

# **PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF A SCHOOL-BASED REFORM INITIATIVE**

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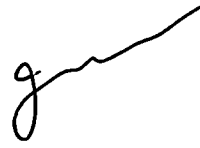
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## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institute, college or university, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the Thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Judith G Bennett', written in a cursive style.

Judith G Bennett

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a loop followed by a long, slightly curved horizontal stroke.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF A SCHOOL-BASED REFORM INITIATIVE**

By Judith Grace Bennett

In recent years the structure of school governance in Australia has been undergoing dramatic change. Changes have included an increased devolution of responsibility for the implementation of centrally-determined policies and priorities (Mulford and Hogan, 1999). Such change is considered as having significant implications for all schools (Sharpe, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which a selected group of 16 Tasmanian school principals undertook a school reform initiative in the area of increased decentralisation of school governance, the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) process, in their particular school.

The research questions selected for the study were as follows:

1. How did principals gain commitment and initiate the ASSR process in their School?
2. What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?
3. What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools? and,
4. How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?

A multi-case study method was adopted and semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather data. The range of interview questions and prompts were also listed. The interview data were analysed according to the questions presented and categorised. Responses were triangulated by reference to the document analysis and an elite interview.

This study found that the establishment and implementation of school-based reform is affected by the level of commitment from staff and the principal, the principal's leadership style and the characteristics of a school context including administrative practices, school size and school sector. The principal is a critical player in implementing school-based reform. This study reinforces previous research indicating tension between central policy guidelines and school-based ownership and accountability. Though the principals in this study perceived the ASSR process as centrally driven, they perceived the process in a positive light, and considered that they implemented the ASSR process as required by the ASSR guidelines.

In brief, this study has found that the following seven aspects contribute to a greater likelihood of successful implementation of school reform efforts such as ASSR:

- Principal with a positive attitude and understanding of school-based reform;
- Proactive rather than reactive principal using ASSR as a lever for change;
- Having an experienced principal;
- Being in a primary and/or smaller school;
- Use of existing rather than adding to a school's activities or ways of operation;
- Shared or distributive leadership within the school; and

- Time, to reflect on the reform process and its implications for school improvement.

Principals undertaking reform agendas have professional learning needs that relate to change and school improvement and their roles as leaders in schools. These agendas need to take particular account of the professional development of those new to principalship or new in their school.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Abstract

Chapter 1:	Introduction:	
	□ Background	1.
	□ Statement of the Problem	7.
	□ Purpose of the Study	7.
	□ Significance of the Study	7.
	□ The Need for the Study	8.
	□ Research Questions	8.
	□ Assumptions Underpinning the Study	9.
	□ Methods Selected for the Study	9.
	□ Limitations	9.
	□ Acknowledgement of Potential Bias	10.
	□ Definition of Term	10.
	□ Chapter Outline	11.
Chapter 2:	Literature Review:	
	□ Introduction	12.
	□ Principal Leadership	12.
	□ Authority and Power	21.
	□ Teacher Participation	27.
	□ Summary	38.
Chapter 3:	Methodology:	
	□ Introduction	45.
	□ Seeking Permission to Conduct the Study	46.
	□ Population	46.
	□ Sample	46.
	□ Research Bias	47.
	□ Research Methods Selected for the Study	48.
	□ Data Gathering Techniques	50.
	□ Design of the Data Gathering Tools	51.
	□ Semi Structured Interviews	51.
	□ Elite Interview	55.
	□ Document Analysis	55.
	□ Trialling the Instrument	56.
	□ Administration of the Data Gathering Instruments	57.
	□ Data Analysis	58.
	□ Issues of Validity	59.
	□ Summary	59.
Chapter 4:	Data Analysis and Results:	
	□ Introduction	61.
	□ Results of Research Question One	62.
	□ Results of Research Question Two	86.
	□ Results of Research Question Three	113.
	□ Results of Research Question Four	118.
	□ Summary of Results of Research	128.



Chapter 5:	Discussion:	
	□ Introduction	133.
	□ Initiating the ASSR Process	133.
	□ Management and Decision Making Processes	137.
	□ Review Co-ordination Team	139.
	□ Role of the Management Team	141.
	□ Administrative Demands	143.
	□ Professional Development	145.
	□ Outcomes of ASSR	146.
	□ Principal Leadership	150.
	□ Conclusion	155.
	□ Recommendations	157.

Postscript:		162.
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## References

Appendix	A: Principal Statement of Duties
	B: Letter to the Tasmanian Department of Education
	C: Response: the Tasmanian Department of Education
	D: Letter to District Superintendents
	E: Information Sheet for Principals
	F: Consent Form for Principals
	G: Interview Questions

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

In recent years the structure of school governance in Australia has been undergoing dramatic change. Changes have included an increased devolution of responsibility for the implementation of centrally-determined policies and priorities (Mulford and Hogan, 1999). Such change is considered as having significant implications for all schools (Sharpe, 1994).

Trends towards increased decentralisation of school governance and its significant impact on Australian schools and school reform initiatives were evident in all states by the beginning of the 1990's. Historically, state systems of education in Australia have been characterised by "...high levels of central control..." (Should Schools be Self – Managing? 1996, p9) and large bureaucracies, although some aspects of responsibility had been variously and gradually devolved to the school level in the twenty-year period earlier. The extent of devolution in the 1990's varied across Australia.

With the exception of Victoria, devolution has meant continued central control over staffing and considerable power over policies and guidelines, with increasingly devolved budgetary and administrative responsibility to schools. ( p11)

In this climate of increased decentralisation of school governance, School Development Planning (SDP) can be identified as one of the key management technologies. In *Planning for Better Primary Schools*, Logan, Sachs and Dempster (1996) link the introduction of SDP to management practices associated with wider

public sector reform, and especially structural decentralisation throughout Australia and internationally, in the previous decade. They claim that there were six features of SDP that appeared to be common to school reform initiatives in all states:

1. The linkage with school review and quality assurance over a three to five year period;
  2. The use of strategic and operational planning procedures to particularise priorities for each school;
  3. The adoption of participative decision-making structures and procedures;
  4. The inclusion of parents in the management process;
  5. The retention of control by central office over purposes and policies; and
  6. The decentralisation of responsibility for the implementation of policy, quality improvement and resource management to schools
- (p2)

According to Logan, Sachs and Dempster (1996), decentralisation has emerged as a “key organising principle” of this change because the members of a school community were required to assume different roles and functions in the management of the school. Mulford and Hogan (1999) pointed out that increased devolution of responsibility to schools has, at the same time, demanded increased accountability. Among other things, this demand for effective performance management requires school leaders to develop strategies and processes within the school for school-based review and accountability. If done well, the outcomes of these procedures can inform continuous school improvement and, more specifically, SDP. Logan et al (1996) argued that the increasing trend to school-based management has demanded leadership skills to ensure that processes are in place to link continuous school improvement with school planning and accountability.

Trends towards decentralisation were evident in Tasmania as well and led, in 1996, to the Tasmanian Department of Education trialling a process that is the focus of this study, the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR). This process took account of the key features of school development planning as identified by Logan et al. (1996) including the link between continuous school improvement and school planning and accountability. Whilst Tasmania had experienced increased trends towards school-based management from as early as the 1970's, mirroring trends in other Australian states, the most significant development that influenced major school reform and school-based management in this state in the period leading up to the implementation of the ASSR trial was the re-organisation that occurred as a direct result of the Cresap review of the entire state education system.

In June 1990, consultants were commissioned to conduct an efficiency review of the Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts. The Cresap Report (1990) was published as a result of this consultancy. The report provided an overview of trends in organisational management in the education department and "...proposed a set of guiding principles for the delivery of educational services" (Should Schools be Self-Managing? 1996 p12). One of its recommendations was a model of delivery of education based in regions or districts. Underpinning this model was the notion of the devolution of authority to at least the regional level, but particularly to the school or college level.

The review was driven primarily and initially by budgetary considerations indicated

by the terms of reference. The terms of reference set out a number of areas for examination that would identify "...where greater efficiencies and cost effectiveness can be achieved while maintaining the quality of education." (Cresap, Terms of Reference, 1990). The authors acknowledge that they "...could not be unaware of the context in which it [sic the review] was occurring..." (p2). Increased decision-making at the school and at community level was perceived to be a major benefit to the state education system.

Recommendations from the Cresap Report were implemented in 1991-92. As a result of these recommendations, an eight-district model replaced the three regions as the administrative structure for educational services in over 200 government schools in Tasmania. This restructure provided the context for school-based management. The recommendations included a listing of specific responsibilities for Principals, one of which was "accountability for educational outcomes, developing a school plan, and ensuring students' needs are met (Cresap, 1990, p60)..." (The School Review Program, 1996, p5).

It was also recommended that each of the eight districts be headed by a District Superintendent. The new District Superintendents met early in 1992 to discuss their roles and functions.

Arising from this meeting was the recognition that one of the main educational roles of the District Offices was to review school plans and their implementation. Superintendents, somewhat independently of each other, began developing strategies to meet this responsibility. This work formed the beginning of a school plan implementation review process,

from which current practice evolved ... (The School Review Program, 1996 p5)

A Department of Education document “Local School Leadership and Management Policy ” was subsequently published in 1993. This document made explicit the role of the District Superintendent. There was an expectation, in fulfilling their function, that they would be “...responsible for the administration and quality assurance for schools, colleges and educational facilities in the district.” (Position Description; District Superintendent). There was also an expectation that accountability and compliance mechanisms would need to be put in place.

During the next few years review strategies and planning processes were gradually developed. The ‘seed’ of the idea for ASSR originated during the early nineties with the newly appointed District Superintendents. It came about as a result of discussions amongst the District Superintendents concerning their role and their growing interest in school improvement strategies (This Study Elite Interview, 1999). According to one of those District Superintendents, reform strategies that had evolved to that time met the basic demands of compliance but did little in assisting schools bring about improved student learning outcomes. Further, principals and others believed that the current review strategies and planning processes were largely ad hoc and that a systemically consistent approach to school reform (especially in relation to expectations) was needed. However, it was not until the latter part of 1996 that a formal process of school review linked to school improvement and accountability was developed.

The Tasmanian Department of Education's ASSR process was developed and implemented during the period 1996-2000 by District Superintendents, in collaboration with their principals, and with the assistance of the Department of Education's Office for Educational Review, whose role it was to coordinate and implement accountability initiatives. In brief, ASSR was designed to streamline school planning and to adopt a more consistent approach to review processes. As pointed out in the official documentation, ASSR aimed to:

...build on the good review and planning practices of the past [in the context of self managing schools] to develop a review approach of maximum value to schools and their communities...[and in doing so]...involves everyone, clarifies existing practice, celebrates the good things and describes new pathways. It is about setting priorities that match identified needs and the unique nature of each school in its community...[The process]...culminates in the documentation of a three year Partnership Agreement. (Assisted School Self Review, Department of Education, 1999, p1)

As this development and implementation period for ASSR has now come to an end, it is important that it be evaluated. This introductory chapter to such an evaluation is organised into eleven sections. After the statement of the problem and purpose of the study, the significance of, and need for, the study are elaborated. Then the research questions are listed, the assumptions underpinning the study stated and methods outlined. The limitations of the study, acknowledgement of potential bias and definition of terms are provided before concluding with a chapter outline.

### **Statement of the Problem**

How do principals perceive the process of implementing the ASSR program in their school?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the ways in which a selected group of 16 Tasmanian school principals undertook a school reform initiative, the ASSR program, in their particular school and how this process reflected the stated guidelines of the ASSR.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is timely, particularly in the Tasmanian education context. From 1997-99 all schools in Tasmania completed the ASSR review process. It was agreed that 2000 would be a year of review and that the cycle of ASSR would be suspended to allow time for review and reflection. Consequently, the Department of Education completed its own internal review of the ASSR process (see Postscript). The outcome of this review is a revised School Improvement review process. In agreeing to the study reported in this thesis, the Tasmanian Department of Education believed that the results would only further enhance understandings about school reform initiatives.

The findings of this study would also be significant for researchers interested in the perceptions of principals, especially in relation to school reform initiatives. Currently,



there is much interest in mandated school reform initiatives, especially in the area of accountability, and the links with school improvement and student learning outcomes.

Finally, as this study examines reform initiatives from the perspective of the principal, it is project specific and should inform further review policy, especially with the recent establishment of the Tasmanian Principals' Institute, with responsibility for the continuing professional development of all government school principals in the state.

### **The Need for the Study**

The findings of this study are important for educational research. The contributions of the interviewees could lead to an enhanced understanding of the links between principal leadership and school reform. This understanding should inform school leadership practice and the implementation of future systemic school reform initiatives that are mandated. The perceptions of principals responsible for ASSR should provide important insights into the link between principal leadership and school improvement initiatives. The actions of the principals and the reasons for their choices may point to professional learning needs of principals and senior management.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions selected for the study were as follows:

1. How did principals gain commitment and initiate the ASSR process in their school?

2. What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?
3. What did principals perceive as the outcomes of ASSR for their schools? and,
4. How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?

### **Assumption Underpinning the Study**

The principal has the knowledge and understanding of the ASSR implementation process in their school.

### **Methods Selected for the Study**

A multi-site case study method was selected for the study in order to investigate each school as a bounded system and to look at patterns existing across case study sites. Data gathering was undertaken using semi-structured interviews of sixteen selected principals, an elite interview with a significant person heavily involved in the development and implementation of ASSR and a document analysis of Department of Education material.

### **Limitations**

The sample was drawn from only three of the six school districts in Tasmania. Further, the sample only includes those principals who undertook the ASSR process in 1999. The data collected for this study is therefore only a 'snapshot' of what happened in the ASSR process in the particular school in a particular year and it is seen only through the eyes of the principal. Results of this study may not reflect the

way the review process occurred in other school districts, with other principals or as seen by other teachers.

Further, an elite interview was conducted with only one senior Department of Education administrator who was involved in the development and implementation of the ASSR process. The results of the interview with this senior administrator may not reflect the views of other senior administrators who may have been involved.

### **Acknowledgement of Potential Bias**

The researcher knew the principals selected for interview and had worked closely with some of them. The researcher's prior knowledge of the process could result in bias in the interpretation of the data. However, in order to reduce, as much as possible, a potential bias in data gathering, the researcher adopted formal procedures in the administration of the interviews.

### **Definition of Term**

For the purpose of this study the definition of Assisted School Self Review is:

...A review approach...[that]...uses

- indicators of best practice
- staff, student and parent surveys
- data collection and analysis
- reflection about the school in its particular setting (the scan)

and culminates in the documentation of a three year Partnership Agreement. Assisted School Self Review involves everyone, clarifies existing practice, celebrates the good things and describes new pathways. It is about setting priorities that match identified needs and the unique nature of each school in its community. (Assisted School Self Review, Department of Education, 1999, p1)

## **Chapter Outline**

This chapter described the background of the study and methodology and scope of the study. The remainder of the thesis is organised around four chapters. Chapter two reviews the literature related to school reform and issues relevant to the study. Chapter three details the methodology used in the study. The findings of the study are reported in Chapter four. Chapter five presents a discussion of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The demand for school reform in recent years has generated considerable research and resultant literature. The research has attempted to identify what makes an effective school and how to go about school improvement. School-based management is one strategy employed to bring about change. The Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) process, adopted in Tasmanian state schools during the period 1997-99, is a reform initiative typical of programs implemented in schools to meet the mandated demand for increased accountability that has arisen from increased devolution of responsibility of centrally decided policies. This chapter reports the review of the research literature relevant to school-based management and the ASSR process according to the following headings: principal leadership; authority and power; and participation in decision-making.

### **Principal Leadership**

Research on successful school-based management highlights the important role of the principal. More broadly, research on school reform initiatives highlights the evolving nature of leadership in restructuring schools.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) examined the influences on teacher perceptions of transformational school leadership. It was the researchers view that transformational

forms of leadership are well suited to the demands of complex reform agendas such as school-based management initiatives. Further, the researchers argued that perceptions about leaders are critical to a leader's effectiveness in the role.

Data for the study was derived from a survey containing 243 items that measured dimensions of transformational leadership, school-based management and in-school characteristics. This survey was administered to teachers and principals in a large school system in Canada. The surveys also collected data that related to teacher, leader and school characteristics.

Leithwood et al. (1997) identified dimensions of transformational leadership. One dimension in particular related to collaborative decision-making structures whilst others were related to vision, professional practice, support, high expectations and intellectual stimulation.

The researchers found that because leadership is an influencing process, being perceived as a leader is just as important to a leader's effectiveness as is leadership behaviour. Leithwood et al. (1997) reported that teachers' perceptions of what things a principal should do were significant in their judgment of a principal as an effective leader. They concluded that teachers' perceptions of principal leadership were influenced by the "good work" done on behalf of the school by the principal (Leithwood et al. 1997, p328).

Baker and Dellar (1999) conducted research to find out what educational issues are important to principals in their current administrative context, and which factors contributed to these issues. The research study involved a modified Delphi survey research design. A sample of 330 principals, selected from both primary and secondary schools in the Australian government and non-government education sectors, were surveyed. The majority of principals in the sample were male, primary principals and from the government sector.

Three different mail surveys were sent, in sequence, to the principals in the sample. In the first round, the principals responded to an open-ended statement stem. Written responses provided the basis for developing rating scales and identifying key concerns. The second survey, based on results from the first survey, asked respondents to rate each of the identified concerns against the rating scale. A survey, providing all respondents with a summary of the results from the first two surveys invited responses from principals. These results are interesting because the Delphi research design approach enabled principals to be aware of the concerns of their colleagues, as they made their own responses.

The results from the surveys identified a range of educational issues that are of concern to principals. These concerns were later grouped under six headings: "...Humanistic Leadership; Increasing Demands; Decision-Making Processes; National Curricula; School Discipline; and Technology" (Baker and Dellar, 1999, p20), which related mainly to current system-wide change. Principals expressed

concern about greater demands on the principal's time but the researchers were of the opinion that the principals did not consider their workload unmanageable. However, the researchers concluded that the results of the study highlight "...the enormous pressures confronting the principal with respect to administrative workload associated with multiple reform agenda..." (p20). The way principals manage workloads would seem to have an impact on the leadership role of the principal in the school.

Reitzug and Burello's (1995) research indicates what distinguishes principals in self-renewing schools from those in other schools. They studied 13 principals from 13 school districts in the Midwest, Southwest and Southeast USA. Principals, identified as being "outstanding" by school administrators and university colleagues of the researchers in each geographic region of the USA, made up the sample. The researchers did not provide the criteria, used by the administrators, for selection of fellow university colleagues. The sample included both male and female principals from urban and suburban schools.

The researchers observed the principals and interviewed them and their staff. They also examined school documents for evidence of leadership behaviour that was empowering and led to self-renewal actions.

The results from the research found that principals selected as "outstanding" were perceived by teachers as supportive of those teachers undertaking innovation. These



outstanding principals provided an environment of support, modelled and encouraged reflective practice and facilitated the implementation of program ideas that resulted from teachers engaging in this practice. The researchers concluded that the role of principals in self-renewing schools changed from one of giving out information to one of facilitation.

In school restructuring, problems arise between the principal's role as leader in a self-managing school and the principal's role as line manager in a system hierarchy. A study of principals in Western Australia, involved in-school restructuring, was undertaken by Dimmock (1999). He examined the decision-making structure employed within the school.

Data was collected from a purposive sample of 20 primary and secondary principals in the government education system. In semi-structured interviews, principals were requested to respond to examples of dilemmas in terms of how they handled problems in their school. From this, the researcher identified two different kinds of dilemmas that arose for principals in schools engaged in restructuring initiatives; those that were more general related to personal, professional and philosophical concerns and those that were more specific. The more specific concerns were usually related to practical and operational issues to do with structures, processes, curriculum and resources.

Dimmock found that dilemmas facing school leaders derived from the interactions between changes taking place in the complex environment of the school. He concluded that greater understandings about how school leaders managed dilemmas would lead to better preparation of school leaders as change agents in school improvement initiatives.

School-based management relies on collaborative and co-operative decision-making which may, at times, involve conflict management strategies. Henkin, Cistone and Dee (2000) researched the way in which principals addressed conflict as part of the decision-making process in site-based managed schools.

The researchers invited all 300 principals from a large urban school district in south-eastern USA, where site-based management has been implemented, to participate in the study. The study population represented both males and females and a diversity of groups. However, the proportion of gender and ethnicity was not included. Participants were asked to complete an instrument called The Organisational Communication Conflict Instrument. This instrument provides reports of behaviours and outlines strategies for dealing with conflict.

Results showed that there was a direct correlation between inclinations towards solution-oriented conflict management strategies and the level of satisfaction of the principal with site-based management. They concluded that principals in self-

managed schools felt comfortable with their new roles as leaders, and that conflict management was not a major issue for principals who assumed new leadership roles. The devolution of power to schools and resultant school-based management makes assumptions about how schools will be organised and how decisions will be made. Implicit in school-based management is the expectation that principals will work with stakeholders, providing opportunities for them to be involved in the key decisions that need to be made in a school. School-based management relies on collaboration and co-operative decision-making.

Restructuring initiatives highlight the importance of leadership that promotes shared decision-making and distributed leadership in schools. Leithwood, Steinbach and Ryan (1997) studied six teams of secondary school teachers in order to find out what factors foster or inhibit team learning in secondary schools. There was a particular focus on the nature of leadership influencing such learning.

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from six teams in five secondary schools. Two teams were the school decision-making groups and a third team had assumed the role of assisting its school become a learning organisation. The other three teams were given specific roles, two were given tasks related to the needs of students and the third team was assigned responsibilities relating to school improvement. Team membership varied from four to twenty members.

Members of each group were interviewed as a team. Semi-structured interviews were adopted. Further to the interviews, each team member was asked to complete an eleven-item survey. The data was analysed and coded according to identified variables and relationships.

The findings of the research pointed to a number of “within-team” variables that accounted for variation in the nature and amount of learning across the teams. The study also indicated that both “in-school” (including leadership) and “out-of-school” conditions influenced this learning. The results suggest that team leadership can make a difference to the team’s learning.

A collaborative project between two Australian states and the University of Toronto was undertaken for the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) by Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop (2000) in order to examine the effects of organisational learning and leadership on student outcomes.

This study was unusual in an Australian context in that the sample was large, the study was longitudinal in nature, it attempted to operationalise the concept of organisational learning, it provided international comparisons, and student outcome measures were used to assess effects.

The project required three phases of data collection over the period (1997-1999). In phase one, surveys of students, teachers and principals in 96 secondary schools from

two Australian states were conducted. In phase two, cross-sectional and longitudinal case study data was collected from some of the sample schools for triangulation. In phase three, the results were used to develop and trial professional learning interventions for school leaders. The project design was a series of iterative processes, theory development and testing. Towards the end of the project comparisons were made with similar data from selected Canadian provinces.

The researchers identified a range of factors that contribute to a learning organisation, especially as it relates to Australian schools. The researchers identified four key factors that contribute to a learning organisation; a trusting and collaborative climate, a shared and monitored mission, risk taking and initiative and professional development.

The researchers defined a collaborative climate, fundamental to school reform, as a climate of trust and openness. They found that organisational learning involves taking risks and showing initiative. Further, the researchers found that regular and critical reviewing of school practices ensures continuous learning occurs in the school. Linked to this is the need for staff to be learning continuously. Professional development is a high priority for organisational learning.

Further analysis of their data (Mulford and Silins, 2001) allowed Mulford and Silins to link leadership with organisational learning and a range of study outcomes. It was found that there is a close link between school environments and improved student

learning. In addition, the researchers concluded that a principal who was skilled in transformational leadership had more impact on student outcomes than a principal who exhibited strong transactional leadership involving organisational, managerial and strategic planning tasks in a school.

Apart from size factors, the variations in organisational learning between Australian secondary schools could be attributed to the degree to which the principal was skilled in transformational leadership or transactional leadership, and the degree to which he or she was actively involved in the core work of the school (p288). A principal skilled in transactional leadership may exhibit what appears to be effective behaviours as a leader but this has the potential for an illusion of effectiveness.

### **Authority and Power**

Principal and teacher attitudes towards reform initiatives mandated by an education system maybe a key factor in the effect of school reform on school improvement. Further, the ways in which the principal 'sells' the initiative to staff, and other stakeholders, may impact on staff ownership and commitment.

Wildy (1999) examined the way principals perceived power relations in their school. In particular, Wildy was concerned with the ways principals responded to centrally driven initiatives. The study involved semi-structured interviews conducted with 62 principals in two Western Australian school districts during two periods in 1996 and 1997 as they tried to implement a new policy.

Principals were asked to recount their experiences with examples of changing power relations as a result of restructuring. In order to help interviewees generate specific incidents, a series of prompt dilemmas and questions was presented. Analysis of the transcripts indicated different kinds of responses to the dilemmas of restructuring, illustrating different strategies employed by different principals to deal with new policy implementation.

Wildy uses three case studies from the sample to illustrate her findings. They are examples of the different strategies adopted by principals in the face of one of the dilemmas of restructuring; responding to directives and acting autonomously.

Wildy concluded that the responses could be interpreted in terms of the power relationships each describes; “Power down but not up”, “Power up and power down” and “Power neither up nor down” (p120). The first “Power down but not up” refers to those actions of the principal that result from his or her compliance with central directives whilst still maintaining power within their school. “Power up and power down” refers to those actions of the principal that reflect the principal’s power within the system and within the school. The third category, “Power neither up nor down” refers to the way in which principals become powerless because they were unable to balance the competing mandated demands of restructuring initiatives and sharing power within the school.

Wildy found that although each of these three kinds of responses, made by principals in the study, were different, what was common to all three was that none fulfilled school reform aspirations of devolved power and authority. Wildy concluded that systems committed "...to devolving power and authority to schools needs to provide principals and teachers with opportunities to make decisions about matters that affect them" (p123). Further, she suggested that principals can respond to the contradictions of existing restructuring initiatives by building a school culture that empowers staff "...in pursuit of the spirit of devolution." (p124).

Sidener (1995) examined a particular school's effort to use school-based management and shared decision-making, over a seven-year period in order to restructure the school. The school was selected because it met key criteria namely, degree of commitment, the availability of data, a low staff and principal turnover rate, and length of time that the school had been involved in school-based management.

The research focused on the inter-relationship between school-based management and aspects of school culture; namely, distribution of authority, how work is accomplished and the role of the learner. Data was collected over the period October 1993 to February 1994. The researcher spent approximately two days per week in a selected school conducting interviews with key informants. Additional data was collected from participants in the project, documentation, observations at the site,



district administrators and the teacher union. Analysis was undertaken of the semi-structured interviews, document, observation notes and archive material.

Sidener concluded from her research that restructuring in schools requires a cultural change within the organisation. She identified three areas of change in schools; “distribution of authority”, “work patterns” and “the role of learners” (p34). Sidener found that the process of school-based management can accelerate changes in organisational culture because it is through increased communication, arising from the site-based decision-making, that culture is transmitted, authority re-distributed and collaboration fostered.

Sidener contended that the roles assumed by participants at every level, the training needs of the principal, the need for a common direction for the entire organisation and the opportunities for leadership afforded by school-based management processes were important. Further, the results pointed to the need for time for new initiatives to be institutionalised and for shared decision-making processes to develop. Ongoing review of the processes of site-based management was considered necessary to ensure continual improvement and participants needed to gain ownership and commitment to the process.

As pointed out by Sidener, one of the aims of school-based management is to restructure roles and relationships. However, her research indicated that setting up a governance council (or management committee) does not, on its own, change power

and authority relationships. Time needs to be given to understanding roles and the principal's role needs to be one of facilitator. Sidener argued that there was a need for increased parent participation and a changed role of district staff. In particular, Sidener's research indicated that the superintendent needed to maintain a high profile of commitment to the project.

Sidener's research found that the principal was a key figure in making school-based management work at the school site. Her results indicated that leadership at the school site must be congruent with the school's organisational philosophy and that principals with facilitative styles should be matched to schools operating under school-based management. She contended that, in school-based management, each approach to change had its own theoretical framework. All managers, she believed, need to "...understand the theory that underpins the approach." (p11)

Finally, Sidener also found that cultural change takes time and that participants need ongoing assistance to develop their shared decision-making processes. The research found that a process for renewal needed to be built into the school-based decision-making process and that policy makers needed to "...tread a fine line between providing enough structure to ensure that decisions are student centred and allowing participants to discover the process and set goals for themselves" (p43). In conclusion, Sidener's study highlighted the human aspects of school restructuring.

Wildy and Wallace (1997), in their study of leadership in restructured schools, examined the devolution of power that occurred in one particular Western Australian school. The school is a small rural high school catering for junior high school students. The principal, a female, is in her fourth year of her first principalship. The researchers provided several reasons for selecting this school. According to Wildy and Wallace, the school was recognised for its collaborative methods of working. It was also one of seven schools selected as part of a national restructuring initiative. As part of the evaluation of this initiative, evidence indicated that whilst all seven principals were seen as pivotal in the change process, the principal of the school, in their opinion, stood out from the other school principals as having a key role to play. The researchers also indicated that they had a working relationship with the school.

According to the researcher, the research design involved "...describing, interpreting and analyzing ways in which...[the principal] worked as a leader in collaborative settings." (p136). The researchers concluded that this approach enabled them to examine the whole school rather than a 'snapshot' of principal behaviour, and to look at the complex issues involved.

The researchers spent 20 days in the school over an 18-month period. Information was gathered through a series of interviews across a range of stakeholder perspectives. These interviews were both formal and informal and were triangulated with field notes and observations. The interviews were taped and the transcripts and the field notes, together with other information about school processes, were

progressively analysed using constant comparative method. They also checked the written accounts and findings with participants throughout the study in order to verify data.

Wildy and Wallace identified five common themes that reflected the principal's leadership style: shared knowledge; responsibility; integrity; example; and intervention. It appears that the personal style of the principal and his/her understanding of collaboration affects the way a principal manages decision-making.

Results of this case study suggested to the researchers that a principal can be both strong and collaborative and that teacher empowerment results from shared leadership. The researchers concluded that there is a series of paradoxes facing school leaders in site-based managed schools. There is a need for both shared and strong leadership. Balance needs to be found between pressure and letting go. High expectations and modelling contrasts allow others to make choices. However, it should be noted it was a case study of one principal only and drawing generalisations of this nature may not be justified.

### **Teacher Participation**

Teacher participation in decision-making is widely believed to be a critical factor in effective school reform initiatives. School-based management assumes that school communities will participate in decisions affecting organisational effectiveness.

A research study by Brouillette (1997) sought to examine how three high school principals perceived shared decision-making in their schools. Data was gathered over a two-year period from three high schools in a suburban school district in the USA. The aim of the research was to investigate principal actions that could be attributed to the requirements of the particular school context or the principal's own beliefs. Semi-structured interviews, on-site observations and the researching of archival materials were undertaken as data gathering methods. Interpretative analysis of the data and member checks were undertaken as triangulation for the study. Interviewees included the three high school principals, other key school personnel who had participated in the shared decision-making process and central office administrators.

Brouillette found that two major concerns emerged. Firstly, it was considered that the aim of devolved responsibility was to enable schools to have the freedom to experiment and be entrepreneurial. Secondly, it was felt that school-based decision-making was about all of the school community having a voice. Brouillette reported that the newer high school that had received recognition for school-based reform, unlike the other two schools, had devolved responsibility and freedom to experiment with school community concerns.

Churchill and Williamson (1999) considered how teacher attitudes towards future changes in education might be influenced by their experiences in current change initiatives. The study involved 20 randomly selected schools within the state

education system of Tasmania and South Australia. The researchers used, what they called "...a multi-site, multi-method approach..." (p45), to gather data from 100 teachers from the selected schools, who expressed an interest in being involved in the study. However, no details were provided regarding the way the teachers were selected from each of the 20 schools. A questionnaire was administered and semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher.

The study found that teachers' perceptions about how they would respond to future educational changes were, to an important extent, influenced by their experience with recent educational changes. Churchill and Williamson concluded that the correlation between past and future experiences of teachers with educational reform has implications for the way in which proposed educational changes are implemented. They argued that there was a need to focus on teacher commitment in order to achieve change and to "promote local ownership of educational innovation to enhance teacher commitment to the goals associated with change" (p50).

Churchill and Williamson claimed that there were a number of factors that need to be considered regarding change proposals by those who are proponents of change but concerned about their impact on teachers. The researchers highlight five key lessons. Firstly, they advocate a manageable number of simultaneous innovations. Secondly, they emphasise the importance of proposed innovations to be placed in the context of teaching and learning. Thirdly, they highlight the need for appropriate resources to support the initiative. Fourthly, the researchers point to the importance of local

ownership to enhance teacher commitment to innovation. Finally, Churchill and Williamson found that positive past experiences with change influenced teacher disposition towards educational change in the future.

Lipman (1997) examined teacher beliefs and power relations in schools and their impact on restructuring in schools as it affects, in particular, the education of marginalised African- American students. Lipman conducted a case study of a junior high school located in the Riverton District (USA), that was undertaking district restructuring. Lipman aimed to find out how teacher practices and teacher beliefs affected the way in which teachers responded to the educational needs of students at risk.

Data collection involved the researcher spending one week per month at the junior high school. In addition, a field researcher spent two days a week at the school throughout the year. Open-ended interviews were conducted at the school with a range of stakeholders including students. The researchers also attended school meetings, observed classes and collected relevant school and district documents. Interview data, field notes from meetings and observations and document analysis were analysed using category casting and category saturation techniques.

Lipman concluded that if teacher participation in schools is to make schools more “...liberatory...” then it will need to be linked to an understanding and examination of power relations in the school (p33). Lipman’s findings into the marginalisation of

low income coloured students, indicate that student outcomes will not be improved unless power relations are taken account of in schools. Lipman concluded that change in schools involves risks, conflict and ultimately restructuring of these power relationships.

The reactions of Tasmanian school principals and teachers to developments in local school-based management in their state were examined by Mulford and Hogan (1999). The School Governance and Educational Outcomes Project (SGEOP) systematically mapped and modelled school governance, educational production, social demography and political culture across all Tasmanian state schools. An independent research team distributed a series of questionnaires to all Tasmanian principals, teachers and members of school councils. The questionnaires addressed issues related to the relationship between school governance and various outcomes at both the individual and school level.

The SGEOP research team asked a series of questions about the extent of the adoption of local school management in their school, the nature of decision-making in their school including representation, involvement, determination of policy and practice, central constraints and general processes, the effects of local school management, including effects on relationships, principal's role and authority and views about the potential of local school management.



Mulford and Hogan found that, consistent with trends in other Australian states, expectations for the role of Tasmanian school leaders are changing. School principals are expected, as part of devolved responsibility to the local level, to engage stakeholders in decision-making processes. Mulford and Hogan found that Tasmanian principals largely have accepted this shift from centrally determined school planning to the local level. The researchers found that this apparent acceptance is in contrast to trends in other Australian states. However, the researchers also found that the shift of power beyond the principal, to other stakeholders, was not clear. The results of the study indicated that whilst there was a belief that local school management had resulted in a shift in control, this was largely in relation to administrative rather than educational matters and involved increased workloads.

In addition, Mulford and Hogan reported that principals believed that local school management "...promoted effective school management and decision-making and has improved relationships in the schools" (1999). This is in contrast to the responses of teachers who did not see themselves involved in decision-making to the same extent as principals.

Mulford and Hogan argued that there is a concern that local school management has diverted teacher and school efforts away from teaching and learning and, contrary to intention, the benefits of local school management are seen in administrative terms. This situation presents a dilemma for the principal; how to ensure that

decentralisation moves from increased principal power and prestige that comes with increased administrative control, to increased collaboration, shared leadership and shared decision-making necessary for improved student learning.

Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown (1999) analysed the factors (and their relationships) that influence successful local school management. They considered the impact of school leadership teams on local school management in Californian schools. These teams were characterised by their teacher involvement and influence, their focus on curriculum and school reform and their teacher leadership. They are different from other groups within the school. Other committees are established to deal with administrative matters; they operate according to a pre-determined prescribed form and are involved in budget decisions. They are often led by senior managers.

From a literature review the researchers identified four sets of relations: district; school/community; professional; and team-principal relations that may influence the functioning of school leadership teams. Based on these factors, they formulated a conceptual model that suggested a process by which school leadership teams might develop their effectiveness and ability to focus on teaching and learning. The researchers also identified a number of variables that would impact on the school leadership team. These included team attention to factors that improve teaching and learning, team training, team size, time for planning and team composition, and school context variables.

The researcher's analysed the relationships among the variables to identify those that have a strong influence on school team effectiveness. Data for this study was collected during a year period as part of an on-going study of school teams in California. Three survey instruments were used to collect data about the teams and their schools and about team members' perceptions of their work and achievements.

The researchers found that there is a direct link between a school team's knowledge and understanding of data analysis as it relates to student outcomes and its interest in focusing on educational issues. Further, they found that professional relations among the team members and with the rest of staff were important for effective teams.

Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown conclude that a number of factors influence the effectiveness of school leadership teams. These include clarity of roles and responsibilities, district support, collaborative and supportive principalship, positive professional relations, training, knowledge of planning and pedagogy, and a focus on teaching and learning. Their research concurs with other studies that identify similar predictors of effectiveness of school-based management teams.

Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan (2000) reported the results of a study of school-based management in Tasmanian government schools in order to find out how educational stakeholders perceived the process of implementation and effectiveness. Data for this broad-based study was undertaken in 1996 involving surveys of teachers, principals, school councilors and parents in all government

primary, high, district high schools and colleges. The factors investigated in this study included perceptions of decision-making processes in the school, level of morale, student outcomes and the principal's perception of influences in, and constraints to, policy development. School-based decision-making processes were a particular focus of the data analysis.

Items in the principal and teacher surveys that referred specifically to decision-making were subjected to a Factor Analysis using Principal Component method as an extract method. A decision-making index was then constructed. A Chi-Square Goodness of Fit was calculated to test for normality and a Kendall Coefficient of Concordance was applied to the Index scores to test the overall association of the phenomena.

The researchers found that decentralisation had occurred in Tasmanian schools and that there is wide ranging use of committees for decision-making purposes. However, the findings of this study indicate that the model of decision-making in secondary schools is different from that preferred in primary schools. The level of involvement in high school decision-making processes follows the high school hierarchy. High schools' extensive use of committees, relating to specific areas of policy, reflects their greater size and complexity as compared with primary schools where the principal, with the individual teacher and the whole staff, is the preferred model.

The researchers concluded that those in high school viewed decentralised management more critically than those in primary schools. The researchers suggest that reasons for greater resistance in high schools may be due to time constraints, high school culture and teacher autonomy, when compared with primary schools.

The researchers concluded that there may be some forms of restructuring in schools that could be more beneficial than others. Those initiatives that required decision-making processes to move beyond the administrative to the educational would be the ones that ultimately would lead to improved learning outcomes. Although school-based management has shifted authority in decision-making to the school, further efforts by principals at site level are required for this shift to result in the desired outcomes for students. Decentralisation for improved student learning outcomes requires collaboration, empowerment and distributed leadership amongst teachers. From this a learning community culture will develop that will result in dialogue that relates specifically to teaching and learning. Teachers will take collective responsibility for decisions.

Hipp and Huffman (2000) undertook research to explore the development of professional learning communities. This study grew out of an interest in, and concern about, school reform initiatives and their capacity to impact on student learning.

The research project, entitled *Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* was conducted over a five-year period in an educational region made up of five states in the south west of the USA. Initially, the researchers undertook a literature review and identified five dimensions of learning communities: supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning, supportive climate and collaboration. Next, the researchers identified one school in each of the five states that demonstrated these dimensions.

In phase one of the project, principals and teacher representatives from 19 schools were interviewed by telephone using a semi-structured interview process. The five dimensions of a professional learning community identified by the researchers framed the process. Thirty-eight interviews were taped, transcribed and analysed by a six-member research team. A series of techniques were employed to achieve trustworthiness and validation. Recurring themes were identified and, basing the analysis on a wholistic interpretation of the five dimensions, schools were sorted into one of two kinds: high readiness or low readiness for creating professional learning communities. In phase two of the project the 38 participants were interviewed again, this time for evidence of the five dimensions existing in their schools. The researchers were primarily interested in capturing the stories of learning communities as they emerged over time.

Hipp and Huffman's (2000) found evidence, for creating learning communities, between high and low readiness schools. Further, the discussion addressed two key research questions:

In what ways do principals in high readiness schools share leadership, empower decision-making, and inspire responsibility for a shared vision?

Are practices in shared leadership, shared decision-making, and visioning more inclusive among staff in high rather than low readiness schools? (p290)

The preliminary research results indicate that leadership practices were key factors in whole school reform that made meaningful differences for students. The practices of principals in high readiness schools were more effective than those in low readiness schools in all areas considered; shared leadership, responsibility for a shared vision, empowered decision-making and inclusivity. The researchers found that unlike traditional implementation of school based management initiatives, responsibilities were dispersed and decision-making processes gave teachers a genuine voice in educational matters. The researchers concluded that if schools are to change then principal preparation programs must address these dimensions.

## **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the relevant research literature related to school reform and school-based management and decision-making. The review of this research literature was reported according to the following headings; principal leadership, authority and power and participation in decision-making. The main findings of the research literature review are summarised according to those same headings. This

summary highlights the range of factors that impact on the implementation, by principals, of school-based reform initiatives.

## **1. Principal Leadership**

The literature review highlights key areas of principal leadership that impact on school-based reform initiatives.

### *Leadership Style - General Approach to Leadership*

- Transformational leadership style promotes school-based reform. (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1996)
- A principal who focuses on transactional leadership may give the illusion of school improvement. Principals skilled in transformational leadership had more impact on student outcomes than a principal who exhibited strong transactional leadership. (Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop, 2000)
- Leadership practices are key factors in whole school reform, and the principal is responsible for shared leadership, a shared vision and empowered decision-making and inclusivity. (Hipp and Huffman, 2000)
- Opportunities for leadership afforded by school-based management are important. (Sidener, 1995)

### *The Role of the Principal*

- The principal acts as facilitator rather than provider of information. (Reitzug and Burello, 1995)



- The principal is actively involved in the core work of the school. (Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop, 2000)
- A principal can be both strong and collaborative. (Wildy and Wallace, 1997)

### *Principal Response to Internal Pressure and Conflict*

- How principals manage the multiple 'dilemmas' and workloads. (Dimmock, 1999), (Baker and Dellar, 1999)
- Problem-solving conflict management strategies adopted by principals linked to principal satisfaction with site-based management. (Henkin, Cistone and Dee, 1999)
- Principals can respond to the tensions of reform initiatives by building a school culture that empowers teachers. Tension between responding to directives and acting autonomously. (Wildy, 1999)
- The need for appropriate resources to support reform initiative. (Churchill and Williamson, 1999)
- Restructuring requires changes in school culture. (Sidener, 1995)
- Principal perception about school-based management does not match teacher perception. (Mulford and Hogan, 1999)
- Time to institutionalise reform initiatives and ongoing review of processes are important considerations in school-based reform. (Sidener, 1995)

### *Principal Knowledge and Understanding*

- Principal preparation programs need to address leadership practices in whole

school reform that make differences for students. (Hipp and Huffman, 2000)

- Managers need to understand the underpinning theory and the human aspects of school reform. (Sidener, 1995)
- Principals need to understand power relationships. (Lipman, 1997)

## **2 Authority and Power**

The literature review highlights the importance of commitment and ownership, shared leadership, trust and relationships in school-based reform initiatives.

### *Commitment and Ownership*

- Teacher response to reform initiatives is influenced by past and or recent experiences with change. Teacher commitment is needed to achieve change and this is dependent upon local ownership. (Churchill and Williamson, 1999)
- School-based management demands changed roles for district staff and a high profile commitment on the part of the Superintendent. (Sidener, 1995)

### *Shared Power/Authority*

- The principal's response to devolved power and authority impacts on his capacity to share power within the school. (Wildy, 1999)
- Shared leadership and dispersed responsibilities impacts on school readiness for reform implementation. (Hipp and Huffman, 2000)

- Although principals are accepting their new roles in site-based management the shift of authority beyond the principal is still not clear. (Mulford and Hogan, 1999)
- The establishment of governance structures for reform initiatives does not necessarily mean changed power or authority relationships. (Sidener, 1995)

### *Trust*

- A collaborative climate, fundamental to school reform is one of trust and openness. (Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop 2000)

### *Relationships*

- Key factors contributing to Learning Organisations include a trusting climate and collaboration, risk taking, professional development and a shared and monitored mission. (Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop, 2000)
- Supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning, supportive climate and collaboration are dimensions of learning communities. (Hipp and Huffman, 2000)
- School-based reform initiatives involve risks, conflict and ultimately the restructuring of power relationships in schools. (Lipman, 1997)
- Restructuring in schools requires a cultural change and school-based management can assist this. (Sidener, 1995)

- There is a difference between principal perceptions about the impact of school-based management on relationships within the school and the perceptions of teachers. (Mulford and Hogan, 1999)

### **3. Participation in Decision-Making**

The literature review highlights the importance of the participation in decision-making by teachers for school-based reform.

#### *Decision-Making Participation*

- School-based management relies on collaboration and co-operative decision-making. (Henkin, Cistone and Dee, 1999)
- Devolved power and authority needs to provide opportunities for principals and teachers to be involved in decision-making about issues that affect them. (Wildy, 1999)
- School-based decision-making enhances communication within the school. There needs to be a balance between structure provided by policy makers in relation to decision-making processes and allowing participants to find their own way forward. (Sidener, 1995)
- Decision-making processes need to move beyond the administrative to the educational. (Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan, 2000)
- Models for decision-making differ between teachers and principals and between primary and high schools. (Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan, 2000)

- Effective school-based management teams depend on clarity of role and responsibilities, support and positive professional relations, training, knowledge of planning and pedagogy and a focus on teaching and learning. (Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown, 2000)
- Teams develop knowledge and understanding of data analysis if it is related to educational issues and improving student outcomes. (Chrispeels, Castillo, and Brown, 2000)
- School-based management has implications for the training needs of all those involved and participants need ongoing assistance to develop their shared decision-making processes. (Sidener, 1995)

The next chapter details the methodology used in the study.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which a selected group of 16 Tasmanian school principals undertook a school reform initiative, in the area of increased decentralisation of school governance, the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) process, in their particular school.

The research questions selected for the study were as follows:

1. How did principals gain commitment and initiate the ASSR process in their School?
2. What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?
3. What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools? and,
4. How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?

This chapter describes the methodology employed to answer the research questions. It is organised into the following sections: seeking permission to conduct the study; population; sample; researcher bias; research methods selected for the study; data gathering techniques; design of the data gathering tools; semi-structured interviews;

elite interview; document analysis; trialling the instrument; administration of the data gathering instruments; data analysis; and issues of validity.

### **Seeking Permission to Conduct the Study**

Permission to conduct the study was sought and gained from the Ethics Committee of the University of Tasmania. Permission was also gained from the Tasmanian Department of Education to undertake research in a sample of Tasmanian schools as part of the researcher's Master of Education studies. (See Appendix B and C)

### **Population**

The population consisted of all principals in the Tasmanian Department of Education schools in Tasmania. There are six districts in Tasmania and a total of 218 school principals.

### **Sample**

A convenience sample was drawn from 90 Tasmanian principals who undertook ASSR in 1999 and a senior officer of the Department of Education. The principals' schools are located in three of the six education districts in Tasmania. Principals of schools representing students from Kindergarten to Year 10, and ranging in size from approximately 100 to over 600 students, are included in the sample. Although the sample was drawn for reasons of convenience, it contained a representation of primary and secondary schools and male and female principals. The final sample of

16 consisted of ten primary schools, three secondary schools and three district high schools. 12 principals were male and 4 were female.

A senior officer of the Department of Education was subject for an elite interview. The senior officer was selected from persons who held administrative positions in the Department of Education and who had detailed knowledge of the ASSR process and development.

### **Researcher Bias**

The researcher has worked as a principal colleague and as acting 'District Superintendent with some of the participants. In 1997, the researcher was one of 28 principals in Tasmania to trial the ASSR process in her school. Consequently, she was familiar with the process and terminology of ASSR. On the one hand, her knowledge of the ASSR process could be viewed as an advantage as this knowledge was drawn upon in the design of data gathering procedures. On the other hand, her involvement with some of the subjects may be viewed with caution due to the potential for bias.

The researcher attempted to reduce the potential for bias through the administrative procedures employed. The administrative procedures used to organise the interviews were conducted as formally as possible in order to discourage a tendency towards familiarity. Interviews were conducted in a systematic manner across subjects to



ensure consistency of approach. The formality of the requirements for the consent form promoted the importance of the interview as part of the research study.

### **Research Methods Selected for the Study**

A multi-site case study method was adopted. The study investigates a current school reform initiative where it was implemented, most recently, in the school. The case study is a research strategy employed to investigate in detail "...the way things are in their natural context..." (Gay, 1996, p219). The study is an analysis of a single unit, the school and a particular phenomenon, ASSR. In this sense the case study is a bounded system. Merriam (1998) sees the "...case as a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p27).

Therefore, each school where the ASSR initiative took place was identified as a bounded system. A multi-site case study was designed to consider each school as a separate entity.

Wilson, as cited in Merriam (1998), sees the case study as a process that tries to describe and analyse an entity as qualitatively and comprehensively as it occurs over a period of time. A case study approach can be further defined by its special characteristics. Merriam (1998) lists three main kinds of features: particularistic; descriptive; and heuristic.

The case study approach was chosen because of what it reveals about the ASSR reform initiative. It can be described as being particularistic because it focuses on how individual school communities responded to the ASSR process. By considering how principals undertook the ASSR process, readers are able to gain ideas about how to undertake a reform initiative.

Second, the case study approach adopted provides detailed and rich information about the ASSR process reflecting the complexities surrounding the implementation of school reform initiatives. In this sense the approach can be described as descriptive.

Third, the case study approach allows the process of ASSR to be considered in detail. By examining what principals did in implementing ASSR process it enables the reader to understand more about school reform initiatives. The approach is therefore heuristic.

All research approaches can be considered in terms of their relative strengths and limitations. The case study approach is a valuable method of investigating the ASSR process. It allows examination of a phenomenon and provides insights and understandings that can, in turn, influence future practices. The richness of the data gathered, and the intensity of the approach, also brings to light issues that need further investigation.

However, as Guba and Lincoln, as cited in Merriam (1998), emphasise, readers may think that case studies are accounts of the whole situation whereas they are in fact just a 'slice of life'. Furthermore, the narrow focus of a case study approach where the study is limited to a few units can be seen as a disadvantage to research methodology. Likewise, a case study approach can be considered more vulnerable to subjective biases than other research methods.

The knowledge that a principal has about a school may be a valuable source of data. Principals may be more likely to have a comprehensive knowledge of the contextual factors that impact on school reform initiatives. Whilst it could be argued that seeking data from principals is limited, the perceptions of the principals undertaking ASSR provided a unique perspective of the implementation process in the school under their leadership.

### **Data Gathering Techniques**

Semi-structured interviews, an elite interview and document analysis were used as data gathering tools in this study. The document selected for analysis was the Tasmanian Department of Education document *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* which was produced specifically as a guide for schools undertaking the ASSR process. Memoranda relating to the 1999 ASSR process, circulated by individual District Superintendents and the Office for Educational Review, were also examined.

## **Design of the Data Gathering Tools**

A description of the design of the semi-structured interviews, the elite interview and document analysis follows.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews were considered an appropriate data gathering technique for this case study. The researcher was interested in the principal's opinions and the principal's explanation of how the ASSR process was undertaken in her or his school. This perspective is very personal, unique and context specific. It has the limitation that it is the principal's version of events only.

A semi-structured interview technique was selected because the researcher wished to gather focused data regarding some procedures, yet wished to elicit from subjects unanticipated data through open-ended questions. The semi-structured format provided this scope.

A semi-structured interview approach enabled the researcher to gain specific information in relation to some aspects of the implementation of ASSR as well as providing the flexibility to allow for individual principal's interpretation of how the process occurred in their particular context. A number of questions were posed with the intention of enabling the researcher to respond to the issues raised by the interviewee. The semi-structured interview questions were designed to elicit responses in three areas:

- a) Demographics
- b) Stages of the ASSR process
- c) The ASSR process overall.

Five demographic questions were included. These questions were designed to gather information about the school and the case study site. They included:

“Tell us about your school”

“Tell us about your staff”

“Tell us about your students”

“Tell us about the parent community” and

“Tell us about the school culture”.

The demographic questions were designed to serve two purposes. Firstly, the gathering of data specific to the school site. Secondly, the intention that the provision of data in response to the questions served to set an atmosphere conducive to providing responses to the remaining interview questions.

Six questions were designed to gather data for two research questions that related to the stages of the ASSR process.

#### *The year before starting*

“What did you do and why?”

“How did you present it to staff?”

“What was staff reaction?” and

“What had you heard about it?”

### *Getting Started*

“What were your first tasks?”

“What processes were put in place?”

“What management teams or group and what tasks?”

“How were the parents and school council involved?”

“What was staff reaction?” and

“How did you launch ASSR?”

### *Undertaking the Surveys*

“How did you go about it and why?”

“What was your role?”

“How was the management group involved?”

“What were the responses of stakeholders” and

“How did you manage the task?”

### *Analysing the Data*

“How did you do it and why”

“Who was involved?”

“What were the processes and responses resulting in findings?”

“How did you share information?” and

“What decision-making methods were used?”

### *Setting the Targets*

“How did you do this and why?”

### *The Signing of the Partnership Agreement and Celebration*

“What is happening?”

“Why have you chosen to do it this way?” and

“What was the response and reaction of others?”

These questions were designed as framework questions or guides, to ensure that the interviews covered at least the stages of the ASSR process. Within these stages interviewees were encouraged to determine the breadth and depth of the discussion, depending on areas of interest or the principal’s perspective in making sense of her or his world.

Nine questions were designed to gather data on the remaining two research questions relating to the outcomes of the ASSR process and the principal’s role in the ASSR process.

“What was the highlight and why?”

“What was the lowlight and why?”

“How do you feel about the year in relation to the ASSR process?”

“If you were doing it again what would you do differently?”

“What aspects did you give particular attention to and why?”

“What has it meant for your leadership?”

“What were the challenges?”

“Did you do anything different from your colleagues?” and

“How did the school culture impact on how you undertook the process?”

These nine questions were asked of all interviewees at the conclusion of the interview. Answers to these questions were usually brief, often summing up the principal's perspective.

### **Elite Interview**

Questions for the elite interview were designed to be open-ended in nature and designed to expand upon and clarify data gathered from the semi-structured interview. Further, this interview was able to provide the researcher with background explanatory information relevant to the development of the school review processes in Tasmania.

### **Document Analysis**

One document published by the Tasmanian Department of Education contained the major source of information for District Superintendents, Principals and teachers undertaking ASSR in 1999, namely *The Assisted School Self Review, 1999* guide. This document was analysed in order to identify assumptions made concerning



principals' roles and expectations of, and directives for, the conduct of the ASSR process.

The ASSR 'guidelines' document provides key information about the program and its implementation as well as a source of key issues that influenced the design of the questions for the semi-structured interviews.

### **Trialling the Instrument**

The semi-structured interview schedule was trialled by the researcher with a peer mentor. This mentor is a recently retired school principal who had completed the ASSR process in 1998.

The purpose of the trial was to check the relevance and the clarity of the questions. This trial was an opportunity for the researcher to pre-test the semi-structured interview process, highlighting possible challenges and ensuring that there was clarity of purpose between the research questions and the interviewees' experience. The interviewee in the trial was required to comment on the draft questions posed in terms of the dependability of the data sought and the relevance of the questions to the ASSR process. From this discussion and suggestions made by the peer mentor, a modification was made to improve clarity and reduce complexity in the design of the questions.

## **Administration of the Data Gathering Instruments**

### *The Semi-Structured Interviews*

Each principal was contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study. A follow up letter was sent to each principal confirming arrangements for the interview. A consent form, and an information sheet outlining the research study together with a copy of the semi-structured schedule, was included in the letter to principals. Information was provided about the nature of the study, their part in it, the researcher's goals and how their data would be used and indicating that the interviews would be transcribed and returned to the interviewee for verification (Appendix E and F). Further, the District Superintendent of each education district involved in the sample was contacted by telephone advising them of the researcher's intentions, followed by a letter containing the information sent to interviewees (Appendix D).

Times were arranged for interviews to be conducted prior to the end of the school year in mid-December 1999. Interviews were conducted over a three-week period. Each subject was interviewed initially for one hour. All interviews were taped and transcripts were made of each interview. Transcripts were provided to each interviewee for verification.

At the beginning of each interview the researcher introduced herself and reiterated the need to follow a research protocol involving confidentiality to ensure openness of response.

### *Elite interview*

The person selected for the elite interview was contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the research study. A time was made for the interview to be conducted. This interview was conducted in December 1999. The subject was interviewed for one hour. The interview was taped from which notes were made.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview data was analysed according to the questions presented in the interview across the group. Data relating to the four research questions were categorised. The research questions were: "How did principals gain commitment and initiate the ASSR process in their School?", "What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?", "What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools?" and "How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?". Categories were cross-checked and reviewed until saturation occurred. Categories were identified in relation to the research questions for the study.

The data from the document analysis was analysed in terms of corroborating information derived from the interviews.

## **Issues of Validity**

It is important that consideration is given to the validity of the research data in order that the research conducted can be trusted to produce reliable information. Not only should research methodologies be undertaken rigorously, in addition, results must have credibility for others. The nature of qualitative research studies is such that researchers need to respond to questions raised by others regarding the 'trustworthiness' of the data (Merriam, 1998). Strategies can be adopted to enhance the validity of qualitative research.

Peer judgement was used to test the face validity of the research instrument used for the interviews of principals, and a form of triangulation was used in this research study to enhance the internal validity of the research design. The document analysis and the elite interview were approaches that enabled the researcher to gain 'multiple measures' or 'cross-checks' of principal perceptions of the ASSR process. Isaacs and Isaacs (1995) state: "...once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced" (p97).

## **Summary**

This chapter has described the methodology used in this study. Four research questions were designed to elicit information from a sample of 16 Tasmanian school principals undertaking ASSR in 1999, researcher bias was identified and research methods outlined.

A multi-case study method was adopted and semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather data. The instrument was trialled with a peer colleague and interviews were conducted in December 1999. The range of interview questions and prompts were also listed. The interview data were analysed according to the questions presented and categorised. Responses were triangulated by reference to the document analysis and the elite interview.

The next chapter will report on the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine how 16 Tasmanian school principals undertook a school reform initiative, the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) process, in their particular school in 1999 and how this process reflected the stated guidelines of the ASSR process. Data for this study was derived from an elite interview with a senior administrator at the superintendent level, an analysis of education department documentation relevant to the ASSR process and the role of the principal within that process, and semi-structured interviews with sixteen principals who had undertaken ASSR in 1999. The findings, which are reported in this chapter, are organised according to the research questions that were as follows:

1. How did principals make a commitment to ASSR, and initiate the ASSR process in their school?
2. What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?
3. What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools? and
4. How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?

### **Results of Research Question One - How did principals make a commitment to ASSR, and initiate the ASSR process in their school?**

Data for this research question was derived from the elite interview of a senior education department administrator, the analysis of Tasmanian Department of Education documents and from three of the questions for the interviews of principals. Results will be presented in the same sequence.

#### *Elite Interview*

When the ASSR process was implemented, it is reasonable to assume that District Superintendents would have conveyed to principals information about the process, its origins, developments and progress over time. It was considered important, therefore, to find out the background to the ASSR process leading up to the third stage of implementation from the perspective of a senior administrator who was directly involved as a District Superintendent.

Two questions for the elite interview were designed to find out about the origins of ASSR, in the period leading up to a trial in 1997, and the evolution of the ASSR process from 1997 to 99. One question related to the origins of ASSR, (Tell me about how ASSR originated?) and the other related to how the process developed over the three year period 1997 to 1999, (How has the ASSR process developed over time?).

Prompt questions were asked of the interviewee in order to ascertain interviewee perceptions about the major influences upon, and purposes of, the ASSR process.

Prompts are listed as follows:

“What about people’s perceptions about it (ASSR) as being centrally driven?”

“What was happening with the government agenda just prior to that, in 1996, when you were working on ASSR?”

“What was the input from Deputy Secretary level?” and

“Did it change when it (ASSR) became part of ‘Directions’?” (see below)

Results of responses to the question “Tell me about how ASSR originated?” focused mainly on the history of ASSR. The senior administrator, who was a superintendent of a district at the time of the ASSR implementation, provided detail of his understanding of how the initiative came about. He provided an explanation of the District Superintendents’ interest in improving school review processes, and their desire to clarify the nature of their role, which he claimed led to research of school based management initiatives and school improvement strategies. The interviewee explained how this activity led, during 1996, to school review issues being workshopped with principals in one district in particular, “...out of that, and it took over a year, we... evolved the skeleton which became ASSR” (Elite Interview).

Formative workshops were conducted with principals. In these workshops principals were asked the question, “...what do you need to know in order to be an effective educational leader and manager of your school?” The interviewee claimed that,



predominantly, principals requested "...information". The interviewee explained that further discussion with the principals in his district clarified the nature of the request. Principals felt they required information "...in order to make sensible decisions about how to lead in their schools within their cultures". According to the interviewee it was from this initial stage that, collectively, the elements that became the basis of ASSR were derived, "...stake-holder surveys, talking to teachers, getting structured information from teachers and parents and students and getting data about the achievement of the school".

The interviewee explained that, at this early stage, there was no intention to have a formal partnership agreement with principals and their school communities. It was his view that, in 1996, the notion of systematically collecting and analysing data for a school's own purposes was a new concept for many Tasmanian principals.

The interviewee outlined his recollection of what was happening at the same time within the superintendents' group. He claimed that, as a group, the superintendents shared the interest about school review, researched what was happening elsewhere and visited other education systems in Australia to view developments first hand in school review. With this activity the superintendents "...launched ASSR and moved into the kind of idea of a cycle of school review". This led to the notion of a trial ASSR process for 1997. As he described it, in effect "...they (District Superintendents)... 'grew' it (ASSR)... with their principals" (Elite Interview).

The interviewee explained how, throughout the trial, ASSR principals acted as a reference group. He described how, as well as being supported in their efforts, the principals of trial schools shared their experiences and provided feedback. He explained how, consequently, the principals "...actually shaped it".

The responses of the interviewee regarding the origins of ASSR and the development over time indicate that the 1997 trial of the ASSR process evolved from interest from school principals about how to more effectively lead and manage their schools, and the request for better information, together with the interest of superintendents in school improvement issues.

In response to the question, "What was happening with the government agenda just prior to that, in 1996, when you were working on ASSR?" the interviewee gave a view that things (policy wise) were generally "open" in allowing the Department of Education to undertake initiatives as it chose. In that sense, he claimed that the work being undertaken by the District Superintendents in developing the process with principals received little attention from the government of the day. Review processes in some form already existed and District Superintendents were being more explicit about their role, "...refining our job...being much clearer about it..." (Elite Interview).

In response to the question, "What was the input from Deputy Secretary level at that stage?" the interviewee described the role the Deputy Secretary played:

...he stood back really...seeing initiatives occurring and being prepared to stand out of the way...the initiative didn't grow from 'the top' - I think that is another really important thing...and because it (ASSR) has now permeated the entire system it is difficult for some people to accept that it isn't a 'top down' initiative...but it wasn't - it grew from...the principals' group and then...the superintendents grew it with their principals...in collaboration with principals. (Elite Interview)

The elite interviewee explained that, in 1997, the Department of Education included, as part of the ASSR process, a requirement of a partnership agreement between the school, the community and the government. In reference to the impact of this requirement, the elite interviewee explained that ASSR "...never actually had an output called a Partnership Agreement until 'Directions' came along...the work that we had done on developing ASSR in a sense got captured by 'Directions'...(ASSR) provided the platform that let a lot of other stuff happen."<sup>1</sup>

The interviewee was, in this instance, referring to the fact that this requirement was a feature of one of the six features of the government's 'Directions for Education' policy statement. The interviewee went on to express the view that one of the difficulties following this period was convincing people that ASSR was not a "... 'Directions' initiative but a school reform issue that stands on its own merits". It was his view that ASSR evolved as a school reform mechanism independent of political agendas.

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1. 'Directions' refers to the Liberal Government's blue-print 'Directions for Education'. This government policy set six directions for education: mandatory learning outcomes that would be measured, monitored and reported with schools being accountable for improving these outcomes; a Partnership Agreement; opportunities for more local decision-making; principal accreditation and contracts; professional development targeted to achieving the student learning outcomes; and the introduction of information technology into all government schools. 'Directions' brought together all the current trends in school reform. ASSR became the 'vehicle' for achieving the 'Directions for Education' initiatives and the Government agenda, that focused on learning outcomes, parent participation and Partnership Agreements, ensured the future of the process.

In response to the question, “Did it (ASSR) change when it became part of ‘Directions’?” the interviewee explained how it was, at that stage, that ASSR “...got the hard-edge Partnership Agreement on the end of it”. The interviewee asserted, however, that the ASSR process provided significant additional benefits for the system through the data gathering process because principals were “...invited to collect data from a number of sources, it made sense that common survey instruments and indicators be provided to assist them in this process”.

In response to the question, “What about people’s perceptions about it (ASSR) as being centrally driven?” the interviewee agreed that ASSR was perceived as a centrally driven initiative:

...they then saw it as part of a package of government directions, there’s no question about that...and part of the issue became...this thing is a reform initiative that offers you tools to assist you in improving your school irrespective of the fact that it is now kind of embedded in a...‘Directions’ package...some people...would want to say...it was driven by the Liberal Government...which isn’t right but nevertheless it made it more difficult once it was in the package, there’s no question about that. (Elite Interview)

The interviewee recalled that, in 1996, when the idea of an Assisted School Self Review process was first suggested, it was emphasised that the belief that self review is preferable to centrally imposed inspectorial review models (evident at that time in many education systems), was fundamental to the thinking behind the ASSR initiative. The interviewee stressed his understanding that the original intention of ASSR, and still the focus of ASSR, is that it is a whole school exercise in which all teachers are encouraged to become reflective practitioners. As such, ASSR involves collaborative processes. Schools are given “permission” to focus, for one year, on

this priority alone. He stressed that, in the beginning ASSR was certainly an initiative that had its origins at the “grass roots level” and he claimed that “this is different from many other school reform initiatives”.

In summary, the results of the elite interview with the senior administrator show that ASSR originated as a ‘grass roots’ initiative between superintendents and principals, the latter being keen to have more information in order to develop effective schools. It was seen as an initiative that grew or developed over time and was rooted in the belief that school self review was preferable to centrally imposed models. However, with its cooptation into the then government’s ‘Directions’ policy, it came to be perceived as centrally driven.

### *Document Analysis*

Three kinds of documents relevant to the research questions were analysed. These documents, relating to the ASSR process, would have been forwarded to principals of state schools during the period 1997-1999. The three documents were:

- *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* (Tasmanian Department of Education, 1999);
- Information bulletins from the Office for Educational Review; and
- District Office memoranda.

It was considered important to analyse the key documentation related to the ASSR process in order to identify the information provided to principals that was directly

relevant to the principal's area of responsibility. During 1997, District Superintendents, in consultation with the principals of the remaining schools not selected to participate in the trial, would have planned for the staged implementation of the ASSR process in 1998 and 1999.

As the ASSR process was gradually implemented over the period 1997-1999, progress would have been discussed and information shared amongst all stakeholders both formally and informally. There would have been an assumption amongst Tasmanian state school educators, at the beginning of 1999, that all principals undertaking the ASSR process in that year would have a reasonable knowledge of ASSR and an understanding of what was involved in implementing the process. All schools would have received information relating to the ASSR process and each participating principal would have received a copy of the ASSR 'guidelines' document.

It is likely that it would have been assumed that, by the third stage of the ASSR implementation in 1999, there was a high level of principal 'readiness' to undertake the process. Schools participating in the ASSR in 1999 would have known for some time when it was going to be 'their turn' and it could have been assumed that, by the third stage, school principals had an expectation that they would need to implement this process.

*Assisted School Self Review* (Department of Education, 1999)

A document entitled *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* (Tasmanian Department of Education) was prepared and given as a guide to principals in 1999. The document is 40 pages long. It contains short sections on the various aspects of the process and a series of appendices that provide support materials for principal use. The 'guidelines document' does not provide any background information about the origins of the ASSR process. It assumes that either principals knew the way in which it evolved or that this knowledge is not important for the implementation of the process.

The document describes the ASSR process and its links with school improvement and provides suggestions for undertaking the process. It states that the suggestions included in the document, "...are based on work done by the schools...(that undertook the process)...in 1997 and 1998" (p11).

The document appears to be a stand-alone document directly related to ASSR. The document makes no reference to government policy or Department of Education directives. In this sense, the document can be seen as a process document only.

The 'guidelines' document contains a section entitled 'Getting Started'. The document is clear about the intent of ASSR "...to be supportive rather than prescriptive; however...suggestions...may be useful" (p11). In this section there are five suggestions as follows:

- Develop a plan;
- Establish a review co-ordination team;
- Conduct information sessions;
- Minimize the current school planning process; and
- See the review year as a whole school exercise. (p11)

The ASSR 'guidelines' document seems to be based on the assumption that principals would prepare for the ASSR process in the year prior to implementation, that is "...schools will have begun the ASSR process in term 3 of 1998..." (p13) and that it will be a priority:

ASSR provides a rich and interesting, year-long period of inquiry and reflection directed at school improvement. It will deliver maximum benefit to your school if it is the priority for the year in terms of both planning and professional development time. (p11)

### *Information from the Office for Educational Review*

During 1999 the Office for Educational Review provided periodic information to schools and principals undertaking the ASSR process by way of bulletins, memoranda and the website. This information was simultaneously conveyed to each of the district offices. The information was procedural in nature and included advice about how to conduct the mandated surveys, how to use the survey instruments and how to access the website.



*District Office Memoranda*

Each of the Superintendents in the three districts from which the sample principal population was taken corresponded with their ASSR schools regularly throughout 1999. Each District Superintendent chose the format and content of the correspondence to suit the needs of his district's principals.

The correspondence from the district offices was of three kinds. District Superintendents provided information about tasks that needed to be completed by a certain time. This included requests and reminders about the administering of the mandated surveys, the analysis of data and the drafting of targets and outcomes to include in the Partnership Agreement. Secondly, the correspondence advised ASSR principals of sharing and advice seeking sessions. Thirdly, the information provided other support materials, tips and suggestions for completing other tasks suggested in the 'guidelines' document.

All three District Superintendents distributed a memorandum at the end of 1998 notifying principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 of a preliminary information session that was held before the end of the school year.

One District Superintendent provided his ASSR principals with an information pack including timelines and the 'guidelines' document and throughout the year kept in contact via a newsletter that was published almost monthly. In a similar way, the

second District Superintendent provided comprehensive information in February at a 'beginning' session. The third District Superintendent also provided information. In addition, this District Superintendent corresponded with his ASSR principals in 1999 on a needs basis. A series of memoranda were sent from district office throughout the year in response to deadlines for task to be completed. The information consisted of reminders about tasks to be completed, reminders about the stage of the process that principals should have reached and advice about how aspects might be completed. There was also notification of sessions that principals could attend to discuss and gain assistance through their peers or from the District Superintendent or other appropriate senior Department of Education officers.

In summary, three kinds of documents relevant to the research questions were analysed. The Department of Education's document *Assisted School Self Review, 1999*, provided detailed information about the ASSR process. This 'stand alone' document was distributed to school communities undertaking ASSR in 1999 from the 'centre' through the District Superintendent.

No other information was disseminated from the 'centre' in relation to the ASSR process apart from the information bulletins sent from the Office for Educational Review. This information related primarily to the administering of the mandated surveys and was operational in nature.

Individual District Superintendents were responsible for information and support provided to the ASSR principal in their respective district. Whilst each of the Superintendents, from the three districts from which the sample population was taken, chose their own ways of communicating, the content was similar in that it related to the suggestions outlined in the 'guidelines' document.

### *Interviews with Principals Undertaking ASSR in 1999*

The first research question was designed to find out how principals made a commitment to ASSR and initiated the process in their school. The responses of the principal interviewees will be reported according to the following headings:

- a) Making a Commitment; and
- b) Initiating the Process.

Two questions were designed for the interviewees that were intended to elicit data regarding the way that principals made a commitment to the ASSR process. These two questions focused upon the period prior to the year in which the ASSR was carried out, "Can you tell me about the year before you started the ASSR process?" and on the principal's reaction to being involved in the ASSR process "Can you give me your initial thoughts about your year undertaking the ASSR process?"

Prompts were designed to elicit information of a specific nature that could expand upon the questions. Five prompts regarding making a commitment were as follows:

- "What did you know about ASSR?"

- “How did you feel about having to undertake it?”
- “What did you do and why?”
- “Tell me about your staff” and
- “Tell me about your school”.

The understanding and knowledge of ASSR that principals developed in implementing the process in 1999 would have been based on information provided and the experiences of those who had undertaken ASSR in the preceding two years. The nature of this understanding and knowledge of ASSR could have influenced principals’ reactions to the initiative, their level of commitment and the way in which they approached the process.

Throughout the three-year period, all stakeholders would have been involved in district meetings at which the ASSR process would have been discussed both formally and informally. There would have been items on the agendas of meetings directed to aspects of the ASSR, and discussion between principals attending meetings would have occurred as the normal part of informal communication. Also, specific ASSR meetings for principals implementing the process would have occurred. Principals were encouraged to network with peer colleagues, and ‘buddy’ systems were arranged between principals who had completed the process and those undertaking it in that particular year.

Principals at the sites selected for this research study, more than likely, would have been advised of their ASSR implementation year, if not during 1997 then definitely by the beginning of 1998. The principal's involvement in the decision about when their school would implement the ASSR process could have influenced how they responded to the initiative.

### *Making a Commitment*

Responses from all interviewees suggest that principals had an expectation that they would need to prepare for the ASSR process to be undertaken in their schools.

Data analysis of responses made by principals to the question, "Can you tell me about the year before you started the ASSR process?", appear to relate to 'readiness'. Responses from most interviewees suggest that principals who implemented the ASSR process in the third stage, who were the subjects for the interviews, had a broad knowledge of ASSR and an understanding of the process and a readiness to be involved. Two example responses were as follows:

...we are the last schools who have actually done the ASSR and we have been hearing about ASSR for three years...by the time it was our turn to do it I had a fairly good understanding about what it was all about... (S6)

...we have probably been lucky this year...I think the processes are better defined...we have had an easier task than those schools that have gone before us...I got the impression in the last two years much of the process had been designed on the run. (S11)

Data analysis of responses to the question, "Can you give me your initial thoughts about your year undertaking the ASSR process?", appear to describe the principal's

initial reaction to ASSR. Although all principals in the study undertook the ASSR process during the third stage, not all principals had been in their school during the preceding two years. Initial reaction to the ASSR process varied.

Of the 16 interviewees, almost half took up their principalship in that school as recently as the year before they implemented the ASSR process. Nine of the interviewees would have been involved in the decision about when their school implemented the process. Of the others, two, who took up their current principalship in 1998, had opposite views about the timing of ASSR in their school. One principal wanted to undertake the process in 1998 rather than 1999, whilst the other changed, from the previously planned second stage implementation, to 1999. Examples of responses are as follows:

I was a bit disappointed that we weren't going to do it...[ASSR]...in my first year, I thought that it would be the ideal thing to find out what the school's like ...without my influence and see what needed to be done. (S15)

...we were meant to do ASSR last year, when I was appointed...I asked for it to be postponed...that was good...from the point of view of being able to lay the ground work for ASSR... (S16)

Another principal implemented the ASSR process in the year he arrived in the school:

...it was really valuable for me coming in this year...it helped me with questions...if a partnership agreement had already been reached and people working towards outcomes, I may not have been able to come in and ask questions. (S5)

Nine of the interviewee responses relating to overall thoughts and feelings about the ASSR process expressed the view that there were positive outcomes for the school that could be identified at the end of the process. Examples of responses are as follows:

...I still think the process was useful in going through and forcing us to look at exactly what are our achievements...it has made us re-think our approaches in the classroom and our structures... (S8)

...it filtered down through, so that now it is permeating everything that we do, it is just there...it has gone from being external to being very much internal... (S3)

In one sense I saw it as merely an extension and as a consolidation and refinement of that earlier review process... (S1)

...I think the planning process is very, very sound...the idea of focusing...it is a very good way of managing schools. (S10)

...we have come through it with some really good information which really focuses our work in some areas where we have probably been less focused than we should have been. (S11)

The majority of interviewees expressed positive attitudes towards the ASSR process prior to implementation in 1999. Six interviewees qualified their comments by making reference to apprehensions about the magnitude of the task. Of the three interviewees who expressed reservations about the ASSR process prior to implementation in 1999, one was concerned about capacity to undertake the process, another expressed concerns about the intentions of the process whilst the third interviewee was burdened by the prospect because of site-specific issues such as building redevelopment.

Overall principal responses indicated a broad knowledge of ASSR and a detailed understanding of the process. However, principal 'readiness' varied.

### *Initiating the Process*

Three questions were designed for the interviewees that were intended to elicit data regarding the way that principals initiated the ASSR process in their school and involved their staff. One question focused on starting the ASSR process, "What kind of planning for ASSR did you undertake?" in order to find out how the principal began the process of involving staff and initiating the ASSR process in their school. A second question focused upon telling their staff about ASSR and the process "How did you prepare staff for ASSR?" A third question focused on the principal's thoughts about the intentions of ASSR "What did you say to staff about the purpose of ASSR?"

Six prompts designed to elicit information of a specific nature, which could expand upon the questions were as follows:

- "Had staff heard about ASSR?"
- "How did you sell ASSR to staff?"
- "What preparation did you undertake for ASSR?"
- "How did you raise awareness of ASSR amongst staff?"
- "What was staff response and how did you deal with it?" and
- "Any comments about the notion that it was a centrally imposed initiative?"



Data analysis of responses made by principals to the question, “What kind of planning for ASSR did you undertake?” appear to relate to preparation for the process. All but four interviewees indicated that they undertook planning for ASSR in the period prior to the implementation of ASSR. The responses of the four interviewees who began the process in 1999 pointed to changes in principal as the reason. Six interviewees made specific reference to writing an implementation plan and all interviewees established an ASSR review co-ordination team.

Of the 16 interviewees, 13 made specific reference to information sessions that were conducted to initiate the ASSR process. Several interviewees adopted interesting strategies to launch the ASSR process in their school. These included meetings at which past staff, parents and students were invited, dinner launches, joint staff meetings between cluster schools, and an open day for parents. Written information included newsletter articles, whilst some interviewees prepared packages for stakeholders.

Responses to prompts about information sharing included comments about initiating the process and keeping all stakeholders informed as the ASSR process was implemented throughout the year. All interviewees made reference to information sharing. Strategies included written reports and updates in newsletters, displays of data, the compilation of packages of information, and graphs and verbal presentations in staff meetings and special ASSR sessions.

Many interviewees stressed:

...there has been a genuine attempt to have the whole school community informed...” (S11), “...I tried to ensure that I gave a lot of written information to people as well...tried to ensure...it [ASSR]...always sort of stayed in the middle burner” (S2), “...I wanted it to be open all the time...” (S6) and “...staff have got copies of everything...” (S10), “...I ensured that every bit of correspondence and book that I received on ASSR has gone into a folder and that has been available to all staff in the staff room” (S9). And as one principal summed up, “every piece of information...was fed back to every player in the process. (S16)

Whilst most interviewees referred to professional development sessions dedicated to ASSR matters, only five interviewees referred to professional development sessions specifically to launch the process. All interviewees implemented strategies for getting started as suggested in the guidelines.

Responses from the 16 principals indicate that procedures adopted to gain commitment and initiate the ASSR process in their schools were individualistic and context specific. However, responses from the 16 interviewees indicate that all principals adopted procedures congruent with those suggested in the implementation guidelines.

Responses from the 16 interviewees indicate that there is a direct correlation between the principal’s knowledge, understandings and views of the ASSR process, procedures adopted to involve staff and the principal’s perception of the staff attitude towards the initiative.

Data analysis of responses made by principals to the question, “How did you prepare staff for ASSR?” appear to relate to ‘staff response’ to the ASSR process. Interviewee comments pointed to perceptions of mixed initial responses from staff towards the ASSR process. Positive and indifferent attitudes reflected the principal’s perception that staff were willing to go along with the process or were not really interested until tasks affected them directly. Negative attitudes reflected concerns about intentions and accountability or a response to anecdotes relating to the amount of work involved. Interviewee responses to staff concerns varied:

...once some useful information started to come out of the process, people really started to get interested in it. (S11)

...let’s do it, let’s do it and be prepared to do it in a consistent way throughout the year... (S6)

...whenever there is something that is imposed, then the line is...we have to do this but let’s find a pragmatic way to do it that suits us. And I will usually bring people on board by using that approach... (S2)

And, as one interviewee summed up,

...it depends on how you painted the picture. If you painted the picture that this is a major drama and I don’t really want to do it and it is a real nuisance and imposition, and you start it off from that place, staff would go with you I suppose. But if you said...look we have to do this, we don’t have a choice...if you’ve got to do it let’s make it work for us, and we’ll do it so there are some positive outcomes... (S16)

Five interviewees referred to the ASSR process as affording them opportunity to bring about change in their schools. Half of the interviewees were explicit in referring to the process as an opportunity for school improvement.

One principal gauged approval of the ASSR process by the number of interested staff who attended a meeting. At the second draft stage of the Partnership Agreement, an open invitation to attend a committee meeting attracted a large number of staff. Another principal summed up the degree of team-work by indicating the highlight of the process was, “the way that people have worked professionally and worked together” (p12).

No interviewees referred to specific actions or strategies to minimise the current school planning processes. However, the responses of the interviewees would suggest that considerable professional development time was focused on the ASSR process.

Five interviewees made reference to how ASSR was undertaken alongside the ‘normal’ school activities. One principal summed up:

The advice that a lot of people gave us was basically you won’t be able to do anything other than ASSR. Well, for me that was a nonsense, because the extra things are the things that we want to do, so the challenge was to find the balance between this process that we have got to do, and the things you want to do, and you don’t give up the things that you want to do. (S11)

No interviewees referred to reducing other school activities to focus on the ASSR process. Seven interviewees made specific reference to reducing the impact of ASSR on their school or staff. All referred to the need to reduce the impact on staff.

Reference was made to “stress” (S13) “...burden” (S2) “time” (S13) and “disruption” (S6). One interviewee summed up with the comment that he “...was

very conscious that I didn't want to put too much pressure and stress on them, so we have taken it probably at a lower level if you like than some of the other schools..." (S13). Another interviewee added "...I have never believed that ASSR should totally run and determine the operation of the school" (S9).

A number of interviewees referred to strategies to reduce the impact of the ASSR process on staff. Six interviewees outlined how they undertook particular tasks and generally increased their workload in preference to asking staff to undertake additional work.

Some interviewees pointed to the skills of staff with prior ASSR experience as important factors in managing the workload. One interviewee (S9) referred to resourcing time release whilst a high school interviewee (S11) stressed the importance of getting structures and processes right to avoid duplication of roles, share workloads and ensure good communication.

Data analysis of responses made by principals to the question, "What did you say to staff was the purpose of ASSR?" appears to relate to ASSR being considered an 'imposed initiative'. Several interviewees believed that the process was a centrally imposed initiative that required school compliance. Implied in that belief was the view that the initiative had also originated from 'the centre'. Seven interviewees made reference to perceived staff attitudes towards 'the centre' and the system requirement to undertake the ASSR process.

In brief, interviewee responses indicate that principals initiated the process by outlining the procedures to staff, explaining what was involved, looking for ways to reduce the workload and pressure upon staff and by acknowledging what they perceived to be the imposition of the initiative.

### *Summary of Results for Research Question One*

Results from the elite interview, the document analysis and the principal interviews indicate that although the ASSR process had 'grass roots' origins, by 1999 it was perceived to be a centrally driven initiative. The expectation that principals would make a commitment to the process and 'drive' it in their schools was made clear by the district office and the 'centre'. Principals understood this expectation and that they would need to prepare for the ASSR process to be undertaken in their schools in 1999.

Principals had a broad knowledge of ASSR and an understanding of the process. Readiness to be involved varied. Principals initiated the process by providing information to staff. They explained the tasks to be undertaken and acknowledged that staff responses might be negative, seeing the initiative as a burden. Principals therefore looked for ways to reduce the pressure on their staff, including taking on additional functions themselves.

**Results of Research Question Two - What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?**

Data for this research question was derived from the analysis of Tasmanian Department of Education documents and from one of the questions for the interviews of principals. Results will be presented in the same sequence.

*Document Analysis*

Three kinds of documents relevant to research question two were analysed. These documents, relating to the ASSR process, would have been forwarded to the principals of state schools undertaking ASSR in 1999. The three are:

- *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* (Tasmanian Department of Education, 1999);
- Information from the Office for Educational Review; and
- District Office memoranda.

It was considered important to analyse key documentation related to the ASSR process, in order to identify the information provided to principals that was directly relevant to the principal's area of responsibility in relation to the management of the ASSR process. The information from the Office for Educational Review and the district offices was analysed in research question one.

The document entitled *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* (Tasmanian Department of Education), prepared and given as a guide to principals in 1999, contains short

sections on the various aspects of the process and a series of appendices that provide support materials for use by the principal. In the section entitled 'Getting Started', five suggestions, which were related to the management process, were listed as follows:

- Develop a plan;
- Establish a review co-ordination team;
- Conduct information sessions;
- Minimize the current school planning process, and
- See the review year as a whole school collaborative exercise. (p11)

A series of guidelines relating to the first suggestion, development of a plan, are offered in an appendix included in the ASSR document. These guidelines consist of a series of checklist tasks to be completed throughout the year and they seem to be based on the assumption that the principal will make the decisions about how best to implement the ASSR process.

The second point, establishment of a review co-ordination team (referred to as a management group in this study), is suggested as a means of sharing responsibility with stakeholders and of managing the process. It is assumed that the principal would be a member of the group and that the group might include, "...senior staff, teachers, and parent representatives...students..." (p11).



The document does not provide information about how the review coordination team or its membership might relate to other existing teams within the school or parent groups such as the School Council. Further, there is no reference to the decision-making or leadership role relating to educational goals that may be assumed by this group, or the scope of authority of the group. The ‘Getting Started’ section of the ‘guidelines document’ suggests that the review co-ordination team would have the initial role of establishing a timeline, planning for the collection of school-based data and developing the professional learning plan to facilitate the process. Suggestions about the role of the co-ordination team are limited to administrative and organisational tasks.

Part of the role of the review co-ordination team was to undertake two management tasks, namely “the use of data, and the collection, analysis and interpretation of data” (p. 11). Suggestions and expectations about the use of data are included in a separate section of the ‘guidelines’ document referring to resources available to ASSR schools.

Four different kinds of data that schools might collect, analyse, interpret and store are explained. Firstly, system wide data, including information on educational performance of students, was provided through the Office for Educational Review. Secondly, ASSR schools could collect and use school-based data including enrolment and attendance statistics, school-based assessment results and staff information. Thirdly, all ASSR schools were required to administer a limited

number of mandated stakeholder surveys. These included the use of ‘Best Practice Indicators’ that provided responses from staff in individual schools that generated discussion about teaching and learning. Fourthly, ASSR schools also completed a ‘scan’ that highlighted issues unique to the individual school setting. Schools were encouraged to map the local demographics early in the ASSR year.

The ‘guidelines’ document sets out stages in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, namely, “collecting, processing, mapping and interpreting the data and presenting the results of the interpretation” (p19).

The data collection was intended to inform the forward planning process. There was a point made in the document that the type of data and the interpretation [of data] “are critically important stages in the ASSR process” and points to three appendices and the Office for Educational Review’s website for suggestions for undertaking aspects of the work and for more detailed information.

The appendices include suggestions for managing the data interpretation processes, ten key questions offered as starting points for discussion, reflection and consultation and two models to assist schools manage the review findings and establish the targets that will be the basis of the school’s site-specific goals as outlined in the resultant Partnership Agreement.

It is also suggested in the 'guidelines' document that principals should conduct information sessions because "...information on the review needs to be shared with staff, students and parents..." and that schools should "...minimise their current school planning processes..." because "...ASSR provides a rich and interesting, year-long period of inquiry and reflection directed at school improvement". Principals should "...see the review year as a whole school exercise" (p11).

Throughout the 'guidelines' document there is an assumption that principals will need to engage their staff in professional development in order to implement the ASSR process. In the section 'Getting Started', it is suggested that the co-ordination team develop "...a professional development plan to facilitate the ASSR process" (p..). More specifically, suggestions are provided to principals about the professional development possibilities in the section of the document that relates to resources available to ASSR schools in 1999.

In a discussion of the 'Best Practice Indicators', a source of data available to schools, it is pointed out that:

The use of 'Best Practice Indicators' has become an established feature of ASSR over the past two years. Schools have especially valued the powerful professional development that can be built around reflection on a set of descriptors of 'best practice'. (p16)

The document goes on to explain how District Superintendents, "...will suggest professional development approaches that have been successful in generating rich and worthwhile discussion" (p16). It appears that professional development, as part

of the review process, referred mainly to time to discuss and digest results from the data gathering, "...make sure that sufficient time is available to allow members of the school community to understand, discuss and reflect on the information which has been gathered" (p17). Further, the 'Best Practice Indicators' appear to be the framework presented to guide much of the professional development in the school in that year.

The suggestions regarding the management process seem to be underpinned by the assumption that principals have the skills to implement these suggestions and the expectation that principals will seek assistance from their District Superintendent as required, or deemed necessary, or, alternatively, they will use the resources suggested and made available to them.

### *Summary of the Document Analysis*

The analysis of the Tasmanian Department of Education documents made available to principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 indicates that principals were provided with comprehensive 'tools' to guide them in implementing and managing the process in their school. The 'guidelines' document was explicit in its expectation that principals would adopt decision-making processes to foster staff participation. However, the document assumed that principals were familiar with those processes.

### *Interviews with Principals Undertaking ASSR in 1999*

The second research question was designed to find out what structures and processes were adopted by principals in their schools to manage the ASSR initiative and how, through these structures and processes, staff participated in the ASSR process. A major feature of the management process was establishing a management group within the school community. Moreover, it could be assumed that principals had the expectation that they would involve their staff in the process and the ways in which they might do this would be site-specific and dependent upon individual principal preference and leadership style.

One question that was designed for the interviewees and was intended to elicit data regarding the way principals managed the process was “Tell me about setting up the management group”.

Prompts were designed to elicit information of a specific nature, which would expand upon the questions. Four prompts regarding the establishment of the management group and staff involvement were as follows:

- “How was the management group established?”
- “What kind of role did this management group take on?”
- “What was the rest of the staff doing at this time?” and
- “Tell me about the professional development on the surveys”.

The management tasks required of the ASSR process were the focus of three prompts relating to the data gathering. Three prompts regarding the tasks completed were as follows:

- “What process did you adopt to manage and analyse the data?”
- “What other information did you collect?” and
- “What happened in relation to moving from findings to targets?”

The responses of interviewees to the questions, “Tell me about setting up the management group” and “How was the management group established?” indicated that in all cases the principal of the school was part of the management team for the ASSR process and the group consisted of a combination of staff, community and/or parent representatives. In some cases students were included but this occurred mainly in secondary schools. In most cases the management group consisted of key representatives from existing staff and parent groups. At the outset, principals approached and invited participation from the representative parent group which, in most cases, was the school council. Interview responses suggest that most principals themselves determined the method of establishing the management team. Only one interviewee specifically referred to discussion with staff about how best to establish a co-ordination team: “...we basically, as senior staff, looked at how we might go about the process, we did some early planning on the kinds of structures we might put in place, the management structure and so on...” (S7).

The way in which the principals went about establishing the management group determined how the process was managed in their school. In general, principals adopted one of two different approaches. Some principals established the management group and then allocated tasks in an 'ad-hoc' manner, in some cases related closely to the management group and, in other cases related to site-specific situation groups. Other principals, particularly those of larger schools, allocated tasks to existing committees or groups within the school. In some cases task groups were established around the key organisers of the Partnership Agreement document, such as literacy and numeracy.

Some interviewees referred to the size of their school determining how the management team should be set up. Schools small in size utilised all staff as part of the management group or with the principal and the senior staff person being the logical choice to co-ordinate the process. One principal of a small school included all staff as that was the way issues were managed generally within the school environment.

Two interviewees used the school council structure as the basis for the ASSR process. One principal saw the role of the school council as being the steering committee working with other committees in the school.

Responses to the question "What kind of role did the management group take on?" revealed, that although the majority of principals established management groups

consisting of staff and parent representatives, the role of the group varied significantly across schools and throughout the year. The 'guidelines' document, in the 'Getting Started' section suggests that the initial work of the group will include:

...identifying and planning for the collection of a wide range of school data, developing a professional development plan to facilitate the ASSR process [and]...organising a school time line for the ASSR elements. (p11)

Responses from interviewees relating to the role of the group indicated that, in some cases, the group was seen as having a decision-making function as well as a co-ordination role. As one principal summed up:

...there was...a school council 'bigger' group, then there was a little group...that was directing that group...that was doing the legwork basically, getting things organised, time-frames, things like that, whereas the decision-making and sifting the data ... was done through the council. (S12)

Principals in the study reported that the management committee in their school that had responsibility for the implementation of the ASSR process either changed in function or composition during the year. In most cases the original group, established at the commencement of the ASSR process, was not the same group that completed the process. Only three of the interviewees responded that the original group was maintained throughout the process. As one interviewee explained:

We set up the management group right at the beginning of the year...but as the year evolved, it seemed that that group wasn't all that important...and it worked through council...once the whole thing is underway, the process is quite structured and it...was fairly clear as to what the next steps were. (S2)

Another principal explained how:

...there didn't appear to be any need [for the management group to meet continually]...very quickly...ASSR...got into a rhythm...when we looked at the deadlines that had to be achieved, we just worked back and said we have



got to do that by this time...the mandate we have got pretty much was 'just do it'. (S3)

One principal recounted how he established the management group twice. On the understanding that, "the expectation was that you had to have a group of people, parents and so on and teachers who were fully involved in the management side of it..." (S15), the principal initially invited all interested stakeholders to become involved in the management of the process. As a result of the open invitation the principal began a lengthy consultative process with parents. However, later, on advice from the District Superintendent who was concerned with the time frame for implementation, the principal realised he needed a smaller representative group to manage the process. He then convened a group consisting of himself, the senior staff member and the chairperson of the school council.

Two interviewees used the school planning group as the management team. As one interviewee explained:

I expected us to manage through the management committee, so basically we decided to extend that and have...one more staff member...and the president of the Parents and Friends on the committee, and called that our ASSR committee. (S10)

The other summed up:

No...[a separate management group was not set up]...there were only a few of us. I thought it was unhelpful, and that it created another meeting with the same group of people, who had carriage for it...it made it more manageable if the admin committee dealt with it. (S16)

In that school, parent involvement was gained through the school council and in reality a small executive group consisting of a few staff and three parents was formed.

Another principal explained how difficulty in getting the entire management group together at one time resulted in the group never meeting. Instead, staff and parents met as separate groups with the principal acting as a conveyor of information between the two. In reality "...the staff steered it basically, with the council with us, but separately" (S4).

One interviewee reflected on the significant impact on the process of key members of the school council. Initially, two council members volunteered to participate in the management group. The chairperson of the school council was happy with this arrangement. However, as time passed, it became obvious that the chairperson should have been directly involved. It was time consuming to constantly update the chairperson about developments, findings and possible targets and increasingly the chairperson wanted to have input.

In summary, responses regarding the establishment of the management group revealed that, generally, the principal led the establishment of the management group and participated along with staff. Principals tended to either use existing groups to co-ordinate the process or to establish a management group and then assign the tasks

to be done. Management groups changed function and membership during the period of the ASSR process.

In response to the question “What was the rest of the staff doing at this time?” principals reported that they saw the importance of staff participation but concern was expressed about staff capacity to be involved because of time constraints and the problem of increased workload.

Nine of the 16 principals (S1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13,15, 16) commented on their concern about the workload involved, wanting to ensure that staff were not asked or expected to take on tasks additional to those they already had responsibility for, and undertaking tasks themselves because of constraints of time.

As one principal pointed out, “...I went out of my way to make sure that it really didn’t [impact on staff’s time]...there was not one complaint about ASSR or the workload...they felt sorry for me...” (S16).

Some principals reported undertaking tasks or doing some of the work themselves in order to lighten the load for staff. One interviewee commented on how, because of the need to get the task completed within a ‘tight’ time framework, he completed, “...the mechanical part of it [data synthesis]” (S1) and that he was “...able to do some things in terms of editing and collation of things because of the culture of the school...was one in which people trusted what I was doing...” (S1). In general, he

believed that "...some staff...were probably happy that...[he]...was dealing with it and not them – in terms of the editing and collation of things" (S1). As another interviewee summed up "...in setting the targets, the staff had a far more minor role, than they did in getting the OER [survey]...information, and I guess it was basically due to time..." (S15).

In a similar way, one principal commented on the mandate he and his senior staff member had:

...was just do it [ASSR]...we [staff]...will follow whatever it is that you want us to do, just do it. Because we had kept talking...about deadlines, about the fact that we were going to do this, and we wanted to bring it in early...our commitment was that we would get it through as efficiently and as consultatively as possible... (S3)

Another interviewee summed up by saying that he tried to minimise the impact on staff by employing a number of strategies, "...one of them was not to duplicate our roles...we shared the workload...there was good communication...we have worked together..." (S11). Another interviewee explained how he "...tried to filter out a lot of the things that I have done, and read and perhaps put it into some sort of manageable package for the staff..." (S6) because he "...wanted to protect the staff from what [he]...was going through and that was overload" (S6).

Some principals undertook tasks in preference to delegating because they were concerned staff were not experienced in the process and there was a time framework involved. One interviewee, when asked how he might undertake the task differently in the future, talked about increased delegation of responsibility now that staff

understood the process, "...they [staff]...would have the experience of going through it...once they had seen a way of working through it, they would be more likely to kind of take it on" (S16).

Responses from four principals (S3, 4, 14, 15) indicate that staff participation was a significant factor in the ASSR process. Responses from these four interviewees suggest that staff interest levels changed over time. One principal commented how, after considerable interest in the findings of the surveys, staff were not very interested in the next stages of the process. He concluded by saying that, "...the next bit is me and finishing off" (S15). On the other hand, another interviewee commented on how he believed the next stage "...the implementation and the planning and the strategies...will be the thing that most people, staff are really interested in doing..." (S4) whilst a third principal believed that "...once the data came back, that was the turning point...once the results came in, we could then get down to the nitty gritty and people...really enjoyed it" (S3). As the fourth principal explained, "...this [Best Practice Indicator survey data]...is stuff that really concerned them...they [staff]...are really keen to talk about [it]" (S14).

Another interviewee (S8) commented on how staff participation in an ASSR working group led to ownership of the process. He explained that he believed that there was dissatisfaction amongst staff when some of the findings identified by their working group had not been included and translated into targets in the Partnership Agreement.

Seven interviewees (S2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15) gave their views about staff participation, "...I just felt it was important everyone had to have a part in this and everyone had to be onside with it" (S15). In a similar way, an interviewee commented that, "...to really get credence right across the school we had to involve all members of the school community..." (S9). Another interviewee was especially concerned about, "...trying to involve a wide range of people, the consultation, I wasn't sure how I was going to go..." (S4). Likewise, a principal of a small school was concerned that there might not be ownership of the final Partnership Agreement unless everyone had input to the process (S6). Another interviewee made the following observation about staff participation in his school:

...most of what we do here we try to involve all stakeholders...my best example of that is...senior management group...membership of that group is open to anyone...provided they are prepared to make an ongoing commitment to it...we try to involve as many as possible in the decision-making in the school...we have tried to maintain that approach through ASSR... (S11)

In a similar way, another interviewee explained:

I tried to emphasise to them [staff]...that they should take some ownership, it was a chance for them to have some input...quite often you end up making decisions and you probably haven't consulted as well as you should have done, but at least it is an opportunity for them to have an honest input... (S13)

Another interviewee summed by saying "...as the year progressed, whether it was because of time constraints or whatever, it filtered down through, so that now it is permeating everything that we do, it is just there" (S3).

In summary, responses regarding the role of the staff in the management process indicate that principals reported concerns for staff workload. Principals

acknowledged that they took on responsibility for tasks in order to relieve workloads for staff. However, it is not clear whether this was a particular style of leadership or whether the staff wanted the principal to undertake these tasks.

In response to the question regarding professional development, “Tell me about the professional development on the surveys” all interviewees made reference to professional development that occurred in relation to the ASSR process. This section of interview responses relates to professional development activities that occurred after the process was initiated. Interviewees commented on how professional development was undertaken, the nature of the activity and who conducted it. Responses generally were of two kinds, those that related to professional development that focused on issues to do with school improvement, and those that related to technical aspects of the ASSR process.

Of those interviewees who commented on how professional development was undertaken, most referred to using the mandated five professional development days that Tasmanian teachers are required to complete each year. Many principals also used regular staff meeting time to complete tasks or to discuss issues arising from the process. In some cases principals allocated time at staff meetings for regular updates and information sharing. As one principal summed up, “...a lot of our staff meetings...and our PD [professional development]...sessions were just based on ASSR...I had lots of sessions, but just kept the times short.” (S2)

It seems that professional development that related to the completion of the mandated teacher survey based on the 'Best Practice Indicators' was considered important by the principals. All but one interviewee made specific reference to this kind of professional development activity.

Eleven principals, in describing the professional development in their schools that related to the 'Best Practice Indicators', explained how they went about it. Six principals indicated that they, themselves, led and facilitated the professional development. The other five principals indicated that they worked with others or delegated responsibility. In two instances, the principal worked with a senior staff member, in another two cases principals delegated the responsibility to senior staff members who had previous experience in the ASSR process, whilst the fifth principal indicated that he delegated responsibility to the committees established to manage aspects of the process.

In all cases principals used a range of strategies to encourage discussion and to explain the requirements of the 'Best Practice Indicators' survey before completing the task, "...the aim of the exercise was to immerse ourselves in the 'Best Practice Indicators', to have a decent conversation about it..." (S3) and "...we went through 'Best Practice Indicators', we looked at indicators and what they meant" (S9) and as one interviewee summed up, "...it dawned home to me just how important it is that everyone shares that understanding of what it is about" (S5).



Of those interviewees who commented on professional development related to the 'Best Practice Indicators', three made specific reference to activities that placed the ASSR process in the wider context of school improvement, "...I did a little bit of work on... effective organisations, why do we self review?" (S16).

Some interviewees commented on the restrictions of time in the amount of professional development that they considered necessary for the process to be undertaken, "...probably in hindsight, we probably could have done that session [on 'Best Practice Indicators']...twice to give more groups opportunity to look at other aspects..." (S9). Another interviewee explained the restrictive time framework:

...we had about six weeks to do it [determine the outcome targets]...we knew that it was a lengthy process, the staff had to be skilled up to do it properly...so that they could analyse the data...then they had to know how to write a finding, write a target, reflect on that, collaborate with each other to see that...we had covered all the results...weren't doubling up on each other's stuff and come out at the end with a cohesive document. (S3)

In summary, responses to the question regarding professional development show that professional development, in most cases, was directed by, or undertaken by, the principal. Professional development seemed to relate more to the outcomes of the data gathering process and the development of 'Best Practice Indicators' than the overall educational framework and purpose of ASSR.

In response to the question regarding the management tasks that needed to be completed, "What process did you adopt to manage and analyse the data?" and "What other information did you collect?" and a third question related to the process

of analysing the data, “What happened in relation to moving from findings to targets?” principals reported that they had an expectation that data would need to be collected during the ASSR year.

Apart from the mandated stakeholder surveys and the ‘scan’, the type and quality of other data collected was understood by the principal to be at the discretion of each school. Because the ‘guidelines’ document emphasized the importance of the ‘scan’ in providing a context in which the review process could be undertaken, all principals completed this task early in the year. In some cases the ‘scan’ was completed prior to the school year commencing. It seems principals’ perceptions about the significance and urgency of this school ‘snapshot’ may have influenced the way this task was managed.

Of the eleven interviewees who made reference to the ‘scan’, four completed the task themselves, four indicated that the task was undertaken by their management team or a task group, two others delegated the task to a senior staff member and one principal believed the school council was the logical group to collect demographic data, “...because I felt that the council were the people who knew the community best” (S4).

Interviewees responded variously to prompts about data collected other than the mandated requirements. It seems that decisions relating to additional information were school-based. In two instances, where task groups existed, interviewees

indicated that the members of the group had responsibility for identifying other relevant data for collection.

The comments made by interviewees about analysing the data and setting the outcomes suggested that the processes, adopted by the principal to manage this stage of the ASSR process, were determined by site-specific issues. Results show that generally there was no discernable pattern in the way that schools determined their outcomes. Site-specific issues included the structures put in place specifically to manage the ASSR process, existing school structures, staff attitudes towards participation, the role assumed by the principals and others in relation to the ASSR process, and time constraints. In some cases the processes were pre-planned, in others, principals adopted strategies in response to the needs of the time.

It would seem, from several interviewee responses, that principals adopted pragmatic processes and practices for analysing the data that seemed best at the time and that different processes were adopted for different tasks. In some instances, the principal prepared findings and targets to present to staff for comment (S1, 5, 2, 6).

One interviewee (S3) highlighted the need to be responsive to circumstances and site-specific issues and the benefits that often emerge from unplanned strategies:

...the other thing that we did accidentally was to say, 'you interpret this in whatever way you want' [data analysis]...it wasn't a case of thinking is this the best thing to do to get the best results...the only mechanism that...and I could think of that would work was to divvy up the results into a series of sort of 'senate' select committees and say 'ok, literacy you take that'... (S3)

One interviewee (S2) asked community volunteers to consider the findings and identify possible targets from the parent surveys. He then considered the other findings and presented these to staff for consideration:

...generally staff...accepted...that yes they were the key findings, there were a few other things that were added to it...I guess...through doing it that way, [we]...ended up with key findings...that I thought were important, but it enabled us to get in and get something down... (S2)

Staff then work-shopped over a number of sessions identifying targets from those findings.

In five instances (S3, 4, 6, 15 and 16), at this stage of the process, where sub committees had not previously been established, principals divided staff into groups for the purpose of work-shopping the information from the data, "...they [groups]...went away and looked at...those findings...pulled them to bits...we came back and discussed them...each group was responsible for re-writing them...and tried to set targets for the findings" (S6). Consequently the principal was pleased that "...all staff had real input to the actual writing of it in the end...everybody now feels ownership of that document" (S6). This same interviewee commented on how he had prepared some initial findings to present to staff, his preferred way of working when consensus needed to be achieved.

Another interviewee commented on how the "...steering committee ran that [the session looking at the data to identify findings]...made notes about what was

happening in their group and that was collated and came back to me” (S4). A draft later went to the school council.

Another interviewee commented on how, after considering the data, in groups, in a number of sessions, he told the staff that the senior staff member and he “...with all of that work you have done, will pick out the ones we think are important, put them together and you people don’t have to worry about it anymore...” (S15). He commented that staff were happy with this because they could get on with their reports and other end of year tasks.

Another principal (S16) used a combination of stakeholder groups and working parties to identify findings and establish findings. In this case the principal synthesized the data, “...clearing the way to make it kind of useful, meaningful...” (S16).

Another interviewee (S9) indicated that “...in the end, a small group from the overall committee offered to actually do [analyse the data]...that, we just called that the data group...” (S9). These results were later published and comment invited from stakeholders.

Other interviewees (S1, 5, 7, 12 and 14) indicated that the management group was responsible for establishing the findings, and sharing the information with staff, and inviting response and comment. This occurred on numerous occasions until the task

was completed. In the case of one school (S12), where the school council had a key role, the principal commented, that after “...going in circles for awhile...” he decided to undertake an activity with school council members to identify, from the data, strengths, weaknesses, concerns and comments. From this, and a series of professional development sessions with staff [related to findings and targets] and further discussions [related to the Partnership Agreement organiser strands] at both school council and staff meetings, targets were finally established.

In another school (S1):

...the council basically did this [established the targets]...we took the findings that we had...then we tried to link them under the seven categories that were there on the format [Partnership Agreement organizer strands]...and then I went away and summarised and prepared the draft of what we had discussed... (S1)

In a smaller school (S14), the management team had the responsibility of translating all of the data analysed by working groups into the final draft findings and targets. It seems that although many interviewees indicated that a smaller group was responsible for analysing the data, some were concerned that staff had the opportunity to comment and have input into final decisions about the findings and targets that eventually were included in the Partnership Agreement. One principal stressed the importance of all information being available to all stakeholders (S9) whilst another explained that he asked staff to decide the most important findings from a number suggested, with the hope that, “...they would feel a little bit better about what they were doing” (S5).

In some instances, especially larger schools (S8, 7, 10, 11), principals used existing committee structures or established working parties, from the commencement of the ASSR process, to undertake tasks. "The major findings were identified by each of the committees...presented to the staff...discussed in greatest depth at meetings of the co-ordinators of the committees...the staff were prepared to accept the work of the committees" (S11). This was the practice in that particular school for sharing the workload.

In another school, the data collected and analysed by the committees was given to a central committee for the establishment of targets. Practice at other times was to approach similar tasks as a whole school group. On this occasion, because of practical reasons, size of the task and time constraints, the principal decided that a different approach was needed. Similarly, another principal (S11) established committees at the commencement of ASSR for the purpose of encouraging staff participation.

Where principals adopted a model of using sub groups or task groups of staff, based on the key areas of review, according to the Partnership Agreement organizer strands (see establishment of management group above), it seems that there was significant opportunity for sharing and discussing information. In these situations, the principal and/or the management group acted as a co-ordination team or completed tasks related to the initial organisation of the data. As one interviewee summed up "...there was a lot of input, and a lot of sharing which I found really positive and is

certainly something I have been working on since” (S5). In smaller schools, interviewees commented that it was easier for the whole staff to be involved in analysing the data and establishing findings and targets.

Responses from principals regarding the management process of ASSR, and the data collection and analysis show that the principals operated in a pragmatic way and took account of site-specific issues. Consequently it is difficult to establish trends or patterns in the management processes adopted by principals who implemented ASSR in the sample schools in 1999.

Other general responses to prompts about staff participation (in completion of tasks, being kept informed and participating in decision-making processes related to the task) were related to work load involved in the process, perceptions about staff interest, and willingness or capacity to being involved in the process.

Two interviewees (S10 and S15) made specific reference to staff concerns about being involved and the importance of this in relation to improving student learning. As one interviewee explained, “...people...were more positive when I said, ‘that is my expectation’ [that staff will be involved]...” (S10). An important strategy adopted by this principal was to consistently involve the staff in decision-making relating to how the process should be undertaken, “...I can only remember how many times we went to the whole staff and said, ‘ok, this is what we are going to do



next, what do you think of this?’...” (S10). Similarly, another interviewee commented:

...I really have made the decision to take a lot of it back to staff and to talk it through with staff and to open it up with questions rather than I have decided that...I was really aware that I had to take it back to staff all the time and involve staff all the time and make sure that they knew where I was at, that we shared understandings. (S5)

The other interviewee outlined how he believed that, in the past, staff in his school, had not been accustomed to directing a lot of time into discussion and that they would most likely say, “...we have got a huge amount of work, we are busy in our classrooms...” (S15). He believed taking the time to discuss, explain and develop “...a basic understanding of what the process was and where we were going...listening to them [staff]...was very important” (S15). The principal believed this had ‘worked’ because “...towards the end of it [ASSR]...rather than looking at their watch...they [staff]...would say ‘we need another session to have another look at this sort of thing’...” (S15).

### *Summary of Results of Research Question Two*

The results from the document analysis and the interviews with principals indicate that all principals were provided with the ‘tools’ to implement the ASSR initiative in their school in 1999. However, the ways in which individual principals managed the process and adopted decision-making processes to foster staff participation varied greatly. The management of the ASSR process depended variously on site-specific context issues and principal leadership style.

### **Results of Research Question Three - What did principals perceive as the outcomes of ASSR for their schools?**

Data for this research question was derived from the analysis of the Tasmanian Department of Education documents and from three of the questions for the interviews of principals. Results will be presented in the same sequence.

#### *Document Analysis*

Three kinds of documents relevant to research question three were analysed. These documents, relating to the ASSR process, would have been forwarded to principals of state schools during the period 1997-1999. The three documents are listed as follows:

- *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* (Tasmanian Department of Education, 1999);
- Information from the Office for Educational Review; and
- District Office memoranda.

The information from the Office for Educational Review and the District Offices was analysed in research question one.

The ASSR would have had explicit outcome expectations and it is reasonable to assume that these would have been stated in the 'guidelines' document. Therefore, it was considered important to analyse key documentation related to the ASSR process, in order to identify the information provided to principals that related directly to outcome expectations. During the period 1997-1999, District Superintendents, in

consultation with the principals, would have discussed the expected outcomes of the ASSR process.

Information from the Office for Educational Review and district offices was analysed in research question one.

The introductory paragraphs of the 'guidelines' document state the intentions of ASSR. It is a review approach that:

...culminates in the documentation of a three-year Partnership Agreement....involves everyone, clarifies existing practice, celebrates the good things and describes new pathways. It is about setting priorities that match identified needs and the unique nature of each school community...[a]...quest to improve learning outcomes for all. (p1)

Further the document explicitly states that:

The key purpose of Assisted School Self Review is to help principals and their communities to know and understand their special circumstances so that school improvement planning is site-specific and based on each school's unique situation. (p6)

It can be implied from this statement that there was an expectation that outcomes would be different for each school because of the site-specific issues.

Through the collection and analysis of data, and reflection about the school in its site-specific context, it was expected that the process would culminate with the drawing up of a Partnership Agreement and a School Development Plan. It is stated that:

The preparation of a Partnership Agreement is the culmination of the direction-setting process. The School Development Plan charts the process of implementing the Partnership Agreement targets. (p9)

In a final section of the document, further explanatory information is provided about the purpose and requirements of the Partnership Agreement, the resultant School Development Plan and the required School Annual Report to be prepared in the years following the review year. There is no detailed process information about how school communities might undertake these tasks. It can be assumed that this was considered outside the scope of the document.

In summary, the document analysis reveals that there were two explicit intended key outputs for the ASSR process, namely a Partnership Agreement and a School Development Plan based on "...their [schools']...special circumstances so that school improvement planning is site-specific and based on each school's unique situation" (p6).

#### *Interviews with Principals Undertaking ASSR in 1999*

At the time the interviews were conducted, all principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 had either just completed or were completing the final tasks of the ASSR process. The third research question was designed to find out what principals perceived as the outcomes of ASSR for their school.

Three questions were designed for the interviewees that were intended to elicit data regarding the perceptions of principals about the outcomes of ASSR. One question

was in reaction to a reminder about the original intentions of ASSR as outlined in the 'guidelines' document, "To what extent do you think you have been able to achieve what the intention describes?". A second question, "What were the highlights of the ASSR year?" was intended to elicit data regarding what principals felt they had achieved or were most pleased about in undertaking the ASSR process. The third question, "What were the lowlights of the ASSR year?" was intended to elicit data regarding what principals felt they had been unable to achieve or were least pleased about in undertaking the ASSR process.

The responses from principals regarding the outcomes of ASSR will be organised firstly according to the outcomes identified in the ASSR 'guidelines' document (namely, that planning is site-specific and based on each school's unique situation and as documented in a site-specific Partnership Agreement and a School Development Plan).

### *Planning is Site-Specific and Based on Each School's Unique Situation*

Of those interviewees whose responses related to knowledge of school community circumstances and consequent identification of site-specific issues, most commented on how the process had "...identified some important issues for the school" (S11) and "...identifying where we want to go" (S2). As a principal summed up:

...it [ASSR]...gave a frame of reference for a lot of discussion...people enjoyed the voyages of discovery, the opportunity to analyse data...they realized that the sorts of things that we were talking about before are actually now being highlighted in the data and being highlighted in the targets...it has reinforced a lot of it and focused a lot of it. (S3)

### *Site-Specific Partnership Agreement*

All of the interviewees achieved at least one of the stated outcomes, namely the Partnership Agreement and all met the deadline negotiated with their relevant District Superintendent. Responses from all principals regarding how they felt about the ASSR process, now that the task was completed, were positive with most pleased to have met the deadline and to achieved something that would form the basis of their school development planning. One principal summed up the feelings conveyed by many interviewees, "...when we finished and got the Partnership Agreement done, it was exhilarating to think yes it is done, it is finished, this is it. But we also know that we have got the next part...I think that will be the thing that...staff are really interested in doing..." (S4).

### *School Development Plan*

At the time of interview, principals were at different stages in the development of a School Development Plan. However, some principals indicated that the ASSR process resulted in increased staff interest in, and enthusiasm for, the school development planning process, "...it has been exciting for me in the last few weeks, for people to come in and talk with me about ideas they have for next year" (S5). Another principal pointed to the teacher participation resulting in "...a lot of valuable information...in helping the school move on to the next stage" (S7). One principal described the planning processes as being more coherent than in the past, "...it [the School Development Plan] has never been drawn together like this before...with all the different groups having been involved at some point a long the way..." (S12).

As one principal summed up, “I think the real crunch is going to be the format the development plan now takes, that is the more significant part of ASSR as far as I am concerned...because that will in fact influence what we actually do” (S1).

Another principal commented on how staff participation in discussing and planning for strategies to address identified outcome targets had resulted in a school development planning approach different from in the past:

In putting the school plan last year, I got together a representative planning group and we...put our ideas down. This way [ASSR processes] all the staff has been involved...so they have got more ownership I think and will be on board with the process. (S2)

### *Summary of Results for Research Question Three*

Nearly all of the interviewees who, at the end of the ASSR process, reflected on the statement of intent in the ‘guidelines’ document believed that they had achieved largely what was intended by the review process. All completed the Partnership Agreement according to the mandated requirements and by the deadline. Further, all principals were at varying stages towards the documenting of a School Development Plan that was site-specific.

### **Results of Research Question Four - How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?**

Data for this research question was derived from the analysis of Tasmanian Department of Education documents and from three of the questions for the interviews of principals. Results will be presented in the same sequence.

### *Document Analysis*

Three different kinds of documents relevant to research question four were analysed. These documents, relating to the ASSR process, would have been forwarded to principals of state schools during the period 1997-1999. The three documents are listed as follows:

- *Assisted School Self Review, 1999* (Tasmanian Department of Education, 1999);
- Information from the Office for Educational Review; and
- District Office memoranda.

The information from the Office for Educational Review and the District Offices was analysed in research question one.

It was considered important to analyse key documentation related to the ASSR process, in order to identify the information provided to principals that was directly relevant to the principal's area of responsibility especially in relation to expectations about the principal's leadership role. It could be assumed that during the period 1997-1999, District Superintendents would have worked with the principals in relation to the leadership expectations required of principals in undertaking the ASSR process.

As the ASSR process was gradually implemented over the period 1997-1999, implications for the principals' role as leader in the school would have been considered, discussed and information shared amongst all stakeholders both formally



and informally. There would have been an assumption amongst Tasmanian state school educators, at the beginning of 1999, that all principals undertaking the ASSR process in that year would have an understanding of what was involved in implementing the ASSR process and the implications for the principals' leadership role. All schools would have received information relating to the ASSR process and each participating principal would have received a copy of the ASSR 'guidelines' document.

It is likely that it would have been assumed, by the third stage of the ASSR implementation in 1999, that there was a high level of principal understanding of leadership expectation in undertaking the ASSR process.

The 'guidelines' document provides reference to the leadership expectations of ASSR for principals implementing the process but details are not given. The document assumes that principals, by virtue of the fact that they are principals, have a level of capacity to undertake the leadership expectations of ASSR.

The ASSR 'guidelines' document was written for a range of stakeholders, not just the principal whose responsibility it was to implement the process. This possibly explains why the guidelines do not specifically refer to the leadership implications of ASSR for the principal. It is assumed that the principal understands his/her role in the process and that they have the skills to undertake that role. The guidelines state:

Assisted School Self Review takes school improvement as the shared concern of principals and superintendents...District Superintendents will work with

principals and their school communities to ensure these elements [elements of effective school-based review] underpin the review process and the site specific Partnership Agreement that grows from it. (p8-9)

References are also made to the 'tools' and techniques required for the ASSR process rather than the role of leader:

Assisted School review is designed to provide school leaders with the evaluation tools and techniques they need and to offer time within which positive school change can occur. (p10)

The 'guidelines' document acknowledges that principals:

...[in]...participating schools in 1999 will be involved in professional development at district level and will have the opportunity to work with each other and with principals who have already completed ASSR. (p10)

In summary, the results of the document analysis indicate that the 'guidelines' document, presumably because of its intended various audiences, provides little detail in how principals might undertake their role. However, it does make reference to leadership implications of the ASSR process for principals.

### *Interviews of Principals Undertaking ASSR in 1999*

The fourth research question was designed to find out how principals perceived the ASSR process affecting their role as leader. One question was designed for the interviewees that was intended to elicit data regarding the leadership implications of ASSR, "What do you think ASSR has meant for your leadership?".

Prompts were designed to elicit information of a specific nature, which could expand upon the questions. Five prompts regarding leadership implications were as follows:

- “How do you feel about your year in relation to the ASSR process?”
- “If you were doing it again how would you do it differently?”
- “What aspects did you give particular attention to and why?”
- “Did you do anything different from your colleagues?” and
- “How did the school culture impact on how you undertook the process?”

Some responses of interviewees to the prompts; “What were the challenges?” “What were the highlights?” and “What were the lowlights?” also elicited information about perceptions of principals in relation to the leadership implications of the ASSR process.

Responses from the interviewees suggest that most principals who undertook the ASSR process in 1999 were aware of the leadership implications. Most principals made specific reference to the implications of the process for their leadership referring to three key themes: personal style; relationships in working with others; and organisational management implications.

Of those interviewees who referred to personal style, four reflected on their personal learning and growth:

It has made me have a good look at my leadership style and whether or not there are aspects of my leadership that I need to address. (S6)

...a great deal of soul searching, personal reflection, personal goal setting. (S10)

...it has strengthened my knowledge about myself. (S4)

...I feel more confident... (S15)

Three other interviewees referred to the role of leader in the school, "...what I needed to do was to get away from leading it in the traditional sense, because if I did that I couldn't be part of it and my motives would be suspect" (S3), "...it has certainly cemented the role of the leader" (S16) and "...I believe in dispersed leadership, in getting as many people the opportunity to lead in all sorts of ways within the school" (S9).

Other interviewees who responded to the leadership implications saw the ASSR process as a leadership opportunity impacting on the principal's relationship with others and organisational management. Several interviewees were pleased at the way their staff and parents became involved in the process, "...I really loved the way that people really did work together..." and how they "...enjoyed working with staff in groups...". Responses also related to the ways in which the principal worked with his or her staff, "The discussion within the various groups has probably been the most valuable part...open and frank and constructive..." (S7). One interviewee made reference to the large number of staff, including non-teaching staff who turned up at voluntary meetings to discuss data, "Now that indicated to me that there is a fairly high degree, I think, of approval for the process and an interest in what it is going to look like" (S9).

Some principals made specific reference to the organisation of their school:

...the key one...[opportunity]...is to change the way that the school is set out... (S2)

...it...[ASSR]...has probably given our activities throughout the year a sharper focus than they may have at other times...there has been a lot of communication throughout the process, and a deliberate attempt to keep everyone informed, which is probably a bit different to what we have done previously. (S11)

...I think that there is real communication...very good shared understandings about it...[ASSR]... (S8)

...you get to build relationships with people, and have conversations with people, and fly the flag and do all sorts of things with a definite tool. I would have to do all of those things anyway, as principal, in making my school move forward, but I didn't have to come up with a tool to do it. (S12)

It would seem from the comments of those interviewees who responded to the question "What was your role in the ASSR process?" the role of the principal varied across schools and throughout the various stages of the process. In two cases the principal entrusted the process to another senior staff person. Nearly all interviewees talked in terms of 'we' when referring to steps undertaken to implement the ASSR process. In most cases, according to interviewees, staff who joined the co-ordination team did so on a voluntary basis (S7) whilst in four cases (S3, 12, 13, 15) staff involvement was determined by the positions held such as being a member of the senior staff.

The interviewee responses (that related to principal's perceptions of the leadership implications of the ASSR process) to the prompt, "What were the lowlights of the ASSR process?" could be grouped as leadership issues, time issues and concerns about external expectations. The leadership concerns related to the capacity of the principal to bring it all together, "...the personal terror that...I felt ...it wasn't

‘coming’ in...we had placed enormous trust in a series of small groups” (S3) and the expectation that the principal would be able to ‘do’ it. As one principal said, “...[there is]...a lack of certainty...not have I done it right, but have I done it in such a way that I have really involved the staff...or have I done a process where we have done the steps and it is not clear to people what it is all about yet...”

Responses to the prompt question, “What were the highlights of the ASSR process?” were related to leadership implications of the ASSR process and were of two predominant kinds: comments about the process as a management tool for collaboration, discussion and relationships; and comments of the kind that viewed the ASSR process as a vehicle for providing direction for the school.

In examining the group of principals in the study, it appears there were two types of principal responses to ASSR, namely a predominantly ‘reactive’ and largely management, principal as ‘director’, response and secondly, a predominantly ‘proactive’ leadership, principal as facilitator, response. Principals, it seems either responded to the ASSR process by completing the mandated requirements or by using the requirements as a lever for change.

Interviewees appear to have valued the way in which the ASSR process enabled them to “...have the broader picture...” (S12) and to “...identify...where we want to go. One interviewee summed up the highlights by saying:

...identifying some important issues for the school. Seeing some of the relationships between teachers and staff and students working on committees,

that has been really good. There has been some very good collaboration; there has been some genuine interest in the results...a lot of really useful discussion about things that don't often get discussed in the school...a more sharply focused review of a lot of our activities... (S11)

Of those interviewees who referred to outcomes of the ASSR process, most saw the involvement of others in discussions as a highlight, "...I really loved the way that people did work together, and I guess it showed me that we can work together and do something other than just cope with kids bad behaviour" (S5).

As one principal commented "...the discussion has been...affirming...we recognise that we really are in it together and that where there are things that we want to change and we want to improve, that as a group we look at ways of doing it" (S2). Another principal reflected on how the ASSR process demanded participation of staff that was different from in the past, "...I don't think teachers were used to having a lot of professional development time...I don't think teachers were used to having to discuss..." (S15).

One principal outlined how he invited staff to join committees, become "experts" and make decisions. This principal believed that this approach had really worked. In response to the prompt question, "What were the lowlights of the ASSR process?" that related to leadership, one principal commented on how he completed a number of tasks as a "...way of saving people doing a lot of extra work..." (S4). He also reflected on how:

...I don't delegate as well as I should have...there were some things I should have delegated more and didn't...I chose to do that because I wanted to...I

really wanted to see...I was nervous about the timeline...another reason for taking that on [student survey collation]...and overseeing it myself, so I knew the stuff was accurate. (S4)

He commented further, later, about things he would do differently because, "...by not delegating some tasks as much as I could have...the involvement of some people was more peripheral" (S4).

In summary, the responses from the interviews suggest that most principals who undertook the ASSR process in 1999 were aware of the leadership implications. Interviewees talked about three different kinds of leadership implication, namely personal style, relationships with others and organisational management.

Some principals reflected on their personal growth and learning, others referred to the role of leader in the school and how ASSR had provided them with the opportunity to organise things in their school differently whilst several principals were pleased with the way in which their staff participated in the process.

The results suggest that there were two different kinds of responses to the ASSR. Firstly, because of the mandated requirements and time constraints, most principals took on the role of 'director' ensuring that the tasks were completed. Secondly, the results suggest that some principals preferred the role of 'facilitator' and recognized the process as a lever for change.



### *Summary of Results of Research Question Four*

The results of the document analysis indicate that the 'guidelines' document provides little detail in how principals might undertake their role. It does, however, make reference to leadership implications of the ASSR process for principals.

The responses from the interviews suggest that most principals who undertook the ASSR process in 1999 were aware of the leadership implications. Interviewees talked about three different kinds of leadership implication, namely personal style, relationships with others and organisational management.

The results suggest that there were two different kinds of responses to the ASSR. Firstly, most principals took on the role of 'director'. However, the research suggests that some principals preferred the role of 'facilitator'.

### **Summary of Results of Research**

A summary of results from the elite interview, the document analysis and the principal interviews for each of the four research questions follows:

*Question 1 - How did principals make a commitment to ASSR, and initiate the ASSR process in their school?*

- ASSR originated as a 'grass roots' initiative between superintendents and principals;
- ASSR was seen as an initiative that grew or developed over time;

- ASSR was rooted in the belief that school self review was preferable to centrally imposed models;
- When the ASSR process was co-opted into the then government's 'Directions' policy, it came to be perceived as centrally driven;
- The Department of Education's document *Assisted School Self Review, 1999*, provided detailed information about the ASSR process and was distributed to school communities undertaking ASSR in 1999 from the 'centre' through the District Superintendent;
- District Superintendents were responsible for information and support provided to the ASSR principals in their respective district;
- The expectation that principals would make a commitment to the process and 'drive' it in their schools was made clear by the district office and the 'centre';
- Principals understood this expectation and that they would need to prepare for the ASSR process to be undertaken in their schools in 1999;
- Principals had a broad knowledge of ASSR and an understanding of the process;
- Readiness to be involved varied;
- Principals initiated the process by providing information to staff and gained commitment by explaining the tasks to be undertaken; and
- Principals expressed positive attitudes towards the ASSR process prior to implementation.

*Question 2 - What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?*

- Principals were provided with 'tools' to guide them in implementing and managing the process in their school;
- The 'guidelines' document was explicit in its expectation that principals would adopt decision-making processes to foster staff participation;
- Principals led the establishment of the management group and participated along with staff;
- Principals tended to either use existing groups to co-ordinate the process or to establish a management group and then assign the tasks to be done;
- Management groups changed function and membership during the period of the ASSR process;
- Principals reported concerns for staff workload and took on responsibility for tasks in order to relieve workloads for staff;
- Professional development related mostly to the technical aspects of the ASSR process rather than school improvement issues; and
- The ways in which individual principals managed the process and adopted decision-making processes to foster staff participation varied greatly. However, all adopted procedures congruent with those suggested in the implementation guidelines.

*Question 3 - What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools?*

- A Partnership Agreement and a School Development Plan were intended key outputs for the ASSR process;
- Principals completed the Partnership Agreement according to the mandated requirements and by the deadline; and
- Principals were at varying stages towards the documenting of a School Development Plan that was site-specific.

*Question 4 - How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?*

- The 'guidelines' document provides little detail in how principals might undertake their role;
- The 'guidelines' document makes reference to leadership implications of the ASSR process for principals;
- There were two types of principal responses to ASSR, namely a predominantly 'reactive' and largely management, principal as 'director', response and secondly, a predominantly 'proactive' leadership, principal as facilitator, response;
- Principals responded to the ASSR process by completing the mandated requirements or by using the requirements as a lever for change;
- Principals were aware of the leadership implications of undertaking ASSR; and
- Principals responded positively about their achievements at the end of the ASSR year.

The findings of the four research questions will be discussed in the next chapter, in the context of the literature review. In addition, conclusions and suggestions for further investigation will be made.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine how 16 Tasmanian school principals undertook a school reform initiative, the Assisted School Self Review, in their particular school in 1999, and how this process reflected the stated guidelines of the ASSR. This chapter provides a discussion of the results, identifies concerns and makes recommendations. The chapter is organised according to the research questions of the study.

The four research questions were as follows:

- How did principals make a commitment to ASSR, and initiate the ASSR process in their school?
- What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?
- What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools? and
- How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?

### **Initiating the ASSR process and making a commitment**

The findings of the document analysis and the elite interview indicate that there was an expectation that all principals in Tasmanian schools in 1999, who had not already done so, would implement the ASSR process in their schools. Further, the findings

indicate there was an expectation that principals would make a commitment to the process and 'drive it' in their schools. The research literature on school-based reform points to the critical role the principal plays in such reform (Hipp and Huffman, 2000), and indicates that reform initiatives rely on local ownership and commitment for success (Churchill and Williamson, 1999).

Although the research findings of this study indicate that the ASSR process originated as a 'grass roots' initiative, the interviewee data indicates that some principals confused the intent of the ASSR process with the mandated requirements and the systematic implementation and, consequently, by 1999, three years after the process was implemented, all principals reported their understanding of the ASSR process as a centrally mandated reform process.

This view reflects a similar tension between responding to directives and acting autonomously found by Wildy (1999) in her study that focussed on the dilemmas of school restructuring. It is Wildy's view that there is an irony in school-based management in that the power and authority supposedly devolved to principals to implement change is not necessarily borne out in practice. Wildy found that principals can exercise authority in relation to goals and planning, but, at the same time are given guidelines that become more detailed over time in order to meet system accountability. The responses of the principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 would suggest that the demands of the output expectations of the ASSR review year determined how they implemented the process.

Regardless of perceptions of a centrally imposed reform agenda, principals undertaking the process in 1999 generally expressed positive attitudes towards the ASSR process prior to implementation. The attitude of the principal was important in initiating the process and making a commitment to it. Research evidence indicates that if a reform initiative is centrally imposed or that there is a perception that it is centrally mandated, regardless of the intention, what the principal says about the initiative, or how the principal manages the perceptions of the initiative, impacts on staff response and the degree to which the staff adopts ownership (Churchill and Williamson, 1999).

The research findings revealed that all of the principals in this study responded to the centrally mandated reform initiative as required, and they considered that they implemented the ASSR process according to the guidelines provided by the Department of Education and the District Superintendent. The interviewee data indicates that principals had a broad knowledge of ASSR and an understanding of the process.

Further, there seemed to be an assumption, inherent in the documentation, that principals understood that the process was designed to be context specific and was therefore a mechanism to assist principals with school change. Sidener, in her research (1995), found that policy makers, especially in relation to decision-making processes and school-based reform, need to find a balance between providing



structure for school-based reform and letting schools find their own way forward. The 1999 ASSR guidelines were explicit in their intention of being supportive rather than prescriptive and that schools should determine their own site-specific responses to the implementation tasks.

The fact that the evidence of this study suggests that principals undertaking the ASSR process in 1999 did so in personal and idiosyncratic ways points to this understanding. However, whilst this may have been the intention of the ASSR process, the interviewee data also suggests that principals' personal and idiosyncratic responses to ASSR were largely intuitive rather than preconceived devised strategies to implement the process. The idiosyncratic nature of the restructuring process experienced by principals was identified by Wildy (1995).

Whilst all of the principals in this study adopted procedures to gain commitment and initiate the ASSR process in their schools, that were congruent with those suggested in the implementation guidelines, the ways in which these procedures were enacted was both individualistic and context specific. Principals reported that they made judgements about what was 'best' at the time, taking into account the pressures of daily routine tasks, demands on teachers and conflicting priorities such as building programs and school-specific events and activities. Similarly, principals considered the staff profile, relationships and dynamics and existing structures and current ways of 'doing things here' when managing the ASSR process.

Principals in this study fell into two categories in the way in which they made a commitment to ASSR and initiated the ASSR process in their schools: namely 'proactive' and 'reactive'. At the beginning, most principals saw ASSR primarily as a process to be completed. Only two principals, at the outset, reported that they saw it as a vehicle for change. At the end of the process, half of the principals were explicit in referring to the process as providing opportunity for school improvement. More principals were able to reflect on the positive impact of ASSR on their school as a key outcome.

Given that all of the principals in this study were undertaking ASSR in the third stage of its implementation in 1999, it is likely that it was assumed there was a high level of principal 'readiness' for ASSR. The limited time in the school experienced by principals, both those new to the principalship and those new to the specific site, may have accounted for the different responses to the ASSR process by principals and the varying issues and difficulties encountered in establishing commitment to ASSR. Research concerning principal 'readiness' for restructuring initiatives as well as experience and professional development needs, should be undertaken in order to identify individual characteristics of principals that may affect restructuring processes.

### **Management and Decision-Making Processes**

The findings of the document analysis of the Department of Education 'guidelines' document shows that principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 were provided with

technical 'tools' to undertake the task and suggestions for managing the process. Five suggestions are outlined in the 'Getting Started' section of the 'guidelines' document. The suggestions are of two different kinds: procedural, administrative tasks such as developing a plan, establishing a co-ordination team and conducting information sessions; and process suggestions about minimising other school planning and involving the school community. Practical details are provided about how to manage the administrative tasks. The 'guidelines' document provides an explanation of why collaboration and school priority for ASSR are important issues to consider, but advice concerning methods to use is not included.

The analysis of other documentation indicates that there was an expectation that principals would act on the suggestions provided in the ASSR guidelines. There was an assumption that principals would know how to manage the process or would receive assistance and advice from their District Superintendent if needed, or network with their colleagues for support. However, this individualised, site-specific assistance that was provided could be considered idiosyncratic and ad-hoc. In the interviews some principals expressed the view that greater systemic support and guidelines about the management of ASSR as a change process would have been helpful. This view is supported by the comments of the interviewee included in the postscript. Sidener's research (1995) concluded that school-based management demands changed roles for district staff and a high profile commitment on the part of the District Superintendent. Further, the research of Wildy and Wallace (1997) found that although power and authority has been devolved to schools through site-

based management the corresponding devolution of power and authority within the individual school has not been addressed.

### **Review Co-ordination Team**

The 'guidelines' document was explicit in the expectation that principals would adopt decision-making processes to foster staff participation. All principals in this study established a review co-ordination team. Most principals led the establishment of this team and most participated in the ASSR process with their staff. In most cases, the way in which the team was established depended on the management style of the principal. The composition of the team reflected, and took account of, the existing decision-making structures in the school.

The way in which the review co-ordination team was established determined how the ASSR process was managed in the school. In general, principals adopted one of two different approaches. Some principals established a management group and then allocated tasks as needed. In some cases, tasks were undertaken by the team, by site-specific situation groups and by a combination of both. Other principals, particularly those of larger schools, allocated tasks to existing committees or groups within the school.

Principals referred to the size of their school as a factor in determining how the management team would be set up. In small schools, fewer staff members and, therefore, fewer existing groups, meant that ASSR tasks had to be undertaken by

everyone. In the larger schools, existing teams and specially formed sub-groups could be used to complete tasks. The study of Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan, (2000) supports this finding that models for decision-making differ between primary and high schools.

Principals reported that, in the majority of cases, the management group that was established at the beginning of the process changed during the ASSR year. The report, provided by principals at the interview, on how the ASSR process evolved in their school, suggests that over time context specific factors such as existing school management structures, decision-making processes and power relationships influenced how the tasks were undertaken. It would seem that in most cases principals established the management team at the beginning of the year more in response to the suggested guidelines than as a result of consideration of existing school teams. Only one interviewee specifically referred to discussion with staff about how to best establish the management team. Whilst principals fulfilled the requirements as set out in the 'guidelines' document in relation to establishing a coordination team, staff consultation was limited. Evidence suggests that, at the outset, principals either did not consider the relationship of the team to other existing groups within the school or they were unclear about the co-ordination team's role.

ASSR is an instrument of school-based management. School-based management is based on the assumption that if decisions are going to be made at school level then staff need to be involved. Research shows that school-based management demands

flatter structures, shared leadership and relationships based on collaboration (Henkin, Cistone and Dee, 1999). Wildy and Wallace (1997) found that the establishment of a decision-making team in itself did not necessarily mean genuine participation by staff nor did the allocation of tasks result in real sharing of power and leadership. They contended that school based reform was about new ways of working together and that principals needed to share their leadership. Wildy and Wallace further make the point that principals can share power without abdicating responsibility.

### **Role of the Management Team**

The role of the management team to co-ordinate the ASSR process was an important aspect of the ASSR process. In most schools there were different understandings amongst principals about the role of the management team. Although the 'Getting Started' section of the 'guidelines' document outlines initial tasks, some principals had an expectation that the team would have a decision-making role as well as a 'steering' role. Other principals were unsure as to how the ASSR management team related to other existing school groups such as school council. In one of the few instances where the principal's concern was to meet the expectation that he or she would involve everyone, the outcome was a misunderstanding about the management team and how it should be set up. This lack of clarity, at the outset, about role and purpose could have been the reason that, in some schools over time, as principal understanding of the ASSR process grew, principals deferred to existing structures. Consequently, the specially established ASSR group disintegrated. Research by

Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown (2000) found that clarity about roles was an important factor in developing effective school-based management teams.

The findings of the interviews with principals indicate that principals dominated the ASSR process. The results indicate that in most cases it was the principal who made decisions about what tasks the staff undertook and how they participated in the ASSR process. Whilst principals recognised the importance of staff involvement in the process, more than half of the principals commented on their concerns about time and the workload for staff. As a result some principals elected to complete tasks themselves rather than asking staff to undertake extra work. Some principals reported that they were concerned about teacher capacity. All principals reported that time constraints were a concern.

All principals reported that they completed the mandated collection of data as set out in the 'guidelines' document and all schools made decisions about other data to be collected. In the final stages of data analysis and target setting, most principals employed a range of site-specific strategies to complete the tasks by the required deadline. In some instances, principals formed working parties and sub-committees with clearly defined tasks to complete. In other instances, principals themselves facilitated processes and drafted suggestions that they explained were to minimise teacher stress in the final weeks of the school year.

Some principals indicated that teacher interest in the process changed over time, especially once data was available. Principals reported that teachers were more interested in participation in decision-making in these later stages of the process. Principals considered that this was because the data, presented to them for analysis, impacted directly on the school development planning for the following year. More specifically the data related to teaching and learning. This finding is congruent with Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown's (2000) research, that found that management team knowledge and understanding of data analysis is developed if it is related to educational issues. Further, they found that effective school-based management teams are those that focus on teaching and learning.

### **Administrative Demands**

Principals expressed concerns regarding time and pressure to complete the tasks according to the deadlines mandated. The evidence suggests that principals had little time to reflect on the ASSR process during the year. Indeed, in the interviews several principals expressed the view that the interview was the first time they had had the opportunity to critically reflect on the process.

The concerns about pressures generally, expressed by principals in this study, are consistent with the research literature. Baker and Dellar (1999) found that reform agendas created increased pressure for principals. How principals managed 'multiple dilemmas' and workloads affected their response to the reform initiative (Dimmock, 1999). Henkin, Cistone and Dee, (1999) identified that there is a link between the



conflict management strategies adopted by principals and their satisfaction with site-based management.

In this research study the pressure felt by principals to complete the tasks by the required deadline highlight the risk, inherent in school-based reform initiatives, that administrative tasks and responding to directives will get in the way of principals acting to improve student outcomes. This tension for principals was recognised by Wildy, (1999). Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan (2000), in their study, found that it was important that school-based reform initiatives are placed in the context of educational and not administrative terms.

At the end of the ASSR year, some principals in this research study, on reflection, saw the process as just the beginning for improving their school. The need for principals to take the time to institutionalise changes, and the importance of ongoing review of processes when undertaking school-based reform were shown to be important by Sidener (1995).

In most cases principals adopted pragmatic management approaches, considering the needs of staff whilst mindful of the task to be completed. The results indicate that, generally, principals reported that time constraints influenced their judgements about decision-making processes and teacher participation in order to meet deadlines. Further, most principals indicated that they recognised that the ASSR process was a school priority in terms of planning and professional development. However, the

evidence shows that most principals were reluctant to reduce other school activities that were already in place, planned for and valued. Churchill and Williamson (1999) consider that manageable reform agendas and not multiple innovations are pre-conditions for effective school-based reform implementation.

### **Professional Development**

The findings from the document analysis showed that principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 were provided with detailed guidelines and suggestions for undertaking professional development especially in relation to data collection, analysis and interpretation. The findings from the interview with principal's point to two different kinds of professional development undertaken in ASSR schools: activities that related to the technical aspects of the process; and those that related more broadly to school improvement issues.

Of those principals who described professional development in their schools, just over half led the activities themselves with the remainder delegating responsibility to other staff members. The findings indicate that all principals focussed professional development activities around the analysis of data. Further, the findings indicate that some principals considered that the use of time taken for ASSR management tasks constituted professional development. Sidener (1995), concluded that school-based management has implications for the training needs of all those involved and that participants need ongoing assistance to support their shared decision-making processes.

## **Outcomes of ASSR**

The findings of the document analysis indicated that there were clear expectations about two ASSR process products in 1999. Both the 'guidelines' document and other departmental documents indicate the expectation that an 'output' of the process would be the completion of a Partnership Agreement and the resultant drawing up of a School Development Plan. These expectations were mandated requirements. The memoranda indicated that these two outputs were to be completed prior to the end of the ASSR year.

The findings of the interviews with principals revealed that all principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 had achieved the Partnership Agreement and, at the time of interview, were working on School Development Plans. Further, most principals reported that they had, through the process of data collection and analysis and working with staff, clarified existing site-specific circumstances that would inform planning. Many principals reported that they saw this as just the beginning and that the next stages would be the most important in terms of school improvement.

The interview data indicates four kinds of outcomes for principals who undertook the ASSR process in 1999: completion of the process; goal setting for school improvement; enhanced staff relationships; and the participation of staff in decision-making processes. Student learning outcomes were not specifically identified. Overall, the principal interviews suggest that, on reflection, most principals could

identify positive opportunities for school change that arose from their involvement in the ASSR process.

Of those interviewees who referred to outcomes, most saw the involvement of others as significant. In particular, principals referred to staff participation in a number of tasks related to the ASSR process. These included the administrating of the process, gathering data, professional learning, analysis of the data and synthesising findings to develop targets and goals for the final Partnership Agreement. The results indicated that each of the 16 principals involved their staff using similar processes. All principals collaborated in various ways according to what they believed was 'best' in their situation, and in response to opportunities that arose or that were levered by the individual principal. These outcomes, identified by the principals, reflect the effective school-based management research literature. Churchill and Williamson (1999) found that genuine participation in decision-making by teachers leads to positive attitudes towards change.

It is unclear, however, from the evidence of this research study, the degree to which staff involvement had moved from the completion of administrative tasks to decision-making about educational issues identified by Mulford, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan (2000), and Wildy (1999) as key factors in effective school-based reform. Most principals reported that, on reflection, they valued teacher participation in teams. Evidence of shared leadership and decision-making in this study confirms findings of other research that indicates the link between shared power relations,

dispersed responsibilities and school readiness for effective school-based management (Wildy, 1999; Hipp and Huffman, 2000).

In this study it was found that staff participation in tasks related to data analysis and outcome setting resulted in principal perceptions of staff ownership and genuine engagement. However, some principals, who undertook the ASSR process in 1999, expressed the view that until the experience of this interview, they had not made explicit the link between their actions and successful school-based reform. This situation reflects findings from a study by Chrispeels, Castillo and Brown (2000) who contended that critical elements in effective staff participation in school-based reform initiatives relate to role clarification, training and support from the principal.

Overall, the findings of the research suggest that staff participation in the ASSR process in the small schools was related to the way in which 'power' was distributed whilst in the larger schools it was linked more closely to the existing decision-making structures. Therefore, the degree to which ASSR as a reform initiative was able to build teacher capacity and empowerment through shared decision-making and greater collaboration was determined by power relations and existing structures within the school. This conclusion concurs with the research of Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan (2000) who found that models for decision-making differ between teachers and principals and between primary and high schools.

Although the results indicated that some principals took measures to ensure that teachers were not asked to undertake too many tasks, most principals involved staff to take on some leadership roles and assist with tasks. The resultant collaboration and ownership indicated by the results supports the idea that those who are affected by the outcomes should be involved in the process (Wildy, 1999). Further, the enhanced personal relationships indicated by some of the findings of this study points to the idea that improved working relations emerge from the involvement of key stakeholders. Some principals in this study expressed the view that the involvement of teachers in the process had been a positive outcome.

The results of this research suggest that these two kinds of outcome expectations created tension for principals - the competing demands of undertaking the ASSR process to achieve mandated outputs by a determined deadline and the management of the process in such a way as to achieve the desired reform outcomes. The findings suggest that the concurrent demands of efficiency and effectiveness or product and process were challenging for principals. Therefore, some of the ways in which the principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 approached the process, related to how the principal perceived the pressures, priorities and the role of principalship. The findings would suggest that the ASSR process had limited impact on altering existing conditions as they related to decision-making groups. This raises issues about relationships, collaboration and restructuring in school-reform initiatives. Sidener (1995) concluded that the establishment of governance structures for reform initiatives does not necessarily mean changed power or authority relationships.

In many cases, it would seem principals believed they had to put efficiencies ahead of effectiveness which may have accounted for their reported experiences with time and pressure and the way they established the co-ordination team. The management of the process and the consequent decision-making processes adopted in schools may have been undertaken differently if, at the outset, principals had been asked to consider the purpose and role of leadership teams in the context of school-based reform initiatives prior to establishing a co-ordination team just because it was a mandated requirement.

### **Principal Leadership**

The interview findings indicate that principals were aware of the leadership implications of their involvement in the ASSR process. Further, the findings from the research suggest that the way in which individual principals approached the ASSR process related to how they themselves perceived the role of the principal and how they dealt with pressures and other priorities in their setting.

The findings from the document analysis indicate that there was an assumption that, by the third stage of the ASSR process in 1999, there was a high level of principal understanding of the leadership expectation in what was needed. The 'guidelines' document makes reference to the leadership implications of the ASSR process and points to the assistance principals would receive in working with District Superintendents and other principals. However, whilst the booklet details the

implementation expectations and suggested processes that were largely followed systematically by principals, no systemic professional learning was undertaken with principals that related to the role of leaders in reform initiatives or theory building about how to share power and authority to bring about school reform. Results suggest that, whilst principals understood that they had leadership responsibilities in relation to ASSR, some principals were less certain about their role as leader. Further, some principals indicated that they were uncertain about their capacity to meet this responsibility.

The research literature relating to school-based reform points to the need for principals to understand the underpinning theory concerning school-based reform (Sidener, 1995). Hipp and Huffman (2000) concluded that principal preparation programs need to address leadership practices, in whole school reform, that make differences for students. In addition, both Sidener (1995) and Lipman (1997) identified limitations in principals' understanding of the human aspects of school reform and power relationships. Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop (2000) concluded that principals need to be skilled in transformational leadership and that a principal who focuses on transactional leadership may give the illusion of school improvement.

Whilst the experience of the 16 principals undertaking ASSR in 1999 ranged from extensive experience as a principal to most recently appointed, almost half of the principals were completing their second year in the job. The principal position description (see Appendix A.) outlines principal responsibilities and points to



capacity to bring about change as a key criterion of merit. In this context, it would be reasonable to assume that all principals were clear about their leadership responsibilities and they knew how to undertake the process in their schools. The findings from the interviews suggest a link between time in the principalship and perceptions about principals' leadership roles and principal knowledge and understanding in school-based reform initiatives. This link needs further research.

Whilst the findings from the principal interviews do not specifically relate to personal leadership style, the evidence of the ways in which principals implemented the ASSR process in 1999, could be said to have been influenced by preferred leadership styles. The results of this study indicated that the uniqueness of individual school contexts and different personal leadership styles may account for different principal experiences in undertaking the ASSR process and also account for the variations in the emphasis that different principals placed on aspects of the process. At interview, principals, in reflecting on the process, usually focussed on a particular aspect. Principals variously talked about staff participation, parent or student involvement, analysis of data or professional learning. Further, the ways in which principals went about the process would suggest that personal principal understandings about school improvement and leadership requirements varied.

The findings suggest that some principals preferred a more traditional, authoritative style whilst others preferred a more facilitative style. Some principals reported adopting and endorsing the ASSR process, involving staff through collaboration and

shared decision-making but nevertheless, retaining 'authority' by claiming a need to 'protect staff' and assist staff cope with heavy workloads. The extent to which principals undertook tasks, to avoid interfering with staff commitment to the classroom, could be seen to impact on the degree to which staff in ASSR schools in 1999 assumed ownership of the process through genuine participation. The evidence would suggest that principal attitude towards undue workload for staff, is related to preferred personal leadership style.

It is interesting to note that differences in principal behaviour throughout the ASSR process may have also been in response to pressures rather than a reflection of preferred leadership style. Principals who can be categorised as 'reactive' in their responses to the management tasks, with greater support and encouragement to use ASSR as a process to develop their schools, may have responded more 'proactively'. All principals resorted to pragmatic strategies to meet the deadlines and 'protect' their staff from increased workloads. Many principals pointed out that for these reasons they undertook many tasks themselves.

Principals in some schools believed that staff were 'happy' for the principal to undertake tasks on their behalf, and they assumed that teachers did not necessarily want to be involved in all decision-making that occurred in their school. It was assumed that principals would know what to focus on and what to leave out, and that they would understand what it meant for leadership. Principals were left to work out the priorities about how the outcomes of the process would be achieved best.

According to the ASSR 'guidelines' document principals were expected to exercise discretion and make judgements.

Likewise, it is interesting to note that principals reported that they made judgements about when and how their staff became involved in decision-making processes based on their concerns about workloads, capacity and in some cases their belief that their staff was happy for them to 'do it'. This perception of the principal and his or her desire to 'protect' staff could have inadvertently prevented staff in some schools from 'real', as opposed to contrived, participation in decision-making processes in their school. Silins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop (2000) found that a collaborative climate, that is, one of trust and openness is fundamental to school reform. However, Mulford and Hogan in their study (1999) found that although principals are accepting their new roles in site-based management the shift of authority beyond the principal is still not clear.

Some principals made a point of the fact that they did not reduce other school activities in order to focus on ASSR. These principals seemed to be more task oriented than other principals. On the other hand, there were other principals who delegated responsibilities to others. These principals seemed to be more people oriented and saw their role as one of facilitation. Hipp and Huffman (2000) concluded that leadership practices are key factors in whole school reform and it is the principal who is responsible for sharing the leadership and including staff in

decision-making. Further, Reitzug and Burello (1995) found that the principal needs to act more as a facilitator in processes than a provider of information to staff.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment and implementation of school-based reform is affected by the level of commitment from staff and the principal, the principal's leadership style and the characteristics of a school context. The principal is a critical player in implementing school-based reform. Though the principals in this study perceived the ASSR process as centrally driven, they perceived the process in a positive light, and considered that they implemented the ASSR process as required by the ASSR guidelines.

A majority of principals approached the ASSR process in a 'reactive' manner undertaking a job to be done. A minority of principals approached the process in a 'proactive' manner anticipating productive outcomes for the school and long term development. It is not clear whether the differences in approach, either proactive or reactive, was a consequence of the principal attitudes or as a result of the administrative demands encountered.

ASSR was intended to be site-specific and results showed individual and idiosyncratic approaches by schools. Principals gained commitment from staff and initiated the process through the establishment of ASSR 'teams'. However, the manner in which a Review Co-ordination was set up was determined by the

principal, with little consultation with staff. Generally, the ASSR Review Co-ordination Team was set up within pre-existing committee structures within the school. ASSR as a mechanism for school reform is based on the assumption that principals understand fully the implications of site-based management for schools. Principals expressed the view that they required more support to achieve ASSR outcomes.

Principals in this study felt that ASSR placed additional pressures of tasks and time on teachers and they attempted to relieve this pressure by taking on some of the task themselves, even though they acknowledged the importance of staff involvement in decision-making. The opportunity for personnel to achieve ownership of the ASSR process was reduced. Differences were found between small schools and large schools with more staff involved in the process in smaller schools.

Predominantly, principals in this study were either in their first year of their principalship or in the first year at the school. The ASSR guidelines appeared to assume a greater level of experience and professional knowledge from the principals than may have been the case. Further, leadership style and understanding of the administrative practice may have been influencing factors in the ASSR process. Principals undertaking reform agendas have professional learning needs that relate to change and school improvement and their roles as leaders in schools. These agendas need to take particular account of the professional development of those new to principalship or new in their school.

This study reinforces previous research indicating tension between central policy guidelines and school-based ownership and accountability. However, this study has illuminated the importance of individual attitudes, leadership styles and administrative practices, school size and school sector in impacting on school-based reform. All are areas that need to be explored further.

### **Recommendations**

In brief, this study has found that the following seven aspects contribute to a greater likelihood of successful implementation of school reform efforts such as ASSR:

- Principal with a positive attitude and understanding of school-based reform;
- Proactive rather than reactive principal using ASSR as a lever for change rather than just conforming to mandated requirements of the education system;
- Having an experienced principal - time in the principalship and/or in the school was found to have implications for their readiness and need for professional development related to the reform effort;
- Being in a primary and/or smaller school;
- Use of existing rather than adding to a school's activities or ways of operation such as its committee structure;
- Shared or distributive leadership within the school, especially that involved with collecting and jointly discussing data and then setting outcomes in relation to teaching and learning; and

- Time, both to reflect on the reform process and to get beyond mastery of the technical aspects of the reform to its implications for school improvement.

However, the study also highlighted four dilemmas that need further attention if reform initiatives such as ASSR are going to have a greater chance of not only being successfully implemented but also positively influencing teaching and learning in schools. These dilemmas are:

- The ease with which a 'grass roots' initiative becomes a mandated requirement, including the way supportive guidelines can turn into prescriptions;
- The tensions between directives/structure/accountability/efficiency requirements and autonomy/empowerment/effectiveness at both levels of schooling, i.e. superintendent to school at a system level and principal to teachers within a school. This study found both that the output expectations and timelines acted as major determining factors in the implementation process and that the principal dominated the reform initiative;
- The need for timelines but also the need for time to reflect on the process of reform and to get through the technical or administrative to the more substantive or educational; and
- The desire of many principals to be pragmatic and action oriented (even where this is for the noblest of reasons, such as to avoid adding to staff workloads) yet the need to genuinely involve teachers in decision-making (not everybody wants to be involved in all decisions or at every stage of a decision-making process) and efforts at school reform.

The results are consistent with previous research findings in the area. These include:

- Key role played by the principal. (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1996)
- Need for principals to have an understanding of school-based reform.

(Sidener, 1995)

- Transformational rather than transactional leadership. (Salins, Mulford, Zarins and Bishop, 2000)
- Need for time. (Sidener, 1995)
- Size and type (primary/secondary) of school. (Mulford, Kendall, Kendall, Bishop and Hogan, 2000)
- Tensions between responding to directives and acting autonomously. (Wildy, 1999) and
- Authority is not shifting in any significant way below the level of principal. (Mulford and Hogan, 1999)

Other findings from previous research were not replicated or were not part of the focus of the current study. These include:

- Principal as facilitator rather than provider of information. (Reitzug and Burillo, 1995)
- The need for appropriate resources to support reform initiatives. (Churchill and Williamson, 1999)
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities including the need for changed roles for district staff. (Sidener, 1995)



- Different perceptions of principals and teachers. (Mulford and Hogan, 1999)
- Team development. (Chrispeels, Castillo, and Brown, 2000) and
- Skill at data analysis. (Chrispeels, Castillo, and Brown, 2000)

Given these findings regarding the initiation of, the decision-making processes in, the outcomes of and the effect on the role of principal of Tasmania's Assisted School Self Review reform initiative, and links to previous research, this study concludes by providing a number of recommendations.

As a result of this study the following nine recommendations are made for research and policy.

For research:

- In order to obtain a better understanding of the applicability of the findings, the convenience sample, multi-case study with semi-structured interview methodology used in this study be followed up with a survey of all principals in the state and the survey employed be based on the findings from this study;
- Further data be gathered from other stakeholders, particularly parents, teachers and students and the results compared with those from the principals that were the major source of data for this study;
- Further research concerning school-based reform be undertaken with a large enough sample in order to examine differences between school size, school

sector, administrative structures and workload of personnel as variables that may affect school-based management;

- Further research be undertaken to explore relationships between characteristics of a principal (attitudes, management preference, leadership style, principal professional knowledge) and school-based reform; and
- Further research be undertaken on each of the four dilemmas identified in this study, not that they will ever be fully resolved but that the advice be provided on the balances that need to be achieved if schools are to continue to improve.

For Policy:

- System policy needs to be formulated that recognises and promotes the critical role of professional development of key personnel involved in school-based reform;
- This professional development needs to stress not only leaders knowledge of theory of school-based reform but also how to develop skills in being proactive, transactional, and distributive as well as finding time for reflection;
- Greater time is needed in educational reform efforts to ensure the antecedents for successful reform are in place, especially team development and skill at data analysis; and
- More emphasis in reform efforts needs to be given to the gathering, interpretation and use of data by those schools, especially data relating to teaching and learning.

## POSTSCRIPT

By the end of 1999, all Tasmanian government schools had completed one cycle of the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) process. During 2000, the Tasmanian Department of Education undertook a review of the ASSR process. This review was entitled Shaping School Review for the Future (SSRF) project. The SSRF project was intended to gain information about the effectiveness of the ASSR process and the satisfaction levels of stakeholders. In addition, advice on improvements and future directions for school review processes was also sought.

The SSRF project considered the ASSR process, the Partnership Agreement and the School Annual Report that was produced at the end of each year of implementation following the school's ASSR review year. The researcher considered that data from this review corroborated the results derived from this research study.

As a result of the 2000 SSRF project, the Department of Education produced a booklet entitled *School Improvement Review, 2001* that was made available to schools commencing the second cycle of school review in 2001. A revised version of this booklet, *School Improvement Review Guide, 2002*, was provided to schools in 2002. An examination of these two documents indicated that they were substantially the same, in content, as the 1999 ASSR 'guidelines' document, with some re-organisation in the presentation of content.

An introductory section in the 2001 booklet provided a description of the SSRF project undertaken in 2000, outlining the scope and methodology. Data gathering for the SSRF project was undertaken by District Review Groups. Each group, representing principals, teachers and parents, was chaired by the respective District Superintendent. It was the task of the District Review Group to undertake extensive consultation within its district. This consultation included focus group interviews, parent and student forums and staff meetings. A second method of data gathering was through questionnaires. Information collected by each district was supplemented by a questionnaire distributed to principals and teachers and parents on a state-wide random sample basis.

A notable addition to the 2001 and 2002 school review booklets content is the reference to stakeholder support for the continuation of school review. Further, the booklets make reference to stakeholder support for the idea of system mandated data collection through an annual Corporate Report rather than a School Annual Report. The process was renamed the School Improvement Review (SIR) process in the 2001 booklet, in the context of a new Review and Accountability Framework that was to apply throughout the Department of Education.

No report of the SSRF project was published other than these references provided in the introduction to the 2001 booklet. The introduction to the 2002 booklet provided a briefer description of the SSRF project, undertaken in 2000, than that provided in the 2001 booklet.

The content, relating to the new SIR processes, builds on the messages of the ASSR process, incorporates the shift in emphases to accommodate the feedback from the consultation processes in 2000 and includes processes, strategies and activities gathered from the experiences of the first review cycle to assist schools and principals.

An outcome of the SSRF project was the option for schools to negotiate their Review Plan with the District Superintendent or to take an 'off-the-shelf' review package. This opportunity to negotiate the School Review Plan afforded principals greater flexibility, if they wanted it, and reflected the emphasis placed on the role of the District Superintendent in supporting principals. The Requirements Information, in the booklet, lists the mandated elements of a negotiated plan. In the 2001 booklet, principals could take an 'off-the-shelf' option package but this option was not included in the 2002 booklet.

In the 1999 ASSR 'guidelines' document a task checklist was included. In the 2001 and the 2002 School Improvement Review booklets, this checklist was presented in the form of questions rather than tasks, and information and diagrams outlining the Negotiated Review Plan were provided. Reference is made, in the 2002 booklet, to a SIR resource package containing activities and strategies to enable the principal and the review co-ordination team to engage the school community.

An interview was conducted with an officer of the Tasmanian Department of Education who had knowledge of the 2000 Department of Education review (SSRF) project as well as knowledge of the first cycle of the ASSR process. The purpose of the interview was first, to gather information regarding the outcomes of the 2000 SSRF project and, second, to gather perceptions from the interviewee regarding the general outcomes of the ASSR process. The broader question of the research problem for this study, "How do you think principals perceived the process of implementing the ASSR process in their schools?" was used as a major focus for the interview and the four research questions for the study were presented as prompts.

On general reflection of the ASSR process, the interviewee made particular reference to principal commitment to the process. In the experience of the interviewee, in the school districts where principals, together with their District Superintendent, had taken a leading role in the early thinking and development of the ASSR process, especially encouraging the process to be school driven rather than centre driven, the principals had strong ownership of the process and wanted to be involved. On the other hand, the interviewee considered that, in other school districts where some principals perceived the ASSR as being imposed from the centre, these principals were less enthusiastic about the process, seemed to be less committed and had less ownership. This view reflects the views expressed in the elite interview conducted for the research study.

Results of this study showed that principals, in schools undertaking the process in 1999, who had not been involved in the initial development of the process, and who knew little about the historical context of ASSR, held the view that the process was centrally driven. Further, principals in these schools were more reactive in their response to undertaking the process rather than seeing it as an opportunity for school improvement.

In the opinion of the interviewee the nature of the principal leadership during the ASSR process was dependent, in part, on the principal's knowledge and the degree to which they were up-to-date with current research, "...knowledge about school improvement and how important that it is to drive it from the school". Further, it was the view of the interviewee that responses by principals to ASSR were mixed, dependent on this knowledge and understanding and the level of their involvement. It was the interviewee's opinion that the ASSR process afforded an opportunity for principals to put in place the kind of leadership that was less hierarchical, had more breadth and allowed for teams to participate in decision-making. ASSR enabled principals to think in practical terms about how to move their ideas forward. The interviewee acknowledged that for some principals the process could have been 'threatening' as a result of the feedback received from some of the survey instruments.

It was the interviewee's belief that an important outcome of the ASSR process was the opportunity for the school to see that its staff could engage in a dialogue in a safe

way and that there were "...ways that they could address some pretty tough issues..." in a professionally safe way that could "...actually impact on change within the school". Further, by the end of the process people believed that they were able to have their say. The other part of that, the interviewee considered, was that people trusted their colleagues to make decisions on their behalf, in the best interests of students. However, the degree to which staff became involved depended on "...the approach the principal took and a lot of that had to do with their personal beliefs".

It was the view of the interviewee that there is now, generally, a strong commitment to school improvement amongst principals and that there is more of an understanding by principals that the Department of Education has a right to have "...accountability processes in place". It was the interviewee's view that the SIR process provided more of a balance between mandated requirements and the flexibility for schools to negotiate their review plan with the District Superintendent.

The interviewee expressed the opinion that principals generally now had a greater understanding of the process of review and its links to school improvement. Some of this could be attributed to the ways in which the process was managed by District Superintendents. The data collected from the interviews with ASSR principals relating to outcomes, indicated that principals felt they had increased understandings and knowledge about school improvement as a result of ASSR.



The interviewee suggested that there was a tension between the accountability role of the Office for Educational Review unit and the professional learning needs of principals. The interviewee proposed that principals would benefit from more professional learning support in relation to change management and that, although the Department of Education, through the activities of the Office for Educational Review, supported schools and districts in the review process by providing guidelines and professional learning relating to data gathering and analysis processes, more support was needed.

The responses of the interviewee, together with the findings of the analysis of the 2001 and 2002 documents are congruent with the findings from the interviews with principals who implemented the ASSR process in 1999. The knowledge and understandings of the principal were important factors in the undertaking of review processes.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Principal Statement of Duties**



# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## POSITION DESCRIPTION – February 2000

<b>TITLE</b> Principal	<b>NUMBER</b> Generic
<b>AWARD</b> Teaching Service (Tasmanian Public Sector)	<b>CLASSIFICATION</b> Band 3 (Level 1,2, 4-8)
<b>DIVISION</b> Schools and Colleges	<b>BRANCH</b> Specified District
<b>SECTION</b> Specified School/College	<b>SUB-SECTION</b> N/A
<b>TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT</b> Permanent Full-time, 70.00 hours per fortnight, 52 weeks per year with 11 weeks leave.	<b>FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)</b> 1.00
<b>POSITION CATEGORY/FUNDING/RESTRICTIONS</b> Cost code as per code in Empower-HR	<b>SUPERVISOR</b> District Superintendent

**FUNCTION:** To lead and direct the educational program and administration of a school/ college in accordance with appropriate Acts, Regulations and guidelines.

### PRIMARY TASKS:

1. Ensure that the school/college provides an educational program which is consistent with the policies of the Department and the requirements of the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board.
2. Ensure that the curriculum taught and the learning environment provided are appropriate to the needs of students, given the available resources.
3. Direct and supervise teaching and support staff.
4. Provide for the well being and safety of students and staff.
5. Manage the school/college in order to make the most effective use of material and staff
6. Responsible for and actively involved in the professional development of staff.
7. Develop appropriate school/college-community links.
8. Promote educational continuity from kindergarten to tertiary level.

**LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY:** The Principal is responsible for the effective and efficient management of the school/college. This position exercises delegations in accordance with a range of Acts, Regulations, Awards and administrative authorities and functional arrangements mandated by Statutory office holders including the Secretary of the Department. Details of delegations to this position are provided to the occupant and must be exercised in accordance with any specified limitations.

This position is required to be the responsible officer in respect of their area of organisational responsibility pursuant to Section 10(1) of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*.

**DIRECTION/SUPERVISION RECEIVED:** The Principal receives advice and direction from a District Superintendent.

**SELECTION CRITERIA:** Employment in the State Service is made on the basis of merit. The *Tasmanian State Service Act 1984* defines merit as the individual capacity of the person to perform the duties of the position she or he may be applying for, having particular regard to his or her knowledge, skills, qualifications, experience and potential for future development. Characteristics such as gender, marital status, religion, racial, cultural or ethnic origin do not contribute to a person's capacity to perform the duties of the position and cannot be considered. Similarly, any form of disability must be disregarded unless it prevents a person from performing the inherent requirements of the position.

The Department is committed to the merit principle and to high standards of performance in the application of contemporary management practice and principles such as workplace diversity and occupational health and safety. The following specific selection criteria must be addressed by applicants in this context. The nominated function and primary tasks of the position must also be used to assist in the interpretation of these selection criteria.

1. Knowledge and understanding of current theory and practice relevant to education and outstanding performance in an educational leadership role.
2. Skills and experience in resource management and general administration based on knowledge and understanding of current guidelines and policies and the capacity to work within these to plan and implement appropriate courses of action.
3. Skills and ability to develop and maintain close relationships between the school and its parents and friends association, school council and the community.
4. High order skills in interpersonal relationships with students, staff, union officials, senior officers, parents and other community members with particular emphasis on communication, negotiation, supervision and counselling skills.
5. A demonstrated commitment to recurrent professional development and growth for all staff, especially senior staff.
6. Demonstrated commitment to the principles of equal employment opportunity for staff and equal opportunity for students.

**WORKING ENVIRONMENT:** As noted above the Department is committed to high standards of performance in the application of contemporary management practices and principles including occupational health and safety and workplace diversity. All employees are expected to participate in maintaining safe working conditions and practices and to promote and uphold the principle of fair and equitable access to employment/promotion, personal development and training and the elimination of workplace harassment and discrimination.

The Department is a large, decentralised, employer with staff deployed throughout Tasmania in a variety of locations including schools, colleges, libraries, offices and institutes. This position will be located at a specified school or college.

The Department is committed to the introduction and application of information management systems and solutions to improve its capacity to meet its objectives. Consequently the successful applicant may work with screen based equipment. All employees are expected to utilise information management systems responsibly and in accordance with privacy principles and, especially, the Department's discrimination and harassment policies.

Smoking is prohibited in State Government workplaces and vehicles.

**ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS:** As established by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in the Teaching Service (Tasmanian Public Sector) Award, 1995. The Commissioner for Public Employment has determined that the person nominated for this position must satisfy a good character check before taking up the appointment, promotion or transfer.

**DESIRABLE REQUIREMENTS:** Four years or more training as defined in the Teaching Service (Tasmanian Public Sector) Award, 1995.

**APPROVED BY HRM DELEGATE:** 103974 - Deputy Secretary (Corporate Services) – February 2000

Instrument to Vary Establishment: 03-2000

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Letter to Department of Education**





30 October 1998

Graham Harrington  
Deputy Secretary (Education )  
Department of Education  
116 Bathurst St.  
Hobart

Dear Graham,

I am writing to seek permission to undertake research in a sample of Tasmanian schools as part of my Master of Education studies.

My research topic, "Redefining Leadership in Authentic Schools" aims to examine the nature of leadership, particularly that of the principal, in self managing schools. Through a case study approach to ASSR I aim to research the nature of the strategies and processes adopted by principals to undertake school based review in response to the demand for effective performance management and accountability .

In consultation with District Superintendents I would like to approach principals from a sample of schools with the possibility of working together next year on some action research based.

My Master of Education studies are being supervised by Professor Bill Mulford.

I would be happy to discuss my research topic further with you should the need arise.

Yours sincerely,

Judy Bennett.

Kaoata Road  
Lindisfarne  
Tasmania 7015

Postal Address  
PO Box 155  
North Hobart 7002

Phone (03) 62 337786

Fax (03) 62 338500



TASMANIAN OPEN LEARNING SERVICE

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Response from Department of Education**

16 December 1998

*Malcolm Kays (03) 6233 7971*

Judy Bennett  
Principal  
Tasmanian Open Learning Service School  
P.O. Box 155  
North Hobart TAS 7002

Dear Judy

**Re: YOUR REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN STATE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

Thank you for your letter seeking permission to undertake research in a sample of Tasmanian schools as part of your Master of Education studies.

In our recent discussion, I indicated that your study appeared to be of a kind that would not be subject to the Department's established approval process requirements. Since then, I have had an opportunity to study the relevant guidelines document and have been reassured that my initial advice was correct.

The document is open to interpretation but, given the information provided in your letter and my understanding of the rationale behind the guidelines and approval process, I am confident that I have advised you correctly.

The guidelines were established especially to deal with studies that use students as research subjects, and to ensure that such studies are not overly disruptive to student learning, can be justified in terms of some short- or long-term educational benefits and meet certain ethical and quality standards. As I understand it, your study is concerned essentially with other principals, and the decision concerning whether or not to participate would be a matter for each individual.

In terms of the specific wording of the guidelines, the relevant section is: 'These guidelines apply to . . . [among others] . . . DoE personnel wishing to conduct research in schools and workplaces other than their own'. Superficially, this suggests that your study *does* need to be subjected to the established approval procedures, but I note that a) you aim to seek from principals information about the strategies and processes they adopt to undertake school-based review, and b) you would like to approach a sample of principals regarding the possibility of working together on some action research. My interpretation in relation to point (a) is that 'hands on' research by you within other schools is not involved—you would simply be acquiring information directly from those principals who chose to cooperate. On the matter of point (b) I assume that any principals who chose to participate would in fact be running their own programs within their own schools, and that there would be a sharing of information—information upon which you would draw for your study.

If my understandings in relation to the nature of your research are correct, you are not required to complete the official application form—you are free to go ahead. Nonetheless, I believe it would 'smooth the way' for your study if you had an official letter of clearance under Graham Harrington's signature. Could you therefore confirm that I have interpreted your plans correctly, and I will prepare a letter for Graham's signature.

If my understandings were incorrect, could you please let me know, and I will forward a copy of the guidelines document and the application form. If need be, I could post them to your home address, but I will be positive and assume that they will not be needed!

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kays  
Principal Educational Review Officer  
OFFICE FOR EDUCATIONAL REVIEW  
(E-mail: [Malcolm.Kays@Central.tased.edu.au](mailto:Malcolm.Kays@Central.tased.edu.au))

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Letter to District Superintendents**

22 Sonning Cres  
Sandy Bay  
Hobart  
Tas. 7005

November 19, 1999  
Mr. Arnold McShane  
Superintendent  
Hartz District  
32 Beach Rd.  
Kingston  
Tas. 7050

Dear Arnold

Following our recent telephone conversation in which I requested your permission to approach some of the 1999 ASSR schools in your district and invite the principals to participate in my Masters in Education Research Project entitled, *Principal Leadership, School Culture and Reform- What are the Links?* I am writing to provide you with a progress report and copies of documentation received by participants in the project.

I have contacted a number of principals in the South who are currently completing the ASSR process this year and invited them to participate in my research project. I have appreciated their willingness to assist and their interest in sharing with me their experience especially at this very busy time of the year. To date I have made arrangements to interview 16 principals over the next few weeks. It is likely that some or all of the interviewees will be invited to participate in a follow up discussion early next year.

I have enclosed a copy of the Information Sheet for Principals outlining the project in more detail and the Consent Form that all participants are required to complete. Should you wish to discuss any matter relating to the project please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (62-252578) or by email ([judyb@sde.tased.edu.au](mailto:judyb@sde.tased.edu.au)).

Once again many thanks for your assistance on this matter.

Regards,

Judy Bennett

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Information Sheet for Principals**

## INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRINCIPALS

### *Principal Leadership, School Culture and Reform- What are the links?*

- **Who is conducting the study?**

Chief Researcher is Professor Bill Mulford, Executive Dean, School of Education, University of Tasmania.  
Field Researcher is Judy Bennett, University of Tasmania student. This research is part of her Masters Studies in Education.

- **Why was this principal invited to participate?**

Because he/she meets the sampling criteria; that is

1. This principal is one of the 90 Tasmanian principals currently undertaking the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) process in 1999..
2. This principal is one of 17 principals invited to participate as part of a random sample

- **What is the time commitment?**

The time required for this study initially is approximately 1 hour of semi-structured interview that will be audio-taped. Some or all of the interviewees may be invited to participate in a subsequent interview early in 2000 to follow up on some emergent issues.

- **Are there any benefits to be expected?**

Hopefully the contributions of the interviewees will lead to an enhanced understanding of the links between principal leadership, school culture and reform. This understanding will inform principal practice and systemic reform initiatives.

- **What is the study about?**

This is a qualitative case study involving semi structured interviews and some document analysis. The study will be guided by the following research question;

*To what extent does the principal's knowledge and understanding of the school culture influence the way in which reform initiatives are undertaken?*

The study will investigate the ASSR reform initiative undertaken in some Tasmanian schools in 1999. The Department of Education document, *Assisted School Self Review 1999*, outlines the tasks that all participating schools must complete in the review. Anecdote and feedback from other schools that have previously undertaken ASSR indicates that whilst the stages of the review process are common to all participating schools the experience is context specific. It is believed that the unique culture of each school means that those leading school reform initiatives (in this case primarily the principal) have to *find a way of doing it* that best suits their circumstances. Therefore it is suggested that if principals are able to identify and assess their culture then they can use this understanding to inform their practice. The study will focus



on asking interviewees how they went about the ASSR process and why, and what they consider to be the links, if any, with their school culture.

There is a slight risk that this study could cause some embarrassment or affect relationships between principals and teachers. Every effort will be made to minimize this risk, however interviewees should be mindful of this when making comment about the ASSR process and the school culture.

- **Feedback**

A transcription of the interviews will be forwarded to the interviewees for verification. The results of the study will be forwarded to interviewees also.

- **Ethics Committee Contact**

The Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee (University of Tasmania), Ms. Chris Hooper, can be contacted on 03-62262763 for concerns or complaints about the study.

- **The Chief Investigator**

If you have any queries about this study please contact the Chief Investigator, Professor Bill Mulford, Executive Dean, School of Education, University of Tasmania on 03-63243288

- **Participation is voluntary**

To opt in, or opt out or withdraw at any time without prejudice is the choice of the interview subject and the decision will be respected.

- **Anonymity**

Each interviewee's identity will be preserved by the researcher. Names of participants will not be used or linked with their respective contributions. The data will be used for research purposes only. Should any invited subject feel that his or her participation may cause concern, they should feel free to decline from participation.

- **Confidentiality**

Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of research data. Data obtained in interviews will be stored separately from details of the information sources.

- **Approval**

This statement has been cleared by the Ethics Committee (University of Tasmania), the Tasmanian Department of Education and complies with the laws of the State. Subjects will be given copies of this information sheet and statement of informed consent to keep.

Thank you for your assistance.

Judy Bennett

02 November 1999.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Consent Form for Principals**

## THE STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

### **Title of Project : Principal Leadership, School Culture and Reform –what are the links?**

This study considers how school culture influences principal leadership in undertaking school reform initiatives. The study will investigate the Assisted School Self Review (ASSR) reform initiative undertaken in some Tasmanian schools in 1999.

The study is performed as part of the requirement for the Field Researcher's Masters Degree in the School of Education, at the University of Tasmania. It should be noted that the Superintendent of your district is aware that you may have been approached concerning the possible inclusion in this study.

I agree to participate in this research project and;

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this study.

2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.

3. I understand that the study involves the following procedures:

I will be interviewed initially for 1 hour. I will be invited to provide a thumbnail sketch of my school's culture. I will be asked to reflect on the ASSR year and describe how I feel about the outcomes. I will be asked questions about the ASSR stages and what actions I took. I will be asked to comment on how my actions were influenced by the school culture. I may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview early next year.

4. I understand that there is a slight risk that some of my comments may be of a sensitive nature. I will need to be mindful of that when commenting on the ASSR process and the school culture.

5. I understand that all research data will be treated as confidential.

6. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

7. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a subject.

8. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Name of subject .....

Signature of subject ..... Date .....

---

9 A statement by the investigator in the following terms:

I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of investigator .....

Signature of investigator ..... Date .....

---

ENDNOTES

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Interview Questions**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The research questions were as follows:

1. How did principals make a commitment to ASSR, and initiate the ASSR process in their school?
2. What were the management and decision-making processes adopted by the principal for the ASSR process?
3. What did principals perceive as the outcomes of the ASSR process for their schools?
4. How did principals perceive the ASSR process affecting their role as principal?

The semi-structured interview questions were designed to elicit responses in three areas:

- a) Demographics
- b) Stages of the ASSR process
- c) The ASSR process overall.

Five demographic questions were included. These questions were designed to gather information about the school and the case study site. They included:

- “Tell us about your school”
- “Tell us about your staff”
- “Tell us about your students”
- “Tell us about the parent community” and
- “Tell us about the school culture”.

Six questions were designed to gather data for two research questions that related to the stages of the ASSR process.

#### *The year before starting*

- “What did you do and why?”
- “How did you present it to staff?”
- “What was staff reaction?” and
- “What had you heard about it?”

#### *Getting Started*

- “What were your first tasks?”
- “What processes were put in place?”
- “What management teams or group and what tasks?”
- “How were the parents and school council involved?”
- “What was staff reaction?” and
- “How did you launch ASSR?”

#### *Undertaking the Surveys*

- “How did you go about it and why?”
- “What was your role?”
- “How was the management group involved?”
- “What were the responses of stakeholders” and
- “How did you manage the task?”

### *Analysing the Data*

- “How did you do it and why?”
- “Who was involved?”
- “What were the processes and responses resulting in findings?”
- “How did you share information?” and
- “What decision-making methods were used?”

### *Setting the Targets*

- “How did you do this and why?”

### *The Signing of the Partnership Agreement and Celebration*

- “What is happening?”
- “Why have you chosen to do it this way?” and
- “What was the response and reaction of others?”

Nine questions were designed to gather data on the remaining two research questions relating to the outcomes of the ASSR process and the principal’s role in the ASSR process.

- “What was the highlight and why?”
- “What was the lowlight and why?”
- “How do you feel about the year in relation to the ASSR process?”
- “If you were doing it again what would you do differently?”
- “What aspects did you give particular attention to and why?”
- “What has it meant for your leadership?”
- “What were the challenges?”

- “Did you do anything different from your colleagues?” and
- “How did the school culture impact on how you undertook the process?”