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# Adoption of a District-Level School Library Policy: A Case Study in Change

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*A case study approach was used to examine the processes in a small school district in Alberta, Canada that led to a district policy adopting a cooperative integrated school library program model. The model adopted by The District was that recommended by the Alberta Ministry of Education in the document, Focus on Learning. The adoption process was facilitated by the innovation capacity of The District, by the active leadership of the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees, by the existence of a provincial policy and program model, and by access to new funding. Evaluation of libraries in The District played a key role in changing the understanding of the nature of the school library, from that of a facility and a collection isolated from the curriculum and operating under the responsibility of support personnel, to that of an instructional program integral to the curriculum and directed by teachers. Four propositions about the nature of the adoption process emerged from the case study, related to the time involved, a problem-solving orientation, understanding the innovation, and school board leadership.*

## Planned Change in Education

Much research has been done in relation to the process of planned change in education, particularly the introduction of innovative programs or practices. Very little research has been done, however, into the introduction of the cooperative integrated school library program model, an innovation that involves classroom teachers and teacher-librarians working together to teach students the information skills essential for independent learning and an innovation that has been advocated by school library leaders in Canada and elsewhere since the 1970s.

Planned change in education involves the purposeful introduction and incorporation of a new practice. In education, a three-stage model of the process of planned change is frequently used: (a) adoption, mobilization, or initiation; (b) implementation; and (c) institutionalization or continuance (see, e.g., Fullan, 1982, 1991). Adoption is the process that leads up to and includes the decision to begin to put a new practice in place; implementation, the steps taken to put the new practice in place; and institutionalization, the incorporation of the new practice into established practice.

The process of planned change in education is complex. What happens at each stage in the process affects subsequent stages. Success at one stage does not mean that success will be experienced at later stages. Change in one aspect of an innovation task causes changes in other aspects, which in turn changes the task. There is a complicated interrelationship among the people,

technology, and structure involved; changing one almost inevitably changes the others and not always in ways that can be predicted or controlled. The complexity increases when multiple agencies are involved in implementing the innovation, and the innovation itself will be changed as it passes through each agency. Schools, school districts, and provincial or national departments of education are multifaceted organizations, joined together in complicated relationships and affected strongly by the economic and social milieu in which they operate.

In relation to the adoption stage, Fullan (1991) has identified eight sources of influence on initiation decisions, ranging from the existence and quality of innovations to the problem-solving or bureaucratic orientations of school districts. There is a growing understanding that many technical factors, political factors, and cultural factors are important in the process of planned change, but the development of theoretical frameworks that clearly explain the interactions of those factors is still just beginning.

### Research Design and Methodology

This study of how and why a school district adopted the cooperative integrated school library program model for its high school was designed and carried out as a case study. A case study is "an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1989, p. 23). This case study was exploratory (Yin, 1989) or interpretive (Merriam, 1988) in nature; that is, it used descriptive data to develop conceptual categories or themes. The identification of a specific phenomenon or bounded system is essential to the case study approach (Merriam, 1988). The bounded system for this study was the development of a district-level school library policy in one small school district in Alberta, Canada. The study examined the adoption stage of one case of planned change, not the full cycle of planned change.

The case study was grounded in a constructivist orientation, and qualitative research methodologies were used to conduct the study. A constructivist or interpretist world view recognizes that reality is a social construction involving multiple realities, and that knowledge is necessarily temporary, relative, and context-bound (Lincoln, 1990). In interpretist research, the research design cannot be completed before inquiry begins; it is developed with the participation of research informants as the inquiry proceeds. The purpose of research from the constructivist perspective is to develop a deeper understanding of a complex world. This occurs through the interaction of researcher and researched in a teaching and learning relationship. The appropriate methodologies for this type of research involve exploration of natural contexts, typically but not exclusively, utilizing qualitative rather than quantitative methodologies. The researcher collects data through interviewing or observing or through examining documents. The researcher

analyzes data by searching for categories and themes within the data. Research informants are involved in the inquiry process from contributing to the research design to verifying the interpretation of the data.

Trustworthiness of the case study findings was enhanced through careful collection of data from many sources over an extended time, through review of data and findings by informants, and by provision of records of the case data base (Oberg, 1992).

The general question addressed in the study was as follows: Why and how did a particular school district officially adopt the cooperative integrated school library program model? The specific questions addressed include:

1. Why was the cooperative integrated school library program model selected for adoption by the school district?
2. Who or what was instrumental in the adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program model by the school district?
3. How was the cooperative integrated school library program model defined or understood by the participants in the adoption process?

Two literature reviews were conducted during the study. The first examined the literature related to planned educational change, to school culture, and to school library program implementation, in order to develop a broad understanding of the background relevant to the study. This wide reading was undertaken, as recommended by Merriam (1988) and Yin (1989), to generate ideas, to sharpen questions and insights, and to help place the proposed research in the context of previous research.

After the collection and analysis of the initial data, the literature pertinent to the specific research focus was examined, as recommended by Glaser (1978). That literature review focused on the themes that emerged from the data: (a) district capacity for innovation; (b) selection of the innovation; (c) key roles in adoption; and (d) understanding of the innovation. This literature suggested that districts with a problem-solving orientation are more likely to adopt innovations (Daft & Becker, 1978; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). These districts will tend to select innovations that meet perceived needs (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Turnbull, 1985). Central office administrators, especially in small or rural districts, are generally the key decision-makers in the adoption process (Crandall, 1984; Newton, 1987; Louis, 1989). During the process of adoption, there may be changes in the way that the innovation is understood (McLaughlin, 1976; Mitchell, 1980). Program evaluation and policy-making processes may facilitate changes in the understanding of the innovation, particularly when evaluators take more than a technical role and when policy-makers are involved in the evaluation process (Dawson & D'Amico, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

### Background of the Study

In Canada, governance of K-12 education is a provincial matter; there is no national office of education. Each province establishes general policies, through its ministry of education, in relation to the organization and management of schools and to the school curricula. However, much authority is given to locally elected school boards for determining how a curriculum is to be taught, how student progress is to be assessed, and what resources are required (Oberg & Wright, 1991). In Alberta, school boards are sometimes called Boards of Trustees or Boards of Education; members are elected by the public to govern school districts. Each school district is administrated by a superintendent, hired by the Board of Trustees; the superintendent is usually assisted by a variety of administrative personnel and educational consultants.

In 1984, in response to "wide concern regarding the present state of school libraries and a strong perception that the quality of school library programs is deteriorating" (Alberta Education, 1985, p. 58), the Minister of Education of Alberta approved a policy for school libraries:

Students in Alberta schools should have access to an effective school library program integrated with instructional programs to provide improved opportunities for student achievement of the Goals of Basic Education for Alberta. (Alberta Education, 1984, p. 2)

More than a decade later, many school districts in the province of Alberta have not yet begun to implement the policy and program model outlined in the 1985 Alberta Education document, *Focus on Learning*. This is sad, but not surprising. Alberta Education's role in the development of effective school library programs has been one of encouragement, guidance, and assistance; the responsibility for actually putting programs into practice has been that of the local school district. Alberta Education has supported the introduction of cooperative integrated school library programs by school districts through dissemination of information, primarily through policy documents and in-service activities. There was (and is today) no requirement that school libraries be staffed in particular ways and no special funding provided for the school library program. There was, however, a small financial incentive given two years after the school library policy was approved; a Learning Resources Grant of \$10 per student (with a minimum of \$1,000 per school) was provided to local school districts that put in place a district-level school library policy that was consistent with the provincial policy.

Information dissemination has raised awareness of the need for change, but it has not brought about much change. Many school districts in Alberta do not appear to have the expertise and resources to make the changes required to develop the cooperative integrated school library program. There has been little recognition, within schools and school districts as well as within the literature of school librarianship, of the complexity of the changes



involved in incorporating this approach. The focus in the field of school librarianship, as in the policies and practices of provincial ministries of education, has been on information dissemination, primarily the description and advocacy of particular program models.

In only a few districts in Alberta have schools incorporated the cooperative integrated school library program into their practice; that is, few schools and few districts have made this type of school library program a regular part of their teaching and learning programs. The cooperative integrated school library program is an innovation that has not yet been widely adopted, implemented, or institutionalized. Although this seems to be a consistent pattern across Canada, there have been few systematic, in-depth investigations of the extent to which the cooperative integrated school library program has been adopted, implemented, or institutionalized. Two other studies in Canada have examined this question in the past decade, one in the province of Ontario and one in a school district in the province of Saskatchewan.

Dekker (1989) studied the impact of *Partners in Action*, the 1982 document that presented a cooperative integrated school library program model for Ontario schools. In her survey of 400 elementary schools in Ontario, Dekker found that the development of the program was uneven. A minority of school districts had provided support, financial or otherwise, for introduction of the program. Over half of the districts had not formally adopted the program. Those districts had no policies or standards in place related to the school library program.

Meyer (1990) interviewed teachers in one district in Saskatchewan to determine the extent to which the cooperative integrated school library program, called resource-based learning in Saskatchewan, had been implemented. The district had adopted the program and had been encouraging implementation of the program for seven years. Meyer found that fewer than two thirds of the teachers had incorporated the program into their teaching.

Most school districts in Alberta where the cooperative integrated school library program model has been incorporated into practice have been involved in the program for a considerable length of time, often for many years before this approach was officially sanctioned by Alberta Education. The decision by one school district (called The District in this article) to improve its school libraries offered the opportunity to explore in depth the way in which a school district might go about adopting the type of school library program recommended in the Alberta Education policy and program model. Initially, the study was conceived of as a case study of a high school adopting and implementing a cooperative integrated school library program where the program was new to both the district and the school. That case study would have necessarily spanned a long period of time. The process of planned change, through its phases, from initiation to institutionalization is generally a lengthy one. Fullan (1991) states that "even moderately complex

changes take from three to five years, while major restructuring efforts can take five to ten years" (p. 49). Therefore, the focus of the study was on the adoption phase of the process.

### Case Description

The need to improve the school libraries of The District had been recognized by many, from the earliest years of The District's establishment. Over the first 30 years of its history, its libraries had gone through a number of changes. During the first decade, the 1960s, a time of rapid growth for The District, libraries were established through donation and volunteer help. In the 1970s, the libraries were organized according to standardized library practice, and support staff were hired to operate them. After this reorganization effort under the leadership of District Office staff, the initiative to improve libraries could not be sustained for a variety of reasons, including The District's financial problems. However, with the establishment of a provincial school library policy in 1984 and with the amelioration of The District's financial difficulties, The District once again began to look at its libraries.

Over the four-year span of the adoption process, awareness had grown within The District of the school library policy and program model recommended by Alberta Education. The Superintendent brought his knowledge of, and commitment to, the role of school libraries in teaching and learning when he came to The District as Assistant Superintendent in 1982. As Superintendent, he first turned his attention to the pressing financial problems of The District. When those problems were ameliorated, he turned his attention to instructional problems, including those related to libraries in The District.

The Board of Trustees responded to the Superintendent's concerns with interest and support. They were aware of some of the inadequacies of the libraries in The District, from their service on the Board and from their experiences as parents whose children attended schools in The District.

The possibility of access to new funding, beyond that provided by the Learning Resources Grant, raised interest in addressing those inadequacies in a major way. The District turned to the evaluation process to provide guidance for the improvement initiative. The District called on external evaluators, through the provincial ministry of education, to assist in examining the state of its libraries. The evaluation process assisted The District in developing a new understanding of the role of the school library in the teaching and learning activities of The District.

The support of the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees for the recommendations of the *School Library Program Evaluation Report* (1988) resulted in the official approval of a District School Library Policy. The Policy and the decision to hire a District Librarian signalled The District's adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program model for the high school.

The adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program model was a lengthy, problem-solving process for The District. The Superintendent and Board of Trustees had the most significant decision-making roles in the adoption process. However, the adoption process was more than a problem-solving and decision-making process; it was a teaching and learning process through which the nature of the innovation being adopted was redefined or reconstructed by the participants in the adoption process.

### Findings of the Case Study

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the case study data base, which are outlined below.

#### *District capacity for innovation*

The District had a high capacity for innovation. It had been involved in a number of innovative initiatives. Many of those had been continued over a extended period of time; they had been institutionalized in The District. Only a few of The District's innovative initiatives had been unsuccessful and at least one of them had been viewed as helping The District to do a better job of innovating. A stable and cohesive, but not isolated, district culture also contributed to its capacity for change. New funding was available for financing some change or changes of significant magnitude.

#### *Selection of libraries as a focus for change*

The decision by The District to adopt the policy establishing the cooperative integrated school library program model appears to have been influenced by the existence of and the awareness within The District of the innovation and by advocacy of this innovation from within and beyond The District. The need to improve libraries had been apparent for a long time, but it was only one of a number of areas within The District that was seen to be in need of improvement. Those areas selected for attention by The District were those where there was a strongly and widely perceived need, where there was a clear pattern available for guiding action, and where the Superintendent and Board of Trustees supported the changes.

#### *Key roles in the adoption process*

The most influential decision-makers in the selection of the innovation to be adopted were the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees. The Superintendent had a deep commitment to improving libraries, which he shared with the Board. The resolve of the Board had been focused and solidified by the visit of the Board's Facilities Committee to the high school's library. The pressure for improving The District's libraries that had come from the principals and from the external evaluators could have been resisted without the shared commitment of the Superintendent and the Board. The Director, Curriculum and Instruction, contributed to the selection of libraries as an area for improvement through his work in making schools aware of the *Focus on Learning* model. Although the parents and the students had little direct

impact on The District's decision to select an innovation that centered on libraries, their dissatisfaction may have influenced those who had a stronger and more direct role in the selection process.

### *Understanding of the innovation*

Through the adoption process, there was a major shift in understandings related to three major aspects of the school library. Initially, the key decision-makers in the adoption process viewed the library as a collection and a facility, isolated from the curriculum, and operating under the responsibility of support staff. Their conceptualizations of the library through the adoption process shifted to viewing the library in terms of an instructional program, integral to the curriculum, and directed by teaching staff. The shift in understanding, although grounded in the Alberta Education school library policy and program model, occurred primarily through the evaluation process, which helped to change people's understandings of the policy and program model and helped translate their understandings into a policy and program model appropriate to the local context.

### *Propositions about the Adoption Process*

Four propositions related to the adoption process were supported by evidence from the case study. These propositions express aspects of the adoption process that appear to have been important to the successful adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program model by The District. None of the propositions is new; however, the evidence provided from the case study may help to explain more fully their importance in the adoption process.

### *Adoption is a process over time*

Fullan (1991) states that change is a process, not an event. Adoption is also a process, not an event. The formal adoption of a cooperative integrated school library program of the *Focus on Learning* model by The District was the culmination of many actions and decisions over a long period of time.

The starting point of the adoption timeline is difficult to determine; certainly it must begin before the Superintendent's formal request for a school library program evaluation by Alberta Education. Over a period of years, principals in The District had been bringing forward, through the budget process, their concerns about their libraries. The Superintendent became aware of the state of The District's libraries when he first came to The District in 1982 as Assistant Superintendent, and when he became Superintendent, he began to share his concerns with others in The District.

The first concrete evidence of The District's intention to focus its attention on libraries was the Superintendent's letter of October 27, 1987 requesting an evaluation by Alberta Education of the school libraries in The District. The District's school library policy was approved by the Board of Trustees on May 8, 1989, 17 months later.

The timeline for the adoption process is considerably longer, however, if the timeline is seen to begin at the point where The District became aware of the *Focus on Learning* model. It is clear that The District leadership at the school and District Office level became aware of the *Focus on Learning* model during the 1985-1986 school year. Copies of the *Focus on Learning* document were received by District Office and by each school in the Fall of 1985; several principals and teachers attended Alberta Education Awareness Seminars on the new school library policy and program model; and The District accessed the Learning Resources Grant provided by Alberta Education to assist in the implementation of the policy and program model. The timeline of the adoption process then is closer to four years than 17 months.

### *Adoption is a process of changing meaning*

The development of a clear understanding of a change, whether imposed or chosen, is critical to the change process. McLaughlin and Marsh (1979), in their study of the implementation stage, refer to this as the development of conceptual clarity. Clarification of the meaning of the innovation, its nature, and critical components can also occur during the adoption stage.

In this case study, the participants in the adoption process changed their understanding of what improving school libraries might mean. The Alberta Education evaluation of The District's libraries played a key role in changing meaning. The evaluation process clarified and shaped the definition of the innovation. It shifted generally held views of what needed to be changed.

At the beginning of the adoption process and before the evaluation, the change was understood in terms of library collections and facilities; at the end of the adoption process and after the evaluation, the change was beginning to be understood in terms of an instructional program that would be developed cooperatively by teachers and integrated with the curriculum. The nature of the problem was redefined through the evaluation process, from a problem of how collections and facilities could be upgraded to a problem of how teachers and students could use those collections and facilities. The problem became less one of how we can get the best things for our libraries and more one of how we can get teachers and students to best use our libraries for teaching and learning.

The change in problem definition resulted in changed views of the best solution. The solution to the first problem was seen in terms of an infusion of money and external expertise; the solution to the second would also require money and external expertise, but more importantly, it would require the development of expertise within The District. Teachers, principals, and District Office staff would have to be involved in learning how libraries could best be used for teaching and learning.

### *Adoption is a problem-solving process*

Fullan (1991) has commented, in relation to planning for change, that "having good ideas may be less than half the battle compared with establishing a

process that will allow us to use the ideas and discover additional ones along the way" (p. 100). The District appeared to have established that kind of problem-solving process.

The District Office staff and the Board of Trustees saw themselves as members of a problem-solving team. They used the evaluation process to "get the facts" in order to solve a problem. A team approach was used throughout The District to make decisions related to such essential matters as budget priorities and allocations. The small size of The District and the cohesive close-knit nature of its staff and community contributed to this team concept.

The importance of each member of staff in The District in the problem-solving process was affirmed by District Office staff and members of the Board of Trustees, but this perception was not always shared by the principals. However, because on previous occasions The District had used the evaluation process to assess problems and find solutions, there appeared to be an expectation at the school level that this evaluation would also lead to changes being made. The school library program evaluation process played an important part in confirming the seriousness of the problem and setting the stage for the changes that would be involved in addressing the problem.

The problem-solving approach of The District was marked by a strong concern for "doing it right," for finding the best possible solution to the problem. This involved using expertise from outside The District. Outside assistance was utilized during the process of adoption, for the school library program evaluation, and for policy development at district and school level. Outside assistance was also utilized during the early stages of implementation of the innovation, for helping the high school staff to understand the evaluation recommendations and for recruitment of a District Librarian. This concern for doing it right, which was evident in the comments made by District Office staff, by members of the Board of Trustees, and by the principals, was often also expressed in terms of spending money wisely and well.

### *Adoption is influenced by school board leadership*

School boards rarely have taken a significant role in the adoption of innovations (Fullan, 1991), but there have been cases where school boards have worked actively (and successfully) to bring about specific policy and/or program changes in their school districts.

In this study, the Board of Trustees played a significant role in the adoption process. It did much more than provide the official approval of an initiative of the Superintendent. Individual board members clearly gave the problems related to The District's libraries serious attention. They studied the *School Library Program Evaluation Report* and discussed the report with interest and insight. It was because of the initiative of the Board of Trustees that the approach selected by The District to address the improvement of libraries went beyond the recommendations contained in the *School Library Program Evaluation Report*.



Adoption of an educational innovation is generally an initiative of district-level leadership; this was certainly the case in the adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program model by this school district.

### Implications

This case study has attempted to achieve some understanding of how one school district adopted an educational innovation for the purpose of improving its school libraries. The implications that can be drawn from this study may be of interest to those involved in the adoption of educational innovations in school districts, as district leaders and decision-makers, or as external evaluators working with school districts. There are also implications of interest to researchers.

#### *Implications for Practice*

##### *The importance of the adoption stage in planned change*

Although the interrelationships between the stages of planned change have been long recognized, the emphasis in the recent research literature has been on the implementation stage. During that implementation stage, it has been found to be essential for those involved to develop an understanding of the innovation (conceptual clarity) and of the particular context within which the innovation is being introduced (mutual adaptation). The adoption stage can also provide the opportunity for the development of understanding of the innovation and of the innovation in its context.

Successful adoption needs to be understood in terms of the generation of understanding as well as in terms of the approval of policy. Without the development of a deep understanding, during the adoption stage, of the innovation and what impact its implementation will have both on the context and the innovation itself, the task of implementation is likely to be much more difficult and less successful.

##### *The role of program evaluation in program adoption*

Program evaluation can play an important role in the process of adoption. It can be a powerful means for developing shared meaning and new meanings. The collection of data, the development of recommendations, and the presentation and dissemination of the *School Library Program Evaluation Report* offered opportunities for discussion of the role of the school library in teaching and learning. Although many in The District were aware of the Alberta Education policy and program model, few understood that the policy and program model presented a new way of thinking about school libraries. The evaluation process encouraged the development of new understandings. Program evaluation can help to develop the understanding that is necessary for people to support the adoption of an innovation, particularly one that is external to The District such as those mandated by provincial

policies. Part of the power of evaluation is its role in showing people how the new innovation is different from present practice.

Program evaluation may change the conceptualization of the planned change in unexpected ways. Few in The District expected that the evaluation process would change their view of what school libraries were all about. At the outset of the evaluation process, the adoption of a policy and program model was not the expected outcome for anyone other than the Superintendent. Most who supported the involvement in the evaluation process expected recommendations for improved collections and facilities, not recommendations for new ways to use the library for teaching and learning.

### *The effectiveness of the program evaluation process*

The extent to which an evaluation is utilized or put into action, that is, its effectiveness, seems to be enhanced by a number of factors in the evaluation process.

One factor was the inclusion of a District Office staff member on the evaluation team who would have a major role in the adoption and implementation of the actions recommended in the final evaluation report. This helped to ensure that there would be someone with influence in The District committed to the recommendations who could provide pressure and support for the changes after the external members of the evaluation team had left The District.

Another important factor was the negotiation of meaning throughout the process. The process began with orienting people to the process, helping them to understand the criteria that would be used in the evaluation. The Director ensured that the *Focus on Learning* document was in every school, and he reviewed the document with the principals. Throughout the evaluation process, the evaluators showed recognition of and respect for context and for others' views of the program being evaluated. They were careful to listen to the views of the staff and students in each school. The recommendations in the final report were made in the context of The District's resources.

### *District level leaders working together*

It is particularly important that the district office staff and the school board support the innovation and have the same understanding of the innovation. Joint support and shared understanding are critical to ensuring that an innovation is adopted in a way that makes possible implementation. In other words, the innovation being adopted must be clearly defined in the policy statement approved by the school board and, as well, the resources essential to the implementation of the innovation must be allocated by the school board.

The development of understanding of the innovation is fundamental to the development of policy and the allocation of resources. Without that understanding, the clarity of the policy statement and the adequacy of

resource allocation will be insufficient to take the innovation from adoption to implementation and institutionalization.

### *The role of funding in the adoption process*

The adoption of the innovation was facilitated by access to new funding. New funding gave the district the opportunity to address problems they had previously viewed as impossible to address. The promise of access to new funding was sufficient, but perhaps not necessary for the initiation of action related to improving libraries. The promise of new funding was critical because the improvement of libraries was seen initially in terms of spending money on collections and facilities. The promise of new funding might not have been so critical if the improvement of libraries had been seen initially in terms of learning how to use libraries for instructional purposes.

Educators often cite lack of funding as the reason for not adopting innovations such as the cooperative integrated school library program. However, the problem may not be so much the lack of funds as it is the *use* of funds. In the analysis of data from 73 school districts in British Columbia, Canada, Coleman and LaRocque (1990) found that high per-pupil costs were associated with low student achievement. The efficiency with which school districts use their funds may have more to do with district effectiveness than does the amount of funds. The lack of funding perceived in some districts may be more a lack of skill in using that funding well, whether for current programs or for new programs, rather than an actual lack of funding. Similar funding levels do not mean similar outcomes in terms of student achievement. School districts may be able to find more money for current programs and for new programs by improving their financial practices and rethinking their budget priorities.

### *The role of school boards in adoption*

School boards rarely have had an important role in the adoption of innovations by school districts. When they have, their role has been generally to pressure district administrators to address a problem, rather than to involve themselves in shaping a solution that might address that problem. However, school board members who are knowledgeable about district programs and practices, who have a clear sense of what they want to accomplish, and who engage in activities that allow them to develop others' understanding can play a significant role in the adoption of innovations that address district needs.

## *Implications for Research*

### *Critical factors in adoption*

The change theory related to adoption consists of lists of factors that appear to have an impact on adoption. No evidence yet has been found that clearly suggests which factors or combinations of factors might be most critical to the adoption process. Researchers need to continue to explore cases of adop-

tion of innovations in order to try to determine which factors are critical for ensuring adoption and for laying the foundation for successful implementation and institutionalization.

### *Critical factors in the adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program model*

The cooperative integrated school library program model may be an innovation for which adoption, implementation, and institutionalization are difficult to achieve. There is some evidence to suggest this in studies by Dekker (1989) and Meyer (1990) as well as in the non-utilization of a number of school library program evaluation reports in Alberta in the 1980s. The reasons for this difficulty need to be explored by research into attempts to introduce the cooperative integrated school library program model at the school level and at the district level.

### *Program evaluation and program meaning*

The most important result of the program evaluation process may be the new understandings that the participants gain about the program being evaluated. The evaluation is complete when full resolution is achieved, that is, when consensus is reached on the recommendations, and the actions to be taken. Research is needed to explore the relationship between the development of shared meanings and the effectiveness of the program evaluation process (evaluation utilization).

### *The role of school boards in improving education*

Effective school boards can have a positive impact on education. However, effective school boards do not appear to differ in any significant way from less effective ones, in terms of either trustee characteristics or type of community served (LaRocque & Coleman, 1989). Furthermore, few trustees receive any training or preparation for their roles (Danzberger et al., 1987). Research need to be done on how school boards can develop the capacity to make a positive difference in the educational programs offered in their districts.

## Questions for Reflection

This case study is the story of how one school district began the process of improving its school libraries. Inevitably, some readers of this article must ask themselves, as I have, if this is the only story that could be told about the process. There must also be questions related to the importance of the elements of the process and how the story might have been different if one or more of the elements had been different in some way. I cannot anticipate all the speculations that this case study may evoke for its readers, but I wish to consider a few of the questions that might arise for them.

*The possibility of other interpretations*

Whose story is being told in this case study? This case study has been based on multiple sources of information, including the stories of the participants in that process. It must be said that this case study is my interpretation of the events and their meanings, verified by the participants, but my interpretation nevertheless.

*The effect of time on interpretation*

How has the nature of the story changed over time? The informants who participated in this retrospective research study were recalling events of the past, albeit the recent past, in most instances. It is impossible to determine to what extent informants may have omitted or forgotten certain thoughts, feelings, or actions. Information related to the reasons for those thoughts, feelings, or actions is also susceptible to changes over time. It is usual for people to tell stories in ways that reflect well on themselves. It is also natural for people, as meaning-makers, to find patterns in their experiences, to see cause and effect where perhaps on closer examination little evidence for that relationship exists. It is possible that the story might have been presented differently if the informants had been interviewed more closely in time to the events being recalled.

*The effect of success on interpretations*

The efforts to improve the school libraries in The District constituted a success story for the majority of the informants. The perception of success may have resulted in the informants' forgetting of negative or unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or actions. For example, most informants more readily identified factors that facilitated the changes than factors that constrained or made the changes difficult. However, it is not unusual for people to forget doubts, or anger, or resistance, when all turns well in the end. There was, in the interview data, some evidence of initial difficulties related to the improvement of school libraries in The District. Most of the difficulties centered around the *School Library Evaluation Report*. A few informants noted that some library support staff were dismayed to find no support for the reading promotion programs that they had developed; others reported that some teachers and principals disagreed with the evaluators' assessment of particular school library programs. It is possible there was much more opposition to the change process; informants may have minimized that opposition later because of the apparent success of the improvement efforts.

*The transferability of findings*

Can readers discover, within this case study of one district's experiences, understandings that can be applied to situations in other districts? It must be recognized that the factors identified as critical in the adoption of a cooperative integrated school library program model by The District may not be the critical factors for another school district. For example, three critical factors

for The District were the role of the Superintendent in initiating change, the role of the external evaluators in teaching about the change, and the role of the Director in learning about the change. Other districts might not be able to replicate these factors in their situations. However, they might be able to find other ways to accomplish the initiating, teaching and learning activities that are critical to successful change.

The Superintendent was a strong initiator of the change in The District. What if it is not the superintendent who initiates the change? Could someone else in a district take the initiating role? This might be possible if that someone were an individual or group within the district working at the leadership level. Districtwide changes necessitate involvement by district level leaders, either district office staff or school board members. Individuals or groups outside the school district, such as program evaluators or parent groups, may support change, but it is unlikely that they can initiate a districtwide change without the advocacy or initiation of district leaders.

The school library program evaluation contributed a great deal to the understanding of the innovation within The District. The external evaluators played a teaching role, helping people at the school and district level to develop a clear understanding of the innovation. This teaching role might be carried out by someone within a district who has the necessary expertise and time. Lacking those resources of expertise and time, a district would need to go beyond its borders to contract for services. Because of its proximity to the workplaces of the external evaluators, The District was able to call on the evaluators for further assistance, both formal presentations related to the evaluation report and informal consultations related to the report recommendations. In districts more remote from the sources of consulting services, provisions need to be made for follow-up and ongoing assistance in addition to the initial evaluation services.

The Director, Curriculum and Instruction, went beyond his original coordination role in the school library program evaluation process. The Director thus began the process of developing expertise within The District related to the cooperative integrated school library program. Without the involvement of a district level person who has expertise related to the innovation, adoption is difficult and implementation is unlikely to be successful. In districts where expertise related to the innovation is lacking, some effort will need to be extended to identify individuals with interests or backgrounds that make them open to the innovation and to arrange for appropriate learning experiences so that they can provide expertise within the district. The development of understanding within the district is critical to successful change.

### A Bright Beginning

The adoption of an innovation is only the first step in the process of educational change. Many bright beginnings have faded away to nothing. However, the adoption of a cooperative integrated school library program in The



District seemed to have, in good measure, the characteristics that Miles (1987) found in adoptions that were successfully implemented: (a) strong advocacy; (b) need; (c) active initiation; and (d) a clear model for proceeding.

The improvement of The District's libraries was supported strongly by the Superintendent and the Director. Several school board members and several principals were also committed to change from the beginning of the adoption process. Through the process, more school board members and more principals became supportive of the change.

The need for the change was clearly evident within The District at all levels, from students to school board members. From the earliest days of The District, libraries had been underfunded. The high school library was the one most clearly inadequate to meet the needs of teachers and students.

There was active initiation of the change by the Superintendent and by several school board members. The program evaluation was viewed as a way to guide the action of the District, and the recommendations of the report were taken seriously by District Office staff and the school board.

The Alberta Education policy and program model provided a clear model for proceeding. The recommendations of the school library program evaluation team were based on that policy and program model. In addition, the implementation of the policy and model in neighboring school districts also provided some patterns for guidance.

These characteristics of the adoption of the cooperative integrated school library program by The District indicate a promising beginning for the implementation phase of this educational change. The purpose of the case study was to contribute to a deeper understanding of the change process. Although there has been a great deal of research related to planned change in education, few studies have focused specifically on the adoption stage of the change process in education. This study may contribute in some small way to the understanding of the adoption stage as a process itself. There are many schools and school districts, in Canada and elsewhere, where policies supporting the cooperative integrated school library program model have not yet been adopted. This study may assist people in those schools and school districts in understanding how a school library policy might be adopted.

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