an executive administration Monica personified one of Webber's (1994) good principals who delegates effectively, fosters collegiality, sustains harmonious public relations and implements site based management (p. 108).

Karen was enthusiastic about the opportunity for teachers and parents to approach school council directly with their concerns, in effect bypassing the principal. Webber (1994) firmly supported principals who "involve teachers in decision-making, assign responsibilities wisely" give credit to teachers, believe in their staffs, foster collegiality, and sustain harmonious public relations (p. 108). Ruth expressed visible relief over finally being able to collaborate on a number of issues that were previously off limits to parents and staff. Sylvia also cited a lack of cohesiveness among school administrators as grounds for welcoming the implementation of her school council. Although the depth of these women's needs struck a poignant note with this researcher, underscoring the unaddressed isolation of the principalship, their enthusiasm over the advent of school councils heralded positive developments in school governance.

Obstacles to collaboration. Nancy warned about council's potential abuse as an arena for generic caviling over teacher incompetence or weaknesses in school policy. Another challenge arose in dealing with parent volunteers who had difficulty establishing positive relationships with others in a committee setting. Ruth was reluctant to facilitate parents' participation on council because she feared that with their lack of training they would be unable to set priorities or meet their goals without heavy reliance on her. Any potential for

Carrier-Fraser's (1995b) "meaningful involvement" was precluded by a lack of training and preparation.

Monica wondered how she could facilitate respectful and legitimate communication among the very diverse group of stakeholders on her own school council. She was ambivalent over the way school councils were creating a further layer of bureaucracy between administration and the classroom, and stated that the extra burden school councils were imposing on principals seemed at this point to outweigh their potential benefits as administrative aids. In other words, parent volunteers were a net drain on school administration. To assume, as school council policy does, that parent volunteers would improve on the quality of decisions made by professional administrators seemed foolish at this point, although poststructuralist theory supported the participation of non-educators in the leadership of educational systems (Beare & Boyd, 1993).

Nancy's experience with council implementation differed from what she had been led to anticipate from Ministry documents. The time required to establish successful group dynamics had been understated and no incentives had been offered to encourage parent participation. Nancy faced a further challenge over the dynamics between her Home and School Association and school council. Home and School parents, recognized formally at the provincial level and historically the senior advisory body to the principal, were loath to give up their authority and switch allegiance to an unproven advisory council.

The reluctance among Karen's staff to tolerate the continual presence of parents presented a major problem which exemplified Heck and Glasman's (1993) notion of conflict within planes of responsibility and control(p. 140). Paula blamed the teaching profession for their traditionally highhanded

approach toward parental involvement in program delivery. Their attitude of independence and superiority reflected an outdated structuralist position on leadership which supported specialization of labor, a hierarchy of authority, and an impersonal approach to staff relations (Campbell, 1977-78, p. 2). Some teachers who had suffered denigration at the hands of parents had trouble overcoming the experience, although Paula was able to deal with the conflict. Attesting to women principals' ability to lead school councils effectively, Rothberg and Pawlas (1993) described them as transforming facilitators who engendered leadership in others by "informing, guiding, intervening and coaching" (p. 72).

Paula anticipated that parent councilors might resist decision making by consensus, thereby reinforcing the need for principals and council chairs to tolerate only respectful and constructive dialogue during meetings. As council facilitators, principals needed to maximize the satisfiers, elements that generated happiness and commitment to the group, and minimize the dissatisfiers, elements that irritated, but whose absence would not create loyalty nor a feeling of achievement (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959). Disarming parents and teachers was a major concern as she attempted to facilitate productive relations among council representatives. Another obstacle to collaboration was the perception among parents that all students in a given grade were working at the same ability level. That parents would feel ill equipped or unprepared was unlikely to deter them from service on school council, but hostility from teachers might prove extremely troublesome. Paula also identified the friction with teachers caused by some parents' single-mindedness, lack of respect for teachers' professional training, and virtual ignorance of the learning process.

Paula alluded to the deliberate frustration some principals were inflicting on their parent volunteers, behaviour she saw as enabling these principals to postpone relinquishing authority. She drew a correlation between principals' responses to school councils and their terms of service: "It seems to me that the people who seem to be struggling most are men ... who were appointed ten or twenty years ago." Based on the Board's practice of only hiring male principals prior to 1985, years of service and gender did appear to contribute to differences in principals' responses to collaborative administration. Valverde and Brown (1988) cited gendered differences in the way school leaders used language and epistemological categories to construct and control cultural and social realities (p. 155) suggesting that patterns of communication are major factors influencing the distribution of power.

Nancy regretted that the traditional power networks in her school had precluded initial cooperation among school council members. Her goal, to empower the council to function independently, complied fully with Ontario's mandate to incorporate community based representation into the governing structure of every school as of September 1996 (Cooke, 1995). Paula described frustration and dread that uninformed parent councilors would make shortsighted decisions and prove incapable of carrying out their objectives without supervision by their principal. Sylvia described her reluctance to continue as council chair as a reaction to having had to subdue the domineering president of her Home and School association. Nancy, Sylvia and Monica also feared the impact of outspoken and uninformed parents, and cited reconciling the relationship between school council and Home and School volunteers as a major problem.

Ignoring school council policy, Nancy continued to endorse the Home and School committee's authority as her school's senior advisory body and

public spokesman. Home and School had always attracted the most dedicated parents and they had no desire to desert a valued organization or switch allegiance to an unproven organization without a provincial network. Nancy doubted council's ability to match, much less surpass, Home and School's contribution to the welfare of students and staff. Valverde and Brown (1988) identified such special efforts to control cultural and social realities as characteristic of conscientious women principals (p. 155). Jurisdictional disputes, challenges to traditional parent teacher relationships, the participation of uninformed parent councilors, and a restructured administration jointly interfered with effective school council implementation and became the preoccupation of sitting principals.

Restructuring School Governance

Positive changes in school governance resulted from increased parent participation, new opportunities for teachers, and the decentralization of authority throughout an expanded community network. Collectively these developments enabled principals to improve on former levels of school governance.

Expanding the role of parents. Five principals found the school council mandate effective in regard to positive parental involvement. Designed to establish and reinforce community links while advising principals of school priorities and goals (Carrier-Fraser, 1995a, p. 1), school councils were perceived variously by the women principals in this study. Karen described them as an opportunity for parents to develop confidence and become informed by being actively involved in the life of their schools. Sylvia identified their attraction for professional parents with valuable skills for school development. Ruth stressed the need for parents to assume control of their agenda and take responsibility for their own projects.

Monica hoped that school councils would facilitate volunteer recognition thereby encouraging greater parental participation in school development. Paula expressed the wish that the new regime would make schools more welcoming to parents. These principals typified Marshall's (1995) claim that women leaders preferred to share meaning and information, and to include rather than dominate others. Their confidence in male and female volunteers reflected Thom's (1993) concept of the ability to lead with conscience and eliminate existing barriers to female participation in favour of the recognition of "true competence and merit" (p. 178).

Nancy envisaged school council as a vehicle for widening the scope of parents' involvement and influence. Monica's most apt suggestion, that parent empowerment is being used within this province to offset school board regionalization, was not anticipated in any of the literature. Background research was given by Stufflebeam and Nevo (1993) who cited community relations among key duties of the principal (p. 35), Carrier-Fraser (1995a), who stated that school councils were to reinforce school community links, and Harrison & Lembeck (1996), who favoured decentralized power networks over hierarchical school management.

Collectively, these leaders approached the expanding parental role with confidence, epitomizing Anderson and Shirley's (1995) image of women principals as catalysts for change who continually strive for successful behaviour. Closely associated with council's impact on parental involvement were new opportunities for teacher involvement.

Opportunities for teachers. Paula explained that although school councils might initially terrify those teachers who had never learned to communicate with parents outside of the structured conversation setting, she cited the excellent contributions made by teachers on her school improvement

committee as proof that the opportunity for parents and teachers to discuss issues other than parent/student/teacher competence would be enormously liberating for both parties. Paula projected Garvie's (1992) perception of women principals as possessing a positive vision of life and the ability to trust responsibility to others, and her forecast exemplified Sergiovanni's (1992) belief that leadership no longer represented an autocratic exercise of power over ignorant and obedient subordinates, but a collaborative facilitation among diversified stakeholders.

School councils made it necessary for teachers to take full advantage of parents' previously untapped skills, to profit from frequent and informal parental collaboration, and to prosper as colleagues in school administration (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1996). For Nancy and one of her teachers, this made it possible to enjoy parents and students in an unprecedented fashion. Her public recognition of teacher councilors echoed Monica's belief in teacher recognition and exemplified Leithwood and Montgomery's (1982) view of effective principals as leaders who "work toward their goals by attempting to influence teachers in a complex set of classroom-based and school-wide situations" (p. 334). Karen concurred that councils would provide teachers with a broader perspective on policy issues and greater respect from parents.

Apart from recognizing teachers as capable educators, Karen supported ways in which school councils would enable parents to know teachers as individuals with personal values and professional skills, and encouraged teachers to become stronger self advocates by taking advantage of council as a forum in which to discuss their concerns and recommendations. Her commitment exemplified Rallis' (1990) view of organizational leaders as people who create corporate identity by bringing together individuals with common values and cultural beliefs (p. 204).

Sylvia also expressed optimism over council's ability to improve teacher/parent dialogue, typifying Shakeshaft's (1989a) position on how women principals' think about traditional parent/teacher communication (pp. 194-214). Fennell (1995) also cited the potential of school councils to serve as catalysts for the type of open discussions favoured by women principals as they assisted staff in "adapting to the changing environment and learning to work towards a common goal" (Myers & Hajnal, 1995, p. 111). The consensus among principals in this study was that good teachers would become even more effective and that the principalship would stand to benefit directly from the process.

Strengthening principalship. Sylvia welcomed school council as a natural deterrent to problems caused by single issue parents and a means of reinforcing her ability to lead her school in positive directions. Her preference for reconciliation with difficult parents exemplified Marshall's (1992) finding that women administrators were more attuned to children and "interact positively with the greater school community" (p. 488). Karen also anticipated that school council would pacify potentially antagonistic parents .

Monica's readiness to facilitate school council implementation and professional development among her councilors reflected excellent personal skills and an administration already engaged in effective collaboration on other fronts. She felt liberated as chair of her school council, enjoying the opportunity to be helpful, nurturing, and instructive. Such attitudes toward the distribution of power, decision-making, motivation, evaluation, communication, leadership style, conflict resolution, equitable representation were heavily supported by contemporary leadership theorists (Shakeshaft, 1989a, pp. 194-214; Thom, 1993, pp. 160-162; Lorber, pp. 282-302).

Sylvia also cited participation in this research as a direct personal benefit that afforded her time out to think constructively about school councils and her administration in particular. Her frustrated longing for quiet reflection also implied a wish for more communication with her superiors and reflected Shakeshaft's (1989a) emphasis on the importance women leaders placed on affiliation and informal conversations with all members of the community.

Sylvia's personal growth, described as stronger tolerance for controversy and greater patience, was not anticipated in the literature as an outcome of school council involvement. Ruth also felt invigorated by council's emergence as a platform for open debate and by the freedom to discuss with council members issues which had previously been confined to administrative circles. The positive stimulation Ruth received from school council empowered her to think more creatively, pursue new lines of reasoning, extend her community network and enhance her effectiveness as an administrator. These findings all support the benefits of school councils as long term forces for positive development at the school level.

Future Expectations. Three of the six principals who participated fully in this study carried positive expectations about the long term impact of school councils. Ruth and Karen anticipated greater school support and a more positive public image as direct benefits from parent participation on school council. Their optimism was typical of Harris' (1995) finding that women principals approached tasks within the social and cultural context of their own school communities with an expectation of accomplishment (p. 174). Their belief in the value of parents' potential contributions supported Ogawa and Bossert's (1995) claim that leadership inheres in every role and shapes the meanings adduced from all organizational structures and situations (p. 225).

Monica further anticipated that additional training would eventually be provided, making councils sufficiently independent to set and achieve worthwhile goals.

Although only 50% of the respondents expressed outright optimism over school council policy, this attribute was characteristic of all experiences perceived as contributing to the successful implementation of school councils. It also formed an essential element in the development of new council priorities, improved community dialogue, and advances in school governance.

Those who saw school councils as a backward step in public education policy were particularly concerned about the power of unskilled council members to interfere with the professional decision making of qualified principals. The arbitrary and unfiltered distribution of authority among representatives of school stakeholder groups opened up opportunities for the misapplication and abuse of power in the minds of some women principals. We now turn to an examination of those implementation experiences which created doubt in the minds of principals and were generally perceived as problematic.

Principals' Abiding Concerns

The women principals in this study identified several issues as ongoing concerns. School councils were clearly putting impossible demands on many parents, requiring them to assume responsibilities that had previously been reserved exclusively for principals. School council training was inadequate and recommendations for ongoing support in the form of free transportation and child care was not forthcoming. From a historical standpoint, parental aggression toward teachers and teacher disdain toward parental involvement in the classroom had generated tension between these two groups that made its way to the council table. Compounding these difficulties was the ever growing

presence of parents in the schools. Teachers resented having their privacy eroded and principals found themselves in perpetual demand as resources to novice councilors. Collectively these forces created three areas of abiding concern which hinged on learning standards, the proper exercise of authority and stability in the workplace.

Overwork, disruption and reduced standards. Despite an outward appearance of success, Karen endured council implementation with trepidation, struggling to carry out the responsibilities of recruiting, training and motivating council members. Monica described school council as an intrusion into her more important work with teachers and students. Such "views of schooling, priorities, ways of managing, and ways of structuring interactions" were typical of the strengths of women leaders (Marshall, 1992, p. 370). Ruth expressed fear over councils' further acquisition of power, and objected to the time demands they placed on her and on staff. The Ministry's attempt to enforce site based administration along the lines of Japanese Quality Circles (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, p. 505) threatened to disrupt the established, cyclical use of staff time and school finances. Nancy's frustration over school council implementation resulted from the lack of visible improvement in student learning. Though typical of the difficulties reported during the early stages of school council implementation, Nancy's experience contrasted sharply with the very high growth in student learning and teacher satisfaction found by Fennell (1991) as a result of initial school council investment.

Paula feared that underfunding would incapacitate existing programs, weaken curriculum delivery, and sabotage the complex process of school council implementation. She also warned that inadequate financing would further exacerbate existing educational inequalities among students. Marshall

(1995) stated that "women administrators are more attuned to teaching, curriculum, instruction, and children" (p. 488) reflecting their greater awareness of the destructiveness of underfunded council policy. Paula commented that school councils have transformed the responsibilities of the principalship into a behemoth. Although Fennell (1995) identified women administrators as typically infused with a duty to nurture and be "facilitative, flexible, nurturing and transformative" (pp. 124-125), principals reported being overwhelmed by the expectation that they motivate "the village" in support of their school councils (Carrier-Fraser, 1995a).

Misappropriation of authority. Nancy found it unjust that the government failed to stipulate more stringent qualifications for parent councilors while requiring principals to be extensively qualified for their role. Ruth also objected to the degree of power vested in elected school councilors, fearing that the absence of rigour in eligibility for service would leave them susceptible to ignorant and misguided opinion. Specialization of labor and the gearing of organizational performance to technical qualifications (Campbell, 1977-78, p. 2) had been identified by Webber as early as the structuralist period.

All principals dreaded their loss of authority and control, and resented having to act on advice from unqualified councils with virtually unlimited authority. Karen responded to heightened parental exposure by attempting to project an attitude of open-mindedness, receptivity and support for inclusive stakeholder collaboration. In committing her school and herself to an annual evaluation, Karen revealed the depth of her commitment to academic performance and personal excellence.

The transfer of authority from salaried Trustees to school-based stakeholders constituted a decentralization of power from locally elected

school boards to site based management councils. When Ruth's authority was challenged by her school council, her behaviour was consistent with Fennell's (1995) findings that women leaders used language effectively during decision-making and conflict resolution and encouraged all members of their school communities to express themselves openly. Ruth was angered by council's right to interfere directly with administrative practice. She objected to the increased potential for conflict that council authority generated, and to its interference with her efforts to maintain school standards. She also feared the import of future Ministry directives. Her alarm over being forced into collaboration with unskilled partners, though understandable, was unsupported by post modernist leadership theorists. Rigidly hierarchical management systems, including traditional principalships, have been discarded in favour of decentralized power networks that respond to the need for frequent change and collaborative leadership (Robbins, 1994, pp. 273-274, Thom, 1993, p. 151, Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 155).

Paula disliked the rapid rate of change and lack of government accountability associated with council implementation, as well as the additional instability caused by school board amalgamation. She expressed concern over principals' loss of control within their own schools, and over their diminishing presence as individuals within expanding school board catchment areas. Paula's view that some women and most men are loath to relinquish the traditional power of the principalship communicated her ambivalence over councils' ability to make a positive contribution to public education.

Inadequate support and unpredictability. Like Karen, Ruth resented the burden of being council's chief resource and trainer in the absence of adequate system support. Describing herself as the conscience of the school

council, Ruth's exercise of "moral science and art within the context of critical knowledge" exemplified what Thom (1993) considered the quintessential expedient for success (p. 177). Karen, Paula and Ruth reported anxiety over their inability to predict what course council might follow or what demands they might be faced with as facilitators. In addition to the pressure Paula felt to find a parent chair, she experienced an awkward sense of vulnerability at the hands of the very parents she was working so hard to serve. Karen also felt uncomfortable having to be constantly accessible. Fewer delays in producing the <u>School Council Handbook</u> (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1996) and the proper provision of inservice for principal facilitators could have reduced this anxiety substantially.

Karen described the biggest threat to principals in terms of collaborative team leadership. Paula shared Karen's anxiety over the potentially chaotic effect of downloading responsibilities from trained board personnel to unskilled school volunteers. Clearly Ministry reform had overlooked the importance of Anderson and Shirley's (1995) analysis which included local characteristics (system administrators, community members, and teachers) and characteristics of change (the need for a specific change, the complexity of a proposed change, and procedural clarity) (p. 407). Overwhelmed by excessive systemic reorganization and the withdrawal of authority, principals became hampered as effective leaders within their own schools. Their abiding concerns applied to parents, teachers, workload, teaching standards, abuse of authority, and the ongoing need for system support and stability. Arising from these concerns are several implications for practice.

Recommendations

In their capacity as school council facilitators, and in some cases chairs, Karen, Monica, Nancy, Paula, Ruth and Sylvia all identified communication skills and conflict management techniques as top training priorities. Addressing the unprecedented demands placed on principals in their role as school council facilitators, Lorber (1994) cited decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution (pp. 282-302) as key areas needing support. Karen recommended the development of icebreaker activities in order for school councils to develop a climate conducive to collaboration.

Several principals recommended hiring local experts and having an in house budget to support council training activities. This money would be used to develop individualized, self-directed sessions during which her own council could meet, reflect on past practice, and set manageable goals. Karen further proposed mounting specific programs to teach conflict management and consensus building in order to protect the voice of all schools, regardless of size. Monica focused attention on the need for high quality trainers and supported the idea that facilitators have a strong say in what kind of training their own school councils would receive.

Ruth specified training in committee practice as an essential skill required by school councilors from non-business and non-professional ranks. Shakeshaft supported this view, citing the difficulty principals faced in integrating school stakeholders (1989, p. 178).

Nancy targeted respect for diversity and knowledge of committee procedure as essential targets for immediate training. Ruth strongly endorsed these objectives and emphasized that failure to provide universal training in these areas would disadvantage some stakeholder groups and defeat the whole purpose of having representative councils. Sensitive to the need to avoid the

perception of favoritism, Monica advocated having an external facilitator direct the future course of training for her school council and helped initiate a successful approach to long term council development by identifying an ongoing need for evaluation and training. Nancy and Monica's objectives were fully supported by Thom's (1993) emphasis on the importance of redressing marginalization through inclusionary, morally driven leadership (pp. 160-162).

<div align="center">Implications for Practice</div>

Individual stakeholder groups will determine the direction taken by their school councils as they design a constitution, elect a parent chair, and establish degrees of tolerance for jurisdiction and controversy. Their success will depend on their ability to make judgments that are in the best interest of student learning and on how much support they receive within their school communities. What will happen in neighborhoods where most parents are uneducated, unemployed and unsupportive of their children's education is of grave concern to all principals. The issue is not whether parent representatives will be found to serve on school councils, but with what capacity they will exercise their right to determine school policy.

Councils' Impact on Education

Principals initially expected benefits to be felt by students whose parents became council representatives. Improvement in these students' communication skills and self esteem was expected to result from increased contact with school administrators and a heightened profile among teachers and peers. For councils to substantially improve student learning, they must produce tangible reductions in racism, sexism, homophobia and other key factors interfering with the existence of an inclusionary school climate. They must create new ways of thinking, knowing and approaching goals that

enfranchise everyone within the school community. Breaking down historically destructive barriers between parents and teachers, encouraging academic excellence and developing a spirit of productive collaboration were some of the initial challenges facing school councils.

The Need to Support Stakeholder Networks

School councils represent another layer in the democratic process, but whether they are properly equipped to address the fundamental questions of curriculum design, access to school spaces, technology and specialized training, and authentic evaluation remains questionable. Karen pointed out correctly that failure to include parents from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds would contribute to a further decline in student learning and social stability. Putting it bluntly, everyone in a school community falls victim to even one student's academic failure, vandalism or suicide.

The second support issue Karen raised was that of the principal's purse. The financial stress that inadequate social funding placed on principals in mixed income schools was further exacerbated by the need to have a school council. For school councils to succeed, principals needed extra money to support low income families who were dependent on free transportation and child care. Where responsibility for councils will finally lie, now that principals have become detached from their teacher union affiliates and parents are being recruited to hire school administrators, is hard to guess. It is safe to assume though that parents will take the lead in so far as they are able to afford the time and expense required for council participation.

Suggestions for Further Research

Of principle concern are the ongoing experiences of school principals as professional administrators teamed with teachers, students and parent volunteers. Also of interest are the evolving experiences of parents who serve

on school councils, the impact on teachers of school council participation, and the value of school councils on the perceptions, values, performance and well being of students. Future studies might examine parents', teachers', and principals' perceptions of change in the quality of school leadership and student learning now that school councils have taken effect in Ontario.

Personal Reflections on the Research Process

The opportunity to conduct original research has been excruciatingly embarrassing and richly enabling, particularly from the opportunity to learn research skills and critical analysis. As a student of educational administration, my personal beliefs about leadership have been put to the test. I have developed a deepening respect for those in authority, particularly those who ride herd over us graduate students. My personal definition of leadership, however, remains unchanged, anchored in the paramount values of truth, kindness, fairness, and a duty to facilitate personal best within all parties. I believe this holds true for all positions of authority, from parent to prime minister.

Satisfaction from earlier survey-based projects pales in comparison to the sense of discovery and insight associated with this research. I have received enormous benefit from working so closely with such gifted women leaders. Many of the experiences shared by these principals were startling in nature, appalling in their complexity and sobering in the context of ongoing changes in Ontario's education policy.

Although a complete assessment of the thesis process would be premature at this time, I shall always treasure the joy of making contact with a favorite author, having proposals accepted by CSSE and AERA, presenting my own research to distinguished audiences, and somewhere along the way acquiring an insatiable appetite for professional research.

Summary

For the women principals in this study, the school council mandate created enormous stress, restricted short term opportunities for effective leadership, and generated multifarious conflict among pre council stakeholders and stakeholder groups. Its implementation took root amid the support of a spirit of collaboration and a common commitment to representative school administration, though many problematic situations were also encountered. These included obstacles generated by historical tensions between teachers and parents, inadequate Board direction and volunteer training, and resentment among principals over being forced to share authority with unskilled volunteers. Optimism, mingled with fear and uncertainty, was the pervasive feeling shared by women leaders who described themselves as (1) perpetually aggravated by the burgeoning parent presence in their schools, (2) badly in need of system support, and (3) dedicated in principle to a policy of stakeholder inclusion.

Positive developments surrounding the setting of post council priorities included issues such as improved student learning, the inception of inclusive stakeholder networks, and commitment to shared and decentralized decision-making. New opportunities for dialogue found expression at council orientation sessions, early council meetings and in stakeholders' willingness to collaborate in the creation of a common mission for their councils.

Interference with the implementation process emerged on a variety of fronts in the form of interpersonal conflict, self-doubt, ignorance, and general disorganization. Excessive time demands threatened to overwhelm all stakeholders, potentially diminishing student learning. Vague guidelines impeded the recruitment process and pressure to engage in instant, council-based decision making threatened to undermine rather than strengthen

school administrations. Inadequate training created procedural dilemmas that could have been avoided, and inadequate orientation contributed to early council meetings characterized by awkwardness, mistrust and confusion. Parents, teachers and principals were placed under enormous pressure to engage in collaborative decision making before they were given enough time to develop comfortable working relationships with one another.

The fundamental and unprecedented metamorphosis of the principalship, from an independent and professionally supervised position to one of codependence on nonprofessional volunteers, is already causing substantial changes in the quality of school leadership and delivery of public education. Early inquiry into the implementation of school councils suggests a potential for short term disruption of the learning process while parents and teachers become reconciled to working together and all parties take the time necessary to learn the intricacies of school council based school administration and committee procedure. If stakeholder groups are not evenly enfranchised, curriculum will continue to flow along traditionally sexist and racist channels, and even Ontario's women principals will be unable to stem the tide.

On the other hand, if inclusive decision making and respect for diversity do gain support, student learning in Ontario's schools will improve significantly, and the initial disruption caused by school council implementation will prove to have been a valuable investment. The pervading optimism of this group of seven principals suggests an overwhelming belief in the value of universal stakeholder representation, and a conviction that school councils will indeed improve school leadership.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF PERMISSION

PRESIDENT

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

10 April 1996

Ms. Virginia M. Stead
Faculty of Education
Lakehead University
THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO
P7B 5E1

Dear Ms. Stead:

Based on the recommendation of the Ethics Advisory Committee, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled: WOMEN PRINCIPALS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN LEADING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL COUNCILS.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

ROBERT G. ROSEHART
President

/lw

cc: Dr. H. Fennell, Supervisor ✓
     Dr. M.C. Courtland, Graduate Coordinator

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH APPLICATION FORM

LAKEHEAD BOARD OF EDUCATION

Virginia M. Stead TEL (807) 939-2925 FAX (807) 939-1728
2280 Robin Crescent, Thunder Bay, ON Canada P7C 4T9

FACSIMILE MESSAGE TRANSMISSION
The total number of pages including this one is 6.

Mr. Curt McMahon
Superintendent of Education
THE LAKEHEAD BOARD OF EDUCATION
2135 Sills Street
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7E 5T2
FAX (807) 623-7848

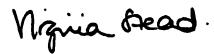*Mar. 7 | 96*
4 pm

7 March 1996

Dear Mr. McMahon,

In anticipation of our meeting this afternoon, at 4:00pm, I am enclosing a copy of my Research Application Form.

The Application has been reviewed with my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Hope Fennell, and met with her approval.

I look forward to meeting with you and to the opportunity to discuss my proposal.

Yours respectfully,

Virginia Stead.

RESEARCH APPLICATION FORM

Approved by _____
            Superintendent Responsible for Research
            The Lakehead Board of Education

Date Approved _____960307_____

1. **Title of Research**   Women Principals' Lived Experiences in the Implementation of School Councils

2. **Name of Researcher(s)**   Virginia M. Stead

3. **Position(s) of Researcher(s)**   Teacher (Lakehead Bd.), M.Ed Student (Lakehead U.

4. **Name of Faculty Advisor or Organizational Supervisor** Dr. H.-A. Fennell

5. **Brief Abstract of Research Project (Maximum 500 words, typed)**

    5.1 **Purpose**

       The purpose of this study is to explore women principals' lived experiences in the implementation of school councils. Although each of the respondents will be operating under the supervision of her zone SIC and zone superintendent, the focus of this research is how the school administrator experiences the implementation process. The primary goal is to identify how the elements of key life experiences are described and evaluated by the participants according to first-hand, self-reported, personal impressions.

    5.2 **Research Design**

       Inquiry into women principals' lived experiences will be conducted using phenomenological research methods. Phenomenology differs from ethnograph in that it does not incorporate a non-participant observer, nor a pre-designed schedule of questions for use during the interview process. Interviews take place between the researcher and the respondent, and conversation is flexible, guided by a limited number of overarching questions, and interspersed with interviewer prompts in response to ongoing conversation. Printed transcripts inform both parties after the initial interview has been completed.

    5.3 **Methodology**

       <u>Data Collection</u> will take place during a series of recorded interviews, subject to the ethics guidelines of Lakehead University and The Lakehead Board of Education. There will be no risk to participating principals, and all participants, schools and the school board will be kept in strict confidence. Researcher notes, audio tapes, and transcripts will be held in safekeeping by the principal researcher for a period of seven years, or in the event of her leaving the university, maintained by the universi for the remainder of the seven year period following the research.

       <u>Data Analysis</u> Comparative and collaborative analysis will be facilitated through graduate research seminars, professional direction from the thesis supervisor and committee, and on-going researcher examination for cross

fittingness, and auditability. Coding will be used to identify
major meaning units, significant events, and themes.

5.4 Method of Reporting Study

Prior to publication, the researcher will hold a final interview
with each respondent in order to review her complete file, and to ensure
that her experiences have been accurately and thoroughly captured within
the written description of the final thesis. All respondents will
receive a summary of the findings of this research, and a copy of the
published thesis will be placed with the Faculty of Education Library,
Lakehead University.

6. Type of Research
(check suitable categories)

6.1 replication study   —

6.2 experimental design   —

6.3 social science model   —

6.4 qualitative research design   X

6.5 quantitative design   —

6.6 other (specify)   —

7. Data Collection
Techniques
(check suitable categories)

7.1 questionnaire(s)   —

7.2 formal interview(s)   X

7.3 informal interview(s)   —

7.4 participant observation   —

7.5 document analysis   —

7.6 other (specify)   —

8. Schools, groups or organization to be contacted

The researcher will contact women principals with The Lakehead Board of
Education who have at least one year's prior experience at the board or
system level. Six participants are required for this research, and the
researcher is hoping to gain participation by women principals at both
the elementary and secondary level.

9. **Sample & Size**

	Number	Grade	Times Contacted
Students	___	___	___
Staff (specify)			
9.1 teachers	___		___
9.2 dept. Heads	___		___
9.3 custodians	___		___
9.4 secretaries	___		___
9.5 prin/v-princ.	6		3-5
9.6 other	___	.	___

10. **Budget**

10.1 grants for researcher	SSHRC $6,000
10.2 researcher(s) time	1200 hours
10.3 supplies	$80
10.4 mailing	$5
10.5 computer time	no charge
10.6 other	$300 (audio tape transcriptions)

10.7 total costs: $385   Bal. to researcher $5,615

11. **Time**

11.1 date to start study   1996/03/18
                             Year/Mo/Day

11.2 people hours required of subject
(please estimate in hours)   3-5 hrs.

11.2.1 Number of students	___	x	___	(time) =	___
Number of staff	6	x	5	(time) =	30
Number of other	___	x	___	(time) =	___
Total					30

12. Legal Implications   Yes   No

     12.1 have you assured complete anonymity?   X

     12.2 have you assured complete confidentiality?   X

     12.3 is the name of the Board to be identified
          in the final report?   X

     12.4 have you discussed with the superintendent
          reponsible for research how the findings
          will be used?

13. Anticipated outputs of documentation. List planned dissemination
     activities, if applicable (include dates, names of Boards, numbers of
     occasions and or other relevant details).

     Please see note below, entitled "Presentations and Publications".

14. Please attach the signed Code of Ethics.

Presentations and Publications

Copies of thesis summary to participants: Jan. - Mar. 1997
Bound copy of thesis to Board of Education: Jan. - Mar. 1997
Thesis summary to members of Graduate Seminar, Fac. of Ed.: Fall 1997
Proposed article in The Newsletter, FWTAO magazine: 1997
Proposed publication in non-refereed journal: 1997
Joint publication with Supervisor in refereed journal: 1997

Presentation to Lakehead Board of Education: 1997, Spring
Presentation to Principals' oroup: 1997
Presentation to women's leadership group: 1997
Presentation to Graduate Student Seminar, Faculty of Education   1997, Fall
Proposed presentation at CSSE, June 1997
Proposed presentation at AERA, March, 1997

CODE OF ETHICS

The researcher must abide by the following code of ethics:

1. The research procedure shall not be harmful in any way to the subject participating.

2. The researcher will be under the jurisdiction of the administration and the principal of the school selected for research in terms of his/her conduct while working in the school.

3. The data collected in the performance of the research will be kept in strict confidence. No names of persons tested, their test results, or the names of the teachers, principals, or schools, shall be mentioned or attention be unduly attracted to them during the course of or following research undertaken unless authorized by the administration. General or specific results as would be used for research papers for scientific journals will be accepted.

4. The researcher shall not, in any way, attempt to attract the interest of the media to his/her research unless authorized by the administration. If the researcher is contacted by representatives of the media, the researcher is bound to say nothing about the research unless the researcher has been given permission by the administration.

5. Research that is not supporting or facilitating the operation of the system is subject to the discretion of the administration and the school principal(s). If the administration and the principal refuse the use of school facilities to a researcher external to the system, the researcher must accept this decision.

6. In accordance with this research policy, any researcher that is undertaking research in this system that identifies the Lakehead Board in any manner, must obtain the approval of the administration for the use of the data.

Date: 5 March 1996   Signature: Lloyd Stead.

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF PERMISSION

SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

LAKEHEAD BOARD OF EDUCATION

THE LAKEHEAD
BOARD OF EDUCATION

2135 Sills Street
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 5T2
Telephone (807) 625-5100
FAX (807) 623-5833

SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

March 12, 1996

Ms Virginia M. Stead
2280 Robin Crescent
Thunder Bay, ON P7C 4T9

Dear Ms Stead:

Please note that Mr. Curt McMahon, Superintendent of Education, has approved your research application entitled, "Women Principals' Lived Experiences in the Implementation of School Councils".

A copy of your thesis proposal and approved research application will be filed in my office. Should you have any further questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to call.

I wish you every success with your research.

Sincerely,

David Halushak
School Operations Officer

:mk
c.c.   C. McMahon

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PRINCIPALS

LETTER OF THANKS FOR ACCEPTANCE TO PRINCIPALS

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

Virginia M. Stead,
Master of Education (Administration)

Ruth Templeton
Principal, Claude L. Benoit Public School
650 Rainbow Drive
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7R 2M4

24 April 1996

Dear Mrs. Templeton,

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Administration), I am conducting research which explores the experience of women principals in leading the implementation of school council legislation. As there is limited research available on the subject, this study may provide useful information about specific ways in which women leaders approach this responsibility of the principalship.

I am seeking the participation of elementary or secondary school women principals who have already had at least one year's experience in a leadership role at the board or system level. My inquiry will encompass a set of three or four recorded interviews. Research procedures will conform to the ethics guidelines of your board of education and those of Lakehead University. I will keep all research tapes, transcripts and personal notes for a period of seven years following completion of the thesis. In addition to these formal requirements, I will ensure discretion, tact and confidentiality. There will be no risk to participants. Possible benefits may include insight gained through our conversations, and access to the results of this study once my thesis has been approved for publication.

If you would like to participate in this research or wish to get more information, I invite you to contact me, at (tel) 939-2925, (fax) 939-1728, or to consult with my Supervisor, Dr. H. A. Fennell, Chair, Preservice Teacher Education, at (tel) 343-8712, (fax) 344-6807.

Thank you very much for considering my proposal. Your participation would provide a great opportunity for me to learn from your experience and reflection.

Yours sincerely,

ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH EFFORT

Virginia M. Stead
e-mail: Virginia.Stead@Lakeheadu.ca
2280 Robin Crescent, Thunder Bay, ON Canada P7C 4T9
TEL (807) 939-2925 FAX (807) 939-1728

FACSIMILE MESSAGE TRANSMISSION
The total number of pages including this one is 3.

Ruth Templeton
Principal,
Marie L. Benoit Public School
650 Rainbow Drive
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7R 2M4

24 April 1996

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for your kind support in my exploration of women principals' experience with the implementation of school councils. One of the great benefits of research is having the opportunity to dialogue with experts in the field! For your information, I am enclosing fax copies of the letters of introduction and consent that I will bring to our first conversation.

I look forward to meeting with you at 10:45 am this Friday, April 26th.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX E

LETTER OF UNDERTAKING FROM PRINCIPALS

Virginia M. Stead
Master of Education Program (Administration)
Faculty of Education
Lakehead University
Thunder Bay, ON   P7B 5E1

Dear Virginia,

I am familiar with your proposal to investigate the lived experiences of women principals in leading the implementation of school councils. You intend to conduct a series of three or four in-school taped conversations with six women principals of elementary or secondary schools in the Thunder Bay area. My name, school, and board of education will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, and all the information gained during our conversations will be treated confidentially.

There are no risks to participants, though I reserve the right to withdraw from the project without penalty at any time prior to its completion. Possible benefits may include insight gained during our conversations, and access to the results of this study once your thesis has been approved for publication.

I, _____, agree to take part in your research.
Printed Name of Participant

I am currently Principal of _____,
Printed Name of School

and employed by the _____.
Printed Name of Board of Education

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   **Date**

APPENDIX F

THEME CODES

Appendix F Theme Codes

A00	SCHOOL COUNCILS	A31	teacher responsibility	C09	power
A01	**membership**	A32	parent awarenss/skill	C10	implementation
A02	mission/vision	A34	**drawbacks**	C11	**policy**
A04	**recruitment**	A35	**principal's concerns**	C12	communication
A05	performance	A36	teacher attitude		
A06	leadership	A37	parent attitude	C13	transition
A07	training	A38	long term prospects	C14	structure/mtgs/chair
A08	reception	A39	conflict	C15	**goals & issues**
A09	implementation	A40	relationships	C16	inservice
A11	planning & developmt	A41	teacher concerns	C17	principal's concerns
A12	**benefits**	B00	PARENT GROUPS	D00	STAFF ASSOC
A13	**principal's role**	B01	membership	D01	membership
A14	power	B02	mission, goals >B11	D02	mission
A15	priorities	B04	recruitment	D03	structure/mtgs/chair
A16	commitment	B05	performance	D04	recruitment
A17	transition	B06	leadership	D05	performance
A18	**communication**	B07	procedures	D06	leadership
A19	teachers' roles	B08	fundraising	D07	function
A20	parents' roles	B10	structure/chair	E00	OTHER SCHOOL GROUPS
A21	students' roles	B11	goals & issues	E01	day care
A22	comm reps' roles	B13	transition	E02	natives
A23	non-teachings' roles	B16	inservice	E03	sports teams
A24	**meetings**	C00	SCHOOL IMP TEAMS/ SCHOOL ASSOCIATION	E04	b & g club
A25	accountability to / supervision of X by	C01	**membership**	E05	health centre
A26	**structure/ procedures**	C02	mission / focus	E06	code of behaviour
A26a	subgroups	C04	**recruitment**	E07	academic excellence
A27	**issues/policy/ goals**	C05	performance	E08	integration comm
A28	parent likes	C06	leadership	E09	> R00
A29	**parent concerns**	C07	future role	E10	coop ed partners
A30	teacher reputation	C08	> C14	E11	safe arrival

Theme Codes continued ...

Code	Description	Code	Description	Code	Description
H16	strategy	G06	power	K06	attitude
H17	responsibility	G07	future role	K07	goals
H18	awareness	G08	jargon	K08	planning timeline
H19	support forteachrs	G09	school profile	K10	communication
H22	initiative	G10	accountability to /supervision of	K11	volunteerism
H23	communication	G11	structure	K12	excellence
H24	relationships	G12	assessment	L00	TRUSTEES
H25	supervision of	G13	leadership	L01	motivation
H26	reputation	H00	PRINCIPAL	L02	performance
J00	PARENTS	H01	bkground experience	L03	membership
J01	background experience	H02	power & influence	L04	attitude
J02	power	H03	leadership style	L05	communication
J03	leadership	H04	inservice for	M00	STUDENTS
J04	training	H05	support from	M01	participation
J05	support	H06	attitude /opinion	M02	communication
J06	attitude	H07	school priorities	M03	goals/issues
F00	ONTARIO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION	H08	planning timeline	M04	attitude
F01	policy	H09	fears	M05	learning
F02	training	H10	non sc concerns	M06	opportunities
F03	support materials	J07	goals	M07	trust
F04	performance	J08	planning timeline	M08	concerns
F05	timing	J09	characteristics of	M09	leadership
F06	future role	J10	communication	M10	background
F07	accountability to / supervision of X by	J11	fears	M11	assessment
F08	assessment	J12	responsibilities	M12	discipline
fff	comments for discussion	J13	commitment	M13	harassment
G00	BD OF EDUCATION	K00	TEACHERS	N00	STUDENTS' COUNCIL
G01	policy	K01	background experience	N01	membership
G02	inservice	K02	power	N02	mission
G03	support materials	K03	leadership	N03	chair
G04	performance	K04	training	N04	recruitment
G05	expectations /timing	K05	support	N05	performance

Theme Codes continued ...

N06	leadership				
N07	goals				
N08	supervision				
N09	power				
N10	procedures				
N11	communication				
Q00	SCHOOL CLIMATE				
Q01	parent attitude				
Q02	communication				
Q03	staff volunteerism				
Q04	structures				
Q05	events				
Q06	hostility				
Q07	new school				
Q08	parent volunteerism				
Q09	school communities				
Q10	parent interviews				
Q11	curriculum				

APPENDIX G

SAMPLES OF TRANSCRIPTS

A10a1 At our first advisory council meeting, I spent most of the time talking to the council as to how I envisioned it operating in our school, and in order to maintain our school improvement committee,

A11b1 I think the key is that we're one step ahead, in that we've had ...had this growing, or this time to experience the growth process where we could do things, where it doesn't matter if they're ... specifically what we were told to do,

A12a1 All sorts of things going. Kids question things, gets a lot of discussion going. I don't know where it's going to lead, but I know that it'll take us in some different places than we've expected to go.

A12a1 It's also a good way of getting discussion going so that we can see things from both sides. Our side as well, in terms of difficulty for the teacher and the school.   getting everybody thinking. People saying well we should do it in the spring as well as the winter, have spring electives. I've never thought of it.

A12a2 ... all those little things (student council elections) that are said like that in discussion are very helpful in terms of looking forward and doing some planning.

A12a2 I think that discussion is healthy because it does create an awareness, so I think that they'll have a lot of advice for us in terms of how to maximize our resources and how to add to them, and how we can reduce some of the things, because once they know the problems involved ... they have to help us know where to focus our energies.

A12a2 I think the school council will help us by advising us in areas ... where we can put less energy and advising us in areas that need a lot of energy. They can problem-solve with us in terms of ways of getting money or ... not necessarily doing the work to get the money, but I mean, they're a very bright group of people, so they could probably help us figure out a number of things there.

A12a2   ... it's creating an awareness in this group of people so that after a certain amount of time, they'll have the knowledge and they will be able to make suggestions or you know, maybe they will be able to offer some suggestions for inservice for staff, priorities for curriculum.

A12a2   That is something now I would take to the advisory council, as opposed to the parent's group. Because that group is now there to advise me. They could offer some advice in terms of ... well this school in particular, with the special education component and having the majority of special education kids put back into classrooms in their home schools a year from now. Could offer some advice as to how we can deal with some of these children. They have a lot of contacts. You know, you never know until someone says, "Hey, I know this person. I can check into this." Or, "I know the person who's in charge of that at the University or the College" or something or "Have you thought of getting these sort of people in? I've got a contact with the 55-Plus Centre ..." you just don't know where people have these contacts, not that they're necessarily going to follow through, they might make an initial contact for you, but there are a lot of resources, that the parents have access to, and they could direct us to, Because teachers ... we're a very limited group.

A12a2   This would be good for staff morale too. To have that mass support from the parents and that kind of appreciation of how few hours there are in a day. And how much needs to be done. Right.

A12a2   We had some really good discussion ... an opportunity for them to dialogue with me, in terms of understanding why I do what I do ... in a non-threatening way. .. they can challenge. You know, I feel quite comfortable when they challenge something I do, and I say, well "I'll think about that." Or, "This is the reason it's being done that way." And, they've been very good.

A12a3   ff How is it helpful to you to be able to talk to parents and teachers within this group as opposed to in other professional groups that you belong to for example the principal's association or your own staff?ff

It's just that an unheard from group. It's an opportunity to bring up issues that don't come up in any other forum responded to by a group of people who are not represented in any other way. The parent's group controls the parent's group. I mean, they set their agenda. They focus on fund raising or things like that. I don't have a group of parents that I can bounce things off or haven't had, so this is a real luxury in terms of "I don't know about this. I think I'll run it by the advisory council, see what they think." Like to me that is the sort of involvement we've always wanted to encourage but we've never had a legitimate means of recognizing a group like this.

A12a3 ff in terms of support ff at this point, they haven't done a particular lot ... again, I think we'll see that over time, but ...I see most of the discussion and direction given by the council will go to staff. Through me to staff looking internally at the school from outside. Now, I say that because we also have the parent's group so certainly, all groups that work in the school you hope are going to be advocates in the school and they're going to present the school in a positive way.

A12a3 ff most signif exp ff I think just getting the group together and interacting with them and watching the interactions and listening to the conversations, I think that's impacted greatly. Because even though I couldn't itemize the things that I've learned from it, I ... through being an observer of other people, have been able to react in such a way that ... maybe I'm able go into directions I hadn't thought of or to respond to things, to build some bridges.

A12a3 ff principal finds it useful ff because I set the parameters under which they're going to be offering recommendations and ... as long as it continues that way

A12a3 fff council as empowering groups, different groups with the community.fff perhaps we've become more knowledgeable. It's like anything. You know people speak in ignorance because they don't

know, so once the knowledge base is there, then they can ff explain to other parents ff these are the reasons why it was done. Even that little bit of sharing I think will go a long way. They will also be able through contacts with their friends to bring back concerns to the group, the larger group. Say well I'm hearing in the community from a couple of people or one person even, and is this a general concern? Should we talk about this sort of thing? And I think the advisory council's going to be giving us advice on things like ... do we have skateboards at school? Do kids wear hats in school? Do we expect everyone to stand for Oh! Canada or do we just let people roam around in the hallways, I mean those sorts of things. **What do they value as parents and what sorts of values do they want to see us reinforcing at the school?** Not that we don't reinforce the values that we consider to be ... the values of Ontario through our documents, but you know, just things the parents feel strongly about.

A13c3 ... role now in relation to the council, how you see yourself? Right now, I see myself as backing off a bit but what I would like to see happen in the fall is someone volunteering to become a chair and at our meeting, our wind-up meeting this Thursday I'm going to just mention that to people, could be anybody on the council. I'm trusting that the same people will remain and that the job isn't that onerous because it's just running the meeting basically and having information and calling on the person when they need to be called upon and

A18c3 ... communication process do you have now prior to a school council meeting? We send things home. ... the whole thing has been evolving in kind of a neat way. We lost a JK . and we had to communicate that to our community, so we drafted up a letter and I thought, well, our school council people need to know about this because it impacts the school so I just sent the communication home. I do that with the minutes and with agendas, I just send it home with their children. And I did that with that letter and we tried to contact each of the parents before the letter went home. Parents on the council that there's a letter coming home, this is the situation in case somebody phones you, and they were really quite appreciative of us, and I think part of it is not just appreciating the **communication but also appreciating the fact that we work**

together. That they were really involved and that they're the first to know something. We've got big kraft envelope it gets recycled, each child has one, it gets recycled. Yeah so anything really important we phone, but parents are hard to get a hold of so ... make sure by ... by envelope.

A20c3 What opportunities do parents have for setting the agenda for a school council meeting? They really don't at this point. They know that they're responsible to report back to the council as to what their task group is doing, so they know that that's always part of the agenda. So they can bring to council something that they're hearing in the community or some questions that they want to ask which kind of makes me nervous. you don't know what's coming. and you don't know whether it's really bizarre. (Laughter) And how to react to it.

A24c3 ... it would be nice to have a parent chairing but I'm not sure whether they feel secure enough with that yet.

A35c3 ... change the process of school council implementation I don't know if I would change the process. I think I would be a little bit more relaxed about it.

A5d2 So you're given a fairly free hand but then you're ahead of schedule That's true. Very much. I find that as far as my contact with my superintendent, is usually just if I'm ... want to clarify something for myself or I think there's going to be an issue with a parent, a parent calling about something. It's just basically a forewarn, but I don't really seek ... I've never really received a lot of ... and certainly I don't want to ... want you to think that superintendents have not been supportive ... they've been very supportive. But I've certainly been given a free reign. I suppose the training, the ... if I do want to have any kind of support .. if I wanted support specifically from a superintendent, it would be there. It's just a matter of picking up the phone and making an appointment or whatever ... there hasn't been the need. the best support, really is going .. to the Ministry session. A number of my colleagues were there. It was just talking. Those type of experiences I think are probably best for me.

F3c3 ... there was another one I think from the Ministry that we sort of flipped through. Jamie and I took turns, looked at it. and we thought in looking at that binder that they had a lot of good ideas but the school council is just so much a small part of the school itself, the school life itself, and you only have so many hours a day to devote to it.

F3d2 ... the ministry has been getting started a guideline that they've just put out recently, so there's material out there.

F7d2 I suspect now the Ministry probably will start auditing, when they go to a school and talk to the principals and teachers and see the plan of what's in place.

G3c3 ..I was thinking about that the other day because we received this wonderful binder about the school council and policies and all the support material and I thought well this was really nice but it's after the fact. Most of us have been rolling with it for at least a year so .... I might say the safe schools policy where there were some things that were done prior to .. this was done sort of after and in some ways it might be it's probably good in that it gives each school the freedom to do what they felt was best for the school and the people that you're working with. I don't know if there were drawbacks because even if it was out earlier I don't know whether I would have looked at in depth.

G3d2 Also, certainly there's been a lot of reading material, such as a there are a couple of binders that our board has provided. One was a separate school in the Metro area, I believe, and then we've got a Dryden ... you know, one from the region and things like that. So, there's certainly material out there.

H15d2 ... as support when you've needed information or you've needed ...I phone my colleagues. I discuss with my principal friends, you know, how you manage this, or struggling with this, what would you suggest? I have 2 or 3 friends who are in new schools as well and getting these things .. I discuss with them. In fact that will probably be my first choice ... always ... just to contact colleagues.

H25c3 ... having Dave Fredrickson as my superintendent and him saying you can only do what you can do and aim for this much, that was really helpful.

H25d2 ... my sense of feedback from teachers and from superintendents is ... my interaction with people is fairly strong.

H25d2 ... supervision by the Board in terms of implementation I don't know that there really has been ... they drafted a policy ... procedures. And our school council has responded to that draft and sent the comments in. one of the attachments ... talks about who's on the committee, when your meetings are going to be, what the priorities are going to be, what your training needs are, and I'm not naive enough to think that this is just for ... our benefit that we would actually do this, but it's their way of monitoring what's going on at the school level so that would be one way for sure that they will monitor what's happening.

H25d2 ...the other thing we did have to do before at a number of our principal's meetings ... was a PD session and we discussed our school plans. We all had to bring our school plans, so if you didn't have a school plan, it was pretty obvious. (Laughing)

H25d2 Who have your contact people been at the board? Actually, Sheila is the person who is mostly involved with it, an education officer but I believe that's only one part of her job. Like school council, she looks after a myriad of things, really.

H8d2 ... if you use your time wisely, you have to be careful that you're not being walked over by parents either sometimes we've let parents who are really angry [waste time], sometimes it's better to give some time between, until the anger settles down and then there's actual contact with the parent.